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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1993-94

COMPRISING PERIOD
24 January - 4 February 1994

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24 January 1994

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 236

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1993-94

House of Commons

Monday 24 January 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Railway Lines (Ownership)

1. **Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the director of Railtrack about ownership of railway lines.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has regular meetings with Mr. Bob Horton, the chairman-designate of Railtrack to discuss a wide range of issues. I am glad to report that, as planned, Railtrack will become responsible for the railway network in April.

Mr. Willetts: May I thank the Minister for that reply and ask him to confirm that it will be possible for Railtrack to sell railway lines to railway operators in certain circumstances?

Mr. Freeman: The answer to that question is yes, but only in exceptional circumstances. We obviously wish to give Railtrack a national responsibility to maintain the rail network and invest in its improvement—particularly electrification schemes—and a national responsibility for safety. But within those parameters, in certain cases the answer will be yes.

Mr. Foulkes: In the light of that answer, would it then be possible for Railtrack to sell all the track in Scotland to a privatised ScotRail?

Mr. Freeman: In theory, it might be possible, but that would run counter to our policy, which is that there should be one body—Railtrack—responsible for the whole of the rail infrastructure in Great Britain. That will benefit ease of access to the rail network by different rail operators. In cases in which rail infrastructure is sold, not only will it be the responsibility of Railtrack to consider that, but there will have to be open competition to ensure that best value for money is obtained.

Mr. Wilson: Not content with selling the family silver, it seems that the more zealous members of the Minister's party want to sell the table, too. Will the Minister confirm that within two and a half months—*[Interruption.]* The problem with the hon. Member's question is that members of the public remember the answer. With allegedly two and a half months to go before shadow franchises, the Government have still not come up with a system for charging for access to the tracks.

Will the Minister confirm that the Government have now accepted that they will not manage to privatise even the Gatwick express in the current year? Will he further confirm that there is now minimal private sector interest in rail privatisation? Instead of taking on board daft ideas such as the one about which we have just heard and succumbing to the demands of the private sector in an effort to get the whole thing off the ground, it would be much better if the Government at least dropped this particular cross on which they are apparently intent on crucifying themselves.

Mr. Freeman: Her Majesty's Government have no intention of withdrawing their proposals to improve the quality and quantity of our rail services. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's specific questions, shadow running will commence on 1 April and sufficient progress has been made. I pay tribute to British Rail and Railtrack for ensuring that that could happen. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that sufficient progress has also been made on access charges to permit shadow running to commence. As for his question about interest, there is substantial interest in the franchising of rail services.

Mr. Wilson: Gatwick?

Mr. Freeman: We would expect Gatwick to be among the first of the rail franchises to be franchised.

Mr. Wilson: When?

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Gentleman had read the draft directive to the Franchising Director, he would know that my right hon. Friend has asked him to submit a specific plan within the next few weeks on the timing of the franchises. Our proposals will be a great success for the railways.

United States Transportation Secretary

2. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the United States Transport Secretary; and what aviation matters were discussed.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John MacGregor): I last met the United States Transportation Secretary on 14 September last year in Washington. We discussed the progress of the liberalisation negotiations and how we saw the way ahead. Since then, there have been many contacts between our officials and I have also spoken to Secretary Peña.

Mr. Colvin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that American and British airlines share one common characteristic: they are free-enterprise rather than state-owned airlines? Does not that mean that we share an interest in confronting the massive Government subsidies that are paid to nationalised airlines, particularly by European Union countries? Those subsidies not only distort competition, but mean that liberalisation is far from creating free competition, even across the north Atlantic, and that air fares are still too high? Was that matter discussed in the recent talks on the general agreement on tariffs and trade and will it be on the agenda for the next meeting of the Council of Transport Ministers?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that those specific matters were discussed in the GATT talks, but I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said. He is right to say that we have highly effective and competitive airlines in the private sector, which does not apply in most of the European Union. He is also right to say that state aids provide an unfair subsidy. He will know that we have fought extremely hard in the European Councils to ensure that state aids are given only in specific circumstances; we will continue to fight for that. It is one of the major matters that I take up on every possible occasion. The issue may arise in the report that the Commission has requested from its "wise men", which will be discussed, although not specifically, at the informal Council at the beginning of next month. I assure my hon. Friend, however, that I am very alert to those issues, which we frequently take up.

Mr. Olner: The Minister will be aware of the representations about the opening of transatlantic routes that have been made to him by Birmingham international airport. I accept that the Secretary of State has had talks on the matter, but that is all that appears to have happened. The attempts of Birmingham airport to obtain transatlantic routes have gone backwards. Those routes are vital to the economy of the west midlands. The infrastructure is in place and the airport is ready to take those airlines. When will the Government act to make the routes open to competition from Manchester and, in particular, Birmingham airports?

Mr. MacGregor: It takes two to reach an agreement and we have put forward proposals for the liberalisation of air services on transatlantic routes to all our regional airports, including Luton and Stansted. That is one of the first items that should be carried through as a result of the current liberalisation agreements. In one or two other cases, smaller arrangements have been made on liberalisation before reaching a full agreement, which the American Administration have refused to accept. So far, therefore, we have not been able to reach agreement on that issue. The Americans are focusing particularly on Heathrow airport, but there are considerable capacity constraints there that I am drawing to their attention. I assure the hon. Gentleman that early liberalisation of services to our regional airports is very much our target.

Mr. Mans: When my right hon. Friend next negotiates the various agreements with his counterpart in Washington, will he make the point strongly that the United States should honour the existing law on code sharing and on minority shares in their own airlines? Does my right hon. Friend agree that he should decide whether he reaches various future agreements with the United States on the basis of how they operate their existing system? Until the United States honour present agreements, will it not be difficult to reach an agreement over code sharing and other matters in the future?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that the two things are separate. We clearly want to reach agreement on the wider liberalisation, but we also think it important that existing agreements should be honoured. To some extent, failure to achieve the second colours success on the first. I know that my hon. Friend is referring to the American Administration's decision to allow, as part of the BA/US Air deal, the code sharing with US Air to take place, not for 12 months, as should happen under existing agreements, but for a shorter period. We have made our protests known to the American Secretary of State about that, because we believe that it is important to honour existing agreements. I hope that, in March, the United States Administration will do so when they come to consider their next decision.

Channel Tunnel

3. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which English regions he expects to benefit most from rail traffic carried by the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: Services through the channel tunnel should provide social and commercial opportunities for all parts of Great Britain when they are fully operational.

Mr. Bayley: Freight services are due to begin running through the channel tunnel in about six weeks' time. Why is it that seven years after the channel tunnel project was announced, when the French Government have managed to build a fast rail link from Paris to the channel tunnel, the British Government are only today publishing tentative proposals for the route, let alone introducing an Act of Parliament for that purpose? It will take until the end of the century to provide direct links from the channel tunnel to serve the north of the country. Why are the Government spending billions on car routes in and around London and not a brass farthing on train routes around London to enable those trains to run direct to the north from the tunnel?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman does his constituency and his party a disservice by seeking to run down the substantial preparations for business and passenger services, once the channel tunnel is open. Freight will start to run through it on 14 March and passenger services will commence from Waterloo international station, which cost £200 million to build, as soon as the tunnel is officially opened. The country will then enjoy good travel connections, because it will then take three hours to travel by train from London to Paris. The construction of the channel tunnel rail link will be the subject of a statement that my right hon. Friend hopes to make shortly.

Mrs. Lait: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the tourism industry of the south-east will benefit greatly from traffic from the channel tunnel? Does he accept, however, that the weak link in the south coast railway is the Hastings to Ashford line? What progress has been made towards its electrification?

Mr. Freeman: The electrification of that particular line will be studied by Railtrack and we will ask it to produce a 10-year investment plan. Doubtless, it will reflect on the priority of electrification. I am glad that the local authorities have shown an interest in contributing to its cost.

A new international station will be built at Ashford and I hope that it will be open by the end of next year.

Passengers and Freight (Rail Transport)

4. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage the transfer of passengers and freight from road to rail transport.

Mr. MacGregor: Government policies are designed to encourage passengers and freight to transfer from road to rail where that makes economic and environmental sense. Some 90 per cent. of passengers and inland freight traffic goes by road, but next year 40 per cent. of total transport expenditure will be used to improve public transport, so my Department's expenditure is positively skewed to public transport. The existing freight facilities grant scheme is also to be extended by the Railways Act 1993 and our new track access grant for freight services will start in April.

Mr. Grocott: Is the Secretary of State aware that it would take some believing to accept that the Government have skewed their transport policy towards the railways? Let me catalogue for the right hon. Gentleman three simple examples from my constituency of the rundown in services in recent years. First, we have lost the rail link to Donnington for freight. Secondly, we have lost the InterCity service to London and, thirdly, Wellington station has been subject to a serious rundown. Those important issues are of particular concern to many people.

May I ask the right hon. Gentleman to take rail transport much more seriously and, more specifically, to agree to meet a delegation from my constituency?

Mr. MacGregor: It is very noticeable that the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* I am just trying to remember all the points that he raised, so that I can answer them in order.

It is noticeable that the hon. Gentleman simply ignores the facts and makes a general statement that is far, far from the facts. Public transport accounts for 40 per cent. of my Department's expenditure and that affects about 10 per cent. of overall traffic. If that is not skewing expenditure towards public transport, I do not know what is. The hon. Gentleman likes to believe a myth and not the facts.

As to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, there has been a problem not only in this country but in all countries concerning the transport of freight on rail, because rail is not so well suited to provide the service required by modern freight transport. That issue must be tackled. I believe that the combination of measures that we have introduced, including open access under our privatisation proposals, the new grants that I have announced and the opening of the channel tunnel, offers the best prospect of getting more freight onto rail.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that Wellington Telford West station faces no threat of closure. I understand that from next May the number of trains from that station will be increased—both the stopping service to Wolverhampton and the semi-fast service to Birmingham will be more frequent. It is therefore not necessary for me to receive a delegation.

Mr. Lidington: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the completion of the crossrail project would encourage many more passengers, including my constituents in Aylesbury, Wendover and Great Missenden, to switch from road to rail? Can he confirm, furthermore, that the project will now go ahead as originally planned?

Mr. MacGregor: It is certainly true that, in London and the south-east, where commuters predominate, public transport is more important. That is why our ratio of expenditure is 3:1 in favour of public transport.

As for crossrail, we have made the position clear. That means that the Bill will be able to go ahead tomorrow. It will be for the Committee to receive all the petitions, and for the Bill to make its progress through Parliament in the usual way. Earlier, we made it clear that crossrail will be a joint finance initiative.

Mr. Harvey: Given the Secretary of State's recent conversion to the idea that road passenger traffic cannot grow unchecked, will he rethink his motorway policy, which his right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie) says is so startling that it forces one to stand back and ask whether it makes sense, while his hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) believes that there is a policy for cars but not a transport policy? Or is the right hon. Gentleman more interested in cutting embarrassing words out of the Government's Rio strategy paper than in cutting motorway building?

Mr. MacGregor: It will be essential for environmental reasons, as well as for reasons of economic efficiency and competitiveness, that we continue to deploy considerable sums of public—and eventually, if motorway tolling is successful—motorists' money on improving our motorways. That is just as vital for environmental reasons. If we do not, with the growth of traffic there will be a great deal more diversion back to local roads, and there will be environmental pollution, owing to congestion, and so on. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I are at one on the sustainable development policy, and we have worked together to produce it.

There is no doubt that motorways will have an important part to play for many decades to come in ensuring that we have a competitive transport system—that is why we have a transport policy.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the very existence of the channel tunnel and of the proposed fast rail link—to which, thank God, we can at last look forward—will constitute a major factor in encouraging passengers and freight to switch from road to rail? Businesses throughout south Lincolnshire are of the view that if we are to enjoy the full benefit of these major infrastructural investments, we shall need a container terminal much closer than what is currently planned. Will my right hon. Friend therefore do everything he can to facilitate and encourage the construction of a container terminal at Peterborough to serve south Lincolnshire and large parts of East Anglia?

Mr. MacGregor: It will be for Railtrack after April to consider that matter. But my hon. Friend will know that about £450 million of public expenditure has already been deployed in providing freight terminals throughout the country and improving infrastructure to serve them. That is a large amount of money.

It is important to bear in mind that it is not only the channel tunnel high-speed link which is relevant to the channel tunnel. When it opens this year, the tunnel will be very competitive for both passengers and freight. This year, the journey from London to Paris and to Brussels will be competitive with air travel—about three hours and three and a quarter hours respectively.

There will be a dramatic improvement in the amount of time spent by freight traffic on rail once the channel tunnel is opened. It takes 60 hours by road from Manchester to Milan, but more than double that by rail at present. After the channel tunnel opens, rail freight will take only half the time that road takes—that makes it very competitive.

Ms. Walley: But why will not the Secretary of State tell us where the money is going to come from for crossrail? Is not all we have heard this afternoon mere hypocrisy? Why are not the Government prepared to tell the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) that the railways and public transport are not having the necessary money spent on them——

Mr. MacGregor: I have answered that.

Ms Walley: No, the right hon. Gentleman has not answered it. All we have heard from him is that public transport is safe in his hands. The men and women on the Clapham omnibus are beginning to rumble his policy. They know only too well that unless there is some sort of review of the decision to go ahead with the M25 widening, the Prime Minister will be unable to claim later this week that he has a sustainable transport policy in the aftermath of Rio.

Mr. MacGregor: I have made it clear that the Government support the crossrail project. It is being promoted by British Rail and London Transport and it will be in Committee tomorrow. As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), we have also made it clear that it will be a joint finance initiative and we expect a substantial contribution from the private sector. It is certain that it will go ahead.

The hon. Lady asked about public transport. Investment in the railways is way above what it was under the last Labour Government. It is currently at near record levels and will be about £3 billion in the next three years in the existing railway system. That is a substantial amount. If the hon. Lady is suggesting that Labour would spend more of taxpayers' money on the railways, where would she make the cuts, or is all this double talk about tax and the Labour party sheer hypocrisy?

Mr. Ottaway: Will my right hon. Friend accept that while investment in motorways is welcome, people travel by road because they want to? Will he ensure that the road programme is not diminished? In particular, will he ensure that the Coulsdon bypass is not taken out of the programme?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot comment on any particular bypass project. I agree with my hon. Friend's general point that we believe in choice. The way in which the vast majority of our citizens exercise that choice when they reach the age of 17 is clear. They wish to be able to buy cars and to travel freely in them. It is necessary for any Government and any Secretary of State for Transport to ensure substantial investment in the roads system to enable that to happen and to avoid the disbenefits, environmental and otherwise, of congestion.

East London River Crossing

5. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make an announcement about the proposed east London river crossing.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): The relative priority for the east London crossing is being considered as part of the national review of the trunk road programme. I shall make a further announcement when the results of that review are known.

Mr. Austin-Walker: In view of the Minister's failure to give an assurance that the east London river crossing will not go through, over or under Oxleas wood, what action does he propose to reduce the blight on properties in Plumstead and Abbey Wood along the line of the original proposal? Is he prepared to publish and place in the Library the specifications of the transportation study for the south-east for which he has recently invited tenders? Does he welcome the results of the rail study published last week showing the cost effectiveness of the Woolwich rail tunnel link?

In view of the Secretary of State's earlier comments about the relative importance to London of public transport compared with roads, will the Minister now embrace the Woolwich rail tunnel link and the public transport alternative to the east London river crossing?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government rightly decided that the original proposals for the east London river crossing were inappropriate and withdrew them. That decision was widely welcomed. The hon. Gentleman is sensible enough to know that the underlying demand for improved transport, across the Thames in particular, still exists. In that context, it is perfectly appropriate that the compulsory purchase orders should expire in November. The line orders will remain in place for a sensible reason. Much of the line of any proposed route in that area is, in a sense, self diagnosing and it would be quite unproductive to abandon the line orders. They also concentrate blight, such as there is, only on that line, rather than spreading it more widely, which would be the case if the formal line orders were abandoned.

The studies on possible rail links about which the hon. Gentleman spoke are useful. One of my Department's aims over the next few weeks will be to make sure that we take account of all the available options to improve crossings of the river east of the town.

Mr. Evennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that the number of road crossings of the Thames to the east of the city is inadequate and that the Blackwall tunnel is totally inadequate for the traffic currently using it? When my hon. Friend visited my constituency, he met many of my constituents in Thamesmead and Erith and many business people who were looking to him for proposals. Many local people would like to see another crossing of the Thames in our area.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is right, but he will acknowledge that we now face propositions in relation to the docklands light railway extension to Lewisham, the Woolwich metro, the Blackwall third crossing, a full east London river crossing and a truncated river crossing. Rather than dealing with those on a piecemeal basis, it would be sensible to ensure that they are all evaluated so that the options that we pursue are the right ones to improve the infrastructure east of the town.

Mr. Raynsford: What discussions, if any, has the Minister had with interested parties about the possibility of paying for the construction costs of an east London river crossing by means of a toll? What are the implications for other river crossings? Will there also be tolls at Blackwall, Rotherhithe and Tower bridge? Will we soon have to pay tolls to cross Westminster bridge? Does the Minister admit that Tory transport policy, like Tory taxation policy, means everyone paying more?

Mr. Norris: As to the general proposition on tolling, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that either the taxpayer or the user pays. There is general and common consent that it can be a useful way to provide funding. For example, the Dartford crossing was completed at least 10 years earlier than it would otherwise have been because the private sector was able to finance the construction from tolls. I have discussed generally, with officials in the Department and others, the idea that one or other of the new crossings over the Thames should be tolled. I did that because it seems to me perfectly sensible that we should do so. If the hon. Gentleman is now saying on behalf of his party that the Labour party has decided to reject the notion of congestion charging in London, I must tell him that, first, that contradicts what he said at a public meeting that we were at only a week ago; and secondly, that is an unwise hook for his party to have got itself on.

"Paying for Better Motorways"

6. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what responses he has had from motoring organisations to his Green Paper "Paying for Better Motorways".

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Key): The AA and RAC have publicly recognised the potential benefits that motorway charging could bring. Both organisations favoured electronic technology as the means by which charging should be implemented.

Dr. Twinn: My hon. Friend will be aware from the representations that he has received that there remain concerns about tolling on existing motorways. He will be aware that the concerns are particularly strong in outer London, where the effects of tolling on the M25 could lead to diverting traffic back to London. In my constituency of Edmonton, and in Enfield, we do not wish to see the North Circular and the Great Cambridge road congested.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is right. Diversion of traffic off tolled roads is a major problem that must be addressed sensibly, not hysterically. That is precisely why we suggested, in the Green Paper published last year, low tolls on tolled motorways, perhaps up to 1·5p a mile, which is about a quarter of the rate elsewhere. I am sure that my hon. Friend will recognise that doing nothing is not an option. It is precisely because we are not doing enough to upgrade our motorways, including the M25, that we already have problems of diversion back to his constituency.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the Minister agree with the Secretary of State for the Environment on the British strategy for sustainable development, in which he says that projected traffic increases will have unacceptable economic and environmental consequences? Is the Minister still insisting that the information that 55 per cent. of the schemes for motorway programmes will affect 50 sites of special scientific interest should be deleted?

Mr. Key: I never comment on leaked documents. The hon. Lady will have to contain herself until later in the week. I can assure her that we keep traffic forecasts under constant review. She may recall that, as recently as November 1993, I answered a parliamentary question and said that we were reviewing the methodology of traffic forecasting. I wish that the hon. Lady and people who think like her about traffic forecasts would recognise, whenever they hear the figure of 1·5 million new cars a year being bandied about, that that is the gross or total figure. About 80 per cent. of new vehicle registrations are replacements for vehicles already scrapped.

Mr. Shersby: Will my hon. Friend initiate immediate discussions with the motoring organisations about the severe traffic congestion that occurred last night on the eastbound carriageway of the M4 after 10 pm, and again this morning, when traffic was banked up as far as Reading?

Is my hon. Friend aware that the works that he has authorised for the overlaying of the M4 are causing congestion throughout the western approaches to London? Why could they not have waited until the completion of the work on Western avenue at Long lane in Hillingdon, and the ending of the chaos caused by the Olympia bridge works? Does my hon. Friend realise that people coming into London simply cannot afford to be held up for so long? Will he extend the deadline from 10 pm to 11 pm, as that would make a great difference?

Mr. Key: I apologise to drivers who are being held up by the roadworks. It is, however, essential to get them done. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London has been at great pains to ensure that traffic management is optimised; he has discussed the matter with both the police and the motoring organisations.

It is also essential for the work to be done concurrently. We are anxious to avoid a repetition of what happened last summer, when the M4 was closed because the 30-year-old section of road leading to the capital's major airport at Heathrow could not cope with the level of traffic or, indeed, with the hot weather. It is worth doing the work early so as not to have motorways that cannot stand the British summer.

North Wales Coast Rail Line

7. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary for Transport what representations he has received concerning the need to improve railway services along the north Wales coast railway line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have received a number of representations about the need to improve rail services on the north Wales coast line.

Mr. Wigley: As the Minister will know, Professor Stuart Cole published today a report about transport in Wales, which mentions the need for advance investment in transport to avoid a build-up in the use of cars. In the context of the north Wales railway line, does the Minister accept that the medium-term objective must be the electrification of the line from Crewe to Holyhead, while there is an immediate need for the track to be upgraded to a 90 mph standard—not only for InterCity services, but for the 153 and 158 classes? Can he ensure that Railtrack is given a directive to proceed with that immediately?

Mr. Freeman: Significant progress on line speeds has already been made, but if the hon. Gentleman wishes me to convey to the chairman of Railtrack his view that further improvement is necessary, I shall certainly do so.

Electrification is a longer-term project. It is for Railtrack to decide the priorities. As for the west coast main line, I can confirm that I know of no proposals to terminate the InterCity services at Crewe; they will continue to run through to Holyhead. When the west coast main-line services are franchised, they will include services all the way to Holyhead.

Mr. Brandreth: Does my right hon. Friend recognise the importance to the north-west of the electrification of the line from Crewe to Holyhead, especially in view of the advent of the channel tunnel? We need a high-speed link between Ireland and the continent, and the north-west is concerned about the speed at which that can be done.

Mr. Freeman: I share my hon. Friend's desire to ensure that there are good transport links not only to connect the island of Ireland with the continent through this country but to serve the population in Wales, particularly along the north Wales coast line. Electrification in itself does not improve the running speeds of trains, although it makes services more efficient and provides electric services all the way from London. I shall, however, bear in mind what my hon. Friend has said. As we all know, he has always been a great supporter of British Rail services in the north-west, especially those to Chester.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Minister accept that if there are to be decent through services on the north Wales coast line, it will be necessary to get ahead with the modernisation and uprating of the west coast main line that leads to them? Can the Minister tell us when that modernisation and uprating will be completed just on the line as far as Crewe?

Mr. Freeman: No, I cannot, but I tell the hon. Gentleman that Railtrack expects to announce very shortly the winning private sector consortium to assess the performance requirements of the line. I hope that, by the end of this calendar year, Railtrack will be able to let a contract to the private sector, so that the work to improve the west coast main line infrastructure—which may cost as much as £600 million—can begin. How long that takes will depend on the contract, but the improvement of the west coast main line is a priority, not only for Railtrack but for the Government.

Mr. Garnier: My right hon. Friend will agree that improving the west coast main line will increase and improve traffic going to north Wales, but would not one of the best ways to encourage trade to go to north Wales and to the island of Ireland from Europe be to extend the A1-M1 link? When is that road likely to be completed?

Mr. Freeman: Again, I cannot give my hon. Friend a completion date because he will know that the link comprises many different individual schemes. It is important that we develop multi-modal transport—that is, transport that comes partly by road, including by the A1-M1 link, to freight terminals including, for example, the proposed terminal in Doncaster and possibly one at Peterborough, which has already been mentioned. We need improvements to roads and railway lines if we are to speed freight.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Secretary of State is spending £12 million on privatisation this year, all of which is going to bankers, accountants and anyone else who knows nothing about running railways. Would not it be an improvement, not only for the north Wales coast line but for all the lines running off the west coast main line, if the £12 million were spent on the railways instead of being handed to any firm that happens to contribute to Conservative party funds?

Mr. Freeman: It is always nice to end Question Time on a truly partisan and irrelevant note. The £12 million being spent on preparations for privatisation is money well spent. It is being spent as a result of a competitive tender and is going to the best possible advisers. I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the fact that we spend £1,000 million a year on investment and that this year another £500 million will be spent on subsidy to the railways. It is a small price to pay and it is well justified.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Freemasons

30. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to ensure that freemasons in all Government Departments disclose their membership of such bodies; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. David Davis): The existing conduct rules require staff to disclose any interests which conflict with their official duties.

Mr. Skinner: How many freemasons are there in the Government? How many are there in the Cabinet? If the Prime Minister can give us a rough estimate of how many bastards there are in the Cabinet, even though I do not think that he can count, is it not about time that the Government came clean? If the Minister does not agree, does he accept that many of us would like membership of the freemasons to be noted in the Register of Members' Interests?

Mr. Davis: Nothing in my notes will help with this one. No one could ever accuse the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) of understating his case. I cannot answer the first part of his question and I have no notion of whether there are any freemasons in the Cabinet, although I suspect not. As for the latter part of his question, it is a matter for him to take up with the Prime Minister, except for one point. The hon. Gentleman said that he thought that membership of the freemasons should be noted in the Register of Members' Interests, but that is a matter for the House, not the Government.

Charters

31. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new charters he expects to promote in 1994 and in what areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: Thirty-eight charters have been produced under the citizens charter initiative. Further and higher education charters for Northern Ireland will be published in the spring. An updated and improved edition of the employers charter was issued on 17 January; revised versions of the jobseekers charter and the parents charter are also planned for the spring.

Mr. Greenway: Is the Minister aware of parents' increasing interest in their children's education following the introduction of the education charter? Can he tell the House of sectors in which standards are improving, such as reading across London, and in which children are clearly seen to be benefiting from Government's policy?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is correct to say that many parents—in fact, most parents—are showing great interest in the league tables that are published as a direct result of a promise made in the first charter White Paper. He is also correct to say that charters are helping to raise standards. Off the top of my head, I can think of many schools. In particular, there is one in Basildon whose deputy head teacher recently wrote in a newspaper about how his school had taken on board the need to improve academic standards as a result of its performance in the league tables. That we see throughout the country, with school heads and in school management, which is a good thing for parents and for pupils.

Mr. Barnes: The original charter, drawn up by the chartists in the 19th century, was concerned with electoral registration and a fair franchise. As the franchise is now in a mess, with the names of up to 4 million people missing from electoral registers, should not the Minister turn his attention to electoral registration and improved methods of updating it, such as a rolling register? That would have been something sensible to do with charters rather than some of the nonsense that we get.

Mr. Davis: I am getting a lot of interesting questions today, not that too many of them have much to do with my Department. Electoral registration is not a matter for the Cabinet Office. I can, however, say that, although the hon. Gentleman may not think that charters do much, 70 per cent. of the population think that charters and the techniques used—league tables and competition—are worth while. He would do well, therefore, to pay attention to what his electors think.

Mr. Matthew Banks: My hon. Friend must be aware that British Rail has recently tightened up on the number of minutes by which a train is deemed to be late. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the employees of British Rail who, with their own rail charter, which he has so enthusiastically championed, have successfully met the standards that they originally laid down and are now setting new standards, which we look forward to being met in the interests of the travelling public?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The theme of the charters this year is very much about tightening up standards across the board. In Network SouthEast, from memory, nine of the lines are tightening standards and six are improving reliability. That is happening across the board and it is a trend to be encouraged. As my hon. Friend says, British Rail is to be congratulated on it.

Mr. Garrett: I read that the main performance indicator for the charter for the immigration service is a two or three-minute wait at passport control at Heathrow, whereas I guess that most hon. Members and most people are much more alarmed about the detention and incarceration of innocent visitors by the immigration service at Heathrow and other places. Does not that illustrate the profound vacuity of the entire charter effort?

Mr. Davis: All it demonstrates is the profound vacuity of the hon. Gentleman. The Home Office has answered that question several times and each time demonstrated that every tenet of his questions is wrong. The hon. Gentleman ought to know the difference between the immigration service and Customs and Excise.

Open Government

32. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received on his White Paper on open government.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): I have received representations from about 100 organisations, which are now being reviewed. We will announce our conclusions shortly, after considering the representations. I am sure that the House will agree that it is important that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, the ombudsman, should be properly resourced to oversee the code of practice. I am, therefore, pleased to announce that next year the resources available for the PCA will be £9·5 million—more than double the current level.

Mr. Coombs: Am I right in thinking that in those representations there has been widespread support for the idea of the code of practice being policed by the new commissioner? Would it not be sensible to wait until the new scheme has had plenty of opportunity to operate, so that we can judge it in practice, before my right hon. Friend chooses to introduce legislation on freedom of information?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend was a member of Standing Committee C, which considered the Right to Know Bill, and is expert on those matters. Many of the people who have doubted that we were going down that route said that we would not resource the ombudsman properly to do his job. We have done that now and I am pleased to be able to announce it. I think that the new system will work well and that it will be much easier for people to deal with than complicated court-based procedures.

Mr. Meacher: How can the Tory Administration make any pretensions to open government when five Cabinet Ministers have secretly signed certificates that would have sent innocent men to jail rather than expose their duplicity in misleading the House about arms to Iraq, and when the Prime Minister——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may well wish to rephrase what he has just said about duplicity and misleading the House. Indeed, he must rephrase what he has said.

Mr. Meacher: We are concerned that what we have been told is not the full truth. I wish to say no more than that. That is a matter with regard to open government. We are concerned when the Prime Minister has tried to pretend his total ignorance of Iraqgate for four whole years, when Westminster and Wandsworth councils have secretly pursued a policy of bribing residents to leave, not to provide homes for the homeless but to provide votes for themselves, and when the Prime Minister overrides a permanent secretary to force him to spend £200 million of aids moneys as a sweetener for an arms deal in Malaysia in statutory breach of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980. When will this Tory Government ever learn that the first requirement of open government is to start telling the truth?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman was a junior member of a Government who failed even to tell their own Cabinet about Chevaline because they did not trust the left-wing Cabinet members—at that time, he was a fiery left-winger, but since then he has become more middle class—let alone announce it to the House of Commons. The hon. Gentleman should give up doing his failed Presiley Baxendale act. He does it much more incompetently than that barrister—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Members behind the Opposition Front Bench could have heard comments made by those on it, they would rightly have spoken of sexism. They should listen to the rubbish spoken by their own Front Bench.

The hon. Gentleman had no other points to make today except one, which he made in *The Times*—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer him."] I am answering the hon. Gentleman's point. He made serious allegations against the Prime Minister in *The Times*. He did not even check the facts. He referred to a letter which he alleged had been written to the Prime Minister in June 1990. If he will recollect matters, he will find that the present Prime Minister was not the Prime Minister in June 1990. That is about the level of accuracy of the hon. Gentleman's allegations.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Are not the recent Herr Mohnke disclosures good illustrations of the need for my right hon. Friend to keep encouraging and pushing his colleagues to release such information early, as it is important for the general public to understand such details so that they can start asking questions and we can put pressure on our allies and colleagues?

Mr. Waldegrave: The Ministry of Defence has made it clear that it was in relation to new, tougher criteria for the retention of documents that those papers were released. I think that the House has welcomed that.

Intestacy

33. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for the latest year for which figures are available, what is the number of people who have died intestate and whose estates have transferred to the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Waldegrave: There were 421 cases reported to the Duchy solicitor during the year ending 1992.

After inquiries had failed to reveal next of kin and after ex-gratia payments had been made, the assets of 328 estates were vested in the Crown in the right of the Duchy.

Mr. Prentice: I thank the Minister for that reply and for his personal intervention, which allowed a grant to be made to the Lancashire free legal advice centre which allowed it to buy updates for its law library. Is not it the case that, in this day and age, it is quite anomalous for the estates of people who die intestate in the county palatine and in the Duchy of Cornwall to be treated so differently from those of people who die intestate elsewhere in the country, where the money goes to the Exchequer? Is not it about time that we got rid of that throwback to medieval times?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is indeed an anomaly, but it is a worthwhile anomaly from which the people of Lancashire benefit. If the hon. Gentleman had been addressing his requests for help to the worthy charity of my right hon. Friends in Her Majesty's Treasury, doubtless, he would have got his money, but perhaps he would not. Hon. Members for Lancashire would do well to hang on to that anomalous piece of history. It does good for the people of Lancashire.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does it not astonish my right hon. Friend that an hon. Member purporting to represent Lancashire should be so unpatriotic about matters affecting that county's citizens? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the citizens of the county town of Lancaster have done extremely well out of the fund? The kids' club, the pre-school play group, the disablement centre and many others have benefited from that unique charity—and long may it survive.

Mr. Waldegrave: On this occasion, my hon. Friend speaks with a more authentic voice of Lancashire than does the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice).

Equal Opportunities

35. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the progress of equal opportunities in the civil service.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government actively pursue a policy aimed at achieving equality of opportunity in civil service employment. The latest reports on the position of women and ethnic minorities in the civil service were published last month and placed in the Library of the House. The report on disabled employees will be published in the spring.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I endorse the Government's determination to ensure that more women can make an active contribution in the civil service, but would not that policy be enhanced if women could get more help with provision for their domestic responsibilities? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we could jointly persuade our friends at the Treasury to make the costs of child care or of looking after elderly folk back home tax deductible, women who have acquired the necessary skills and talents could make a much larger contribution to our public life and also provide many more jobs?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is perfectly right that help with, for example, child care must be a high priority for the civil service if we are to get women into senior jobs. I am well aware of my hon. Friend's long-running campaign on that and I entirely share its objectives. We are making real progress. At first management grade level—executive officer—women now have 46 per cent. of the jobs, compared with 29 per cent. as recently as 1984. That is a considerable improvement.

Dr. Moonie: How many under-secretaries?

Mr. Waldegrave: The answer is not enough, but now that the figure in the management grades is 50 per cent., that position will rectify itself.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: While the Minister is considering equal opportunities, will he seek to ensure that the political background of ministerial appointees to the quangos and other bodies now running so much of the civil service is made public, so that we may see where those appointed by Ministers are coming from politically?

Mr. Waldegrave: As the hon. Gentleman knows, civil service appointments are made through the proper machinery of the Cabinet Office. In other sectors where appointments are made by Ministers, they are always made on the basis of who are the best people for the job.

Chemical Industry (Graduates)

36. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many university graduates were recruited by the chemical industry in 1993.

Mr. David Davis: The Chemical Industries Association carries out a survey of graduate recruitment annually, but I understand that firm figures for 1993 are not yet available. The latest survey showed recruitment of graduates by major employers in the United Kingdom chemical industry to be 856 in 1992, and the provisional prediction for 1993 was 652.

Mr. Devlin: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the chemical industry is to maintain its position as Britain's second largest export earner, it must continue to recruit topflight scientists from our universities as they graduate? Is not the fall-off that occurred in 1993 a cause for concern? Should we not encourage the chemical industry to recruit as many people as possible so that it has the scientists to carry it forward into the next century?

Mr. Davis: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's continued interest in these matters: he is a member of the all-party chemical industry group and has many chemical concerns in his constituency which he ably represents. Like him, I welcome the chemical industry's substantial contribution to research and development and, indeed, to the whole economy. I certainly agree with my hon. Friend and with the president of the Chemical Industries Association that companies would do well to consider carefully the need to invest in highly trained staff and research and development as a factor in securing longer-term economic progress.

Mr. Miller: British universities are clearly doing an excellent job in providing graduates to the chemical industry—despite the fact that they are under-resourced —but what conclusions does the Minister draw from the article recently published in *Physics World* about the acute shortage of physicists in British universities? Has the hon. Gentleman drawn any conclusions in respect of that shortage that extend into other disciplines?

Mr. Davis: Let me set the matter straight for the hon. Gentleman. It is projected that between 1987-88 and 1995-96, the number of science, maths and engineering graduates will have risen from 40,000 to 67,000. The number of full-time postgraduates studying science, maths and engineering has risen by more than 30 per cent. since 1987-88, and it is projected that the intake of students into first-degree physical sciences, including chemistry and physics, will have grown by 40 per cent. between 1987-88 and 1995-96. In addition, postgraduate research has doubled over the past decade. It is difficult to see where the problem arises.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John MacGregor): I should like, with permission, Madam Speaker, to make a statement about the proposed new channel tunnel rail link.

The House will recall that in March 1993 I announced a preferred route and asked Union Railways to lead the consultation on it. Union Railways carried out a huge consultation exercise, and reported to me in October. Its report is available in the Vote Office. I am now able to announce the Government's final conclusions on the route.

The report of Union Railways confirms that St. Pancras is preferable to King's Cross as the terminus on environmental, operational and commercial grounds. I therefore confirm the choice of St. Pancras as the London terminus. British Rail will no longer need to continue to seek powers to build the King's Cross low-level station and will be withdrawing the King's Cross Bill. I intend to remove the safeguarding of the land and property affected by that project. Links from St. Pancras will be provided to the east coast and west coast main lines to facilitate through services to the midlands, the north of England and Scotland, and midland main line services will be retained at St. Pancras.

I propose to seek powers in the hybrid Bill for the advance works for a new Thameslink station under St. Pancras, at Midland road. This would be the optimum location for any eventual new Thameslink station serving the King's Cross and St. Pancras area. It is our intention that further improvements to Thameslink would be carried forward by the private sector and financed entirely by the private sector. The use of any powers obtained will be a matter for the private sector promoters of the channel tunnel rail link and of Thameslink, and not for the Government.

I turn now to the route itself. The approach to St. Pancras has been one of the most contentious issues in London. The surface route along the north London line corridor would be difficult to construct and environmentally damaging. I considered the approach to St. Pancras in combination with three other options recommended by Union Railways for operational reasons. I have accepted a package that incorporates a tunnel, a grade-separated approach to the terminus, a short open concrete box at Stratford to allow for an emergency crossover, and advance works for a connection to Temple Mills.

In Kent, there is no easy choice at Pepper Hill. The tunnel under the electricity switching station has to be ruled out because of high cost and grave threat to the construction programme. The choice between a tunnel under Pepper Hill and an alignment around it cannot be made without more information. Before taking a final decision, I shall hold further consultations with those concerned.

I confirm that there will be a short tunnel under the north downs. I have accepted the proposal for a tunnel 240 m long at Hollingbourne in order to preserve the setting of the conservation area and to reduce noise impacts; and a 170 m long tunnel at Sandway under the Headcorn road so as to reduce the impact on the conservation area.

I have had to rule out the tunnel option to the west of Ashford on grounds of cost. However, as a consequence, and at the request of Ashford borough council, I have asked Union Railways to consider urgently the relative merits of the present northerly preferred route and a central route through Ashford but then proceeding on the surface in a north-westerly direction. The new international station at Ashford is now proceeding and will serve passengers both before and after the construction of a new rail link.

At the Dollands Moor freight inspection facility adjacent to Eurotunnel's terminal, the Bill will allow for possible realignment to improve operations, with the further possibility of allowing international freight trains to have direct access to the rail link, thus removing the need for an additional freight inspection facility at Westenhanger. I shall also provide in the Bill for two freight passing loops in Kent, to keep open the option of taking more freight trains if demand justifies it in the future.

I turn now to intermediate stations. The decision in October 1991 to route the rail link on an easterly approach into London was based in large part on the opportunities for regeneration. With that objective in mind, the Government's view remains that, subject to satisfactory finance, there should be at least one intermediate station between Ashford and London. Four possible locations—Stratford, Rainham, Ebbsfleet and Nashenden—have been looked at. The proposed domestic station at Nashenden has no private sector or local authority promoter or support. I have decided that it can be ruled out.

That leaves Stratford, Rainham and Ebbsfleet. Ebbsfleet and Rainham are in direct competition, both being M25 parkway stations. On present information, a combined international and domestic station at the northern site at Ebbsfleet seems the better parkway station option, but a final decision will depend upon the provision of satisfactory financing by the promoting group.

The economic case for a station at Stratford has yet to be fully made. If the justification for one—in particular the financial case—improves before the hybrid Bill is introduced, powers could be sought to build a longer box there than the one to which I referred earlier.

I intend to issue planning directions in the next few weeks to safeguard the route announced today and St. Pancras. These directions will replace all the existing safeguarding directions. I want to make it clear that the decisions on safeguarding the route announced today are final. Any changes which may be proposed by the private sector partner who will eventually build and operate the new link must be within the area safeguarded. Furthermore, any changes must not materially worsen the environmental impacts of the safeguarded route. The private sector will, however, have flexibility to decide on some operational features of the railway. I expect that the private sector will also want to consider carefully the phasing of the works.

I recognise that there is considerable concern about blight. Homes wholly or substantially required for building the railway, together with those seriously affected by the works or operation of the railway, will be included in the safeguarded zone and will be offered voluntary purchase. Any other homes that may be affected by operational noise above the proposed threshold for noise insulation will qualify for purchase in cases of hardship.

As I announced last November, the project will go ahead on the fastest possible timetable, with the private sector assuming full responsibility for construction and operation. The Government are willing in principle to provide substantial public sector support, in recognition not only of the significant domestic transport and regeneration benefits from the new line, but also of some of the very large benefits to international passengers. Government assistance will be provided partly through the transfer of European passenger services to the private sector partner as soon as the partner has been chosen. The total Government assistance to be provided will depend on the outcome of the competition to select the private sector partner which will be launched very soon.

A hybrid Bill is being drafted on the basis of the safeguarded route. We aim to have it ready by this autumn for consideration by the private sector and for the Government to take forward thereafter. The precise timing of the Bill's introduction will depend on the parliamentary timetable and the private sector's views.

This solution will provide a fast rail link between London and the channel tunnel. It achieves all the Government's objectives. People who live in Kent will get further improved rail services to London. Rail travellers will receive the extra capacity when it is needed around the turn of the century. It provides a new railway which is sensitive to the land and townscapes through which it passes. It establishes a joint venture in which both the public and private sector play their roles.

It is a further demonstration, coming on top of the Dartford bridge, the second Severn crossing, Heathrow express and the Jubilee line extension, all of which have been built or are under construction, that the private finance initiative is now moving ahead fast.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. All the people and organisations affected by the channel tunnel were entitled to expect from the Government today a firm, once-for-all decision that the channel tunnel link would be built, that the route had been fixed, that proper environmental protection had been guaranteed, that decent compensation would be paid, that the blight would be lifted, and that the funds for the link had been found. The statement fails to meet all those legitimate demands.

All the route has not yet been fixed; there are still doubts about the intermediate stations, in particular the one proposed at Stratford; proper environmental protection has not been guaranteed to the satisfaction of the people affected; compensation terms are still not fair to all concerned; all the blight has not been lifted; and the necessary funds have not been found. Some aspects of the statement are welcome—for example, the choice of St. Pancras station as the London terminus, the commitment to some tunnelling through north London and Kent, and the firming up of most of the route—but those decisions do not go far enough, nor are they firm enough. The dither and the blight continue.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that his timetable for the building of the link means that it might not be operated for another nine or 10 years; that, for the next decade, goods and passengers from all over Britain will face a 70-mile bottleneck from London to the tunnel; that that will be an inconvenience for London but a disaster for people in the rest of the country who want to trade with and travel to Europe; that individuals and companies from the north, the midlands, the south-west, Wales and Scotland, will, for a decade, be denied the full benefits of fast, regular, reliable and direct services to Europe that the Government originally promised; that when the first Eurostar train leaves Paris it will travel at 185 mph to the tunnel, pass through the tunnel at 85 mph and then trundle at about 50 mph through Kent to Waterloo; and that, on arriving at Waterloo, international travellers will have to lug their baggage across London to King's Cross, St. Pancras, Euston or Paddington? Is not that a national disgrace when the French link is already in place?

Surely the Government had a strategic duty to ensure that the whole of Britain received the maximum benefits from the tunnel as soon as possible, rather than those benefits being concentrated in the south-east.

Will the Secretary of State make clear what he really intends about Government funding for the link? For the past seven years, the Government have ruled out any public contribution to the international aspects of the link. We welcome his return to common sense. He knows now that there was no chance of private investment without a Government contribution. If the Government had accepted that from the start, the link might have been built by now and we could all benefit immediately the tunnel comes into operation.

Mr. MacGregor: I hope, after all that, that the hon. Gentleman will support the proposal, but let me reply to a number of his points.

On the question about how much this matter is an advance today, it is a very significant further improvement. The route has been fixed, subject to two very small remaining parts—Ashford and Pepper Hill. I have been around them once again since I received the Union Railways report to take a good look at them on the ground. I have received representations on them, and I believe that we can actually settle the route in both areas after some further fairly swift consultation, and well before the hybrid Bill comes before the House or the completion of the competition for the private sector partner.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that today the vast majority of the route has been fixed and that therefore the blight has been lifted, that the safeguarding will apply to all areas that I have mentioned and that, within the next three to four weeks, we shall make the safeguard announcements for all those parts of the route.

On the environmental assessment, the hon. Gentleman will know that an enormous amount of work has been done in relation to the Union Railways report on the environmental aspects. Indeed, a large number of expert consultancies have been deeply involved, but the proper environmental assessment comes at a later stage, and we shall certainly fulfil all the requirements of the European Community environmental directive.

As for stations, at the moment there is not sufficient private finance, which we have made clear throughout is required, for an additional station or two. Therefore, it must be right—no doubt it will involve the partner who is eventually selected as a result of the competition—that we do not make a decision about the stations, apart from the one that I have ruled out, until the financing is clear.

As far as funds are concerned, I made clear in my statement last March that we would be making a public sector contribution. Then, of course, we were prohibited from doing so via British Rail because of section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act. Developments since then have enabled me to widen the area in which public contributions can be made. One significant development was the Railways Act 1993, which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) opposed all the way through.

[Mr. MacGregor]

We cannot at this stage say what the precise split will be between private and public sector finance, and that will be a part of the contributions which are to come.

The hon. Gentleman referred to tunnelling. My announcement today means that 23 per cent. of the total route will be tunnelled. That is a substantial contribution, and clearly demonstrates the extent to which we are taking into account environmental aspects.

Mr. Dobson: Big deal.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman, from a sedentary position, says that it is a big deal. I ask him to reflect on what the route might be like if there was to be something like 75 per cent. tunnelling. The route would not be as attractive as it will be in the way in which I have announced today. To respond to another point made by the hon. Gentleman, we have firmed up not only most of the route, but the vast majority of it.

The hon. Gentleman referred to goods and passengers and commented on a 70-mile bottleneck. It is worth restating clearly that, as a result not least of the £1·4 billion of public expenditure that has been devoted to the track, infrastructure and rolling stock to take advantage of the tunnel when it opens, the time taken for passengers from London to Paris will be down to three hours. The time to Brussels will be three and a quarter hours until the high-speed link is completed in Belgium. Those times will make the route very competitive with air now and for the rest of the 1990s.

I wish that the hon. Gentleman would stop decrying the amount of expenditure which has already gone in to providing the infrastructure to achieve those benefits. I stated at Question Time that there will be significant improvements in the prospects for freight on rail as a result of the opening of the channel tunnel and the investment that has been made. In particular, that will be of benefit to the west midlands, the north of England and Scotland, where there will be significant improvements.

Through trains will go from Waterloo to Scotland and to the north of England, so the hon. Gentleman was wrong on that count. Therefore, he is quite wrong to say that the benefits of the scheme are confined mainly to the south east. That is not true.

As a result of the investment, there will be a substantial take-up of use of the channel tunnel in the 1990s. My announcement today means that we shall be able to have the high-speed link on stream at the time that the extra capacity which it provides is needed.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. A number of hon. Members are seeking to put questions on the statement. After the initial exchanges, I must demand speedy questions and even speedier answers.

Sir Keith Speed (Ashford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be disappointment in my area that he has not been able to provide a tunnel for the central route through Ashford? In view of the strong support for the central route—not least to ensure the long-term viability of the station, and on environmental grounds—we welcome the fact that he is prepared to look at alternative solutions. However, that means that communities such as Little Chart and Hothfield face an uncertain future. Will my right hon. Friend guarantee that there will be full and speedy consultation and that there will be the maximum environmental protection possible for whatever route is finally chosen?

Mr. MacGregor: As we have said elsewhere, we are going for the maximum environmental protection and mitigation. I know that my hon. Friend is disappointed with the decision to rule out the tunnel alternative. However, it would have added £65 million to the cost and that would not have been justified, given the benefits which would have flowed from it. I assure him that the consultation on the additional route which was suggested to me by Ashford borough council will be speedy. I am as anxious as my hon. Friend to end the blight as quickly as possible.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): In welcoming the supposedly final announcement of St. Pancras as the central London route and the tunnelling of the approach to it, may I echo the disappointment that there will not be tunnelling at Ashford? May I ask the Secretary of State how much public money was wasted on the King's Cross project and the south London route? Would not that have helped towards the cost of the tunnels at Ashford?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not sure of the answer to the hon. Gentleman's last question. I shall try to find out as much as possible, but he will know that part of the question cannot be answered yet because the properties are being resold. However, I want to make it clear that the St. Pancras decision is the final one: he seemed to cast doubt on that. I am sure that it is the right decision. The Union Railways report confirmed that, for a variety of reasons. It was right that we should have that additional look so that we could have the right answer for the long-term future.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): While I welcome the Government's preferred option of an intermediate station at Ebbsfleet, will my right hon. Friend confirm that Ebbsfleet would benefit the local domestic commuter as well as the international passenger in a way that Rainham would not? Will he further confirm that, if the alignment goes round Pepper Hill, the rail link will go under the A2 rather than over it, thus avoiding impact on the communities of Southfleet and Betsham?

Mr. MacGregor: In answer to my hon. Friend's first point, I can confirm that Ebbsfield would benefit domestic passengers as well as international ones. As my hon. Friend knows, that is another great benefit that will arise from the project as a whole. Domestic passengers in Kent and parts of Essex will gain considerably in improved journey times.

On my hon. Friend's second point about whether the rail link goes under or over the A2, we are looking at two options. Again, as for Ashford, we want to take decisions speedily.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): In order not to sound curmudgeonly, may I say that we are pleased that the route through Hackney will be in a tunnel and that Stratford has not been chosen as an intermediate station? As far as we are concerned, the shorter the box the better. Will the Minister give an assurance that there will be proper compensation for homes affected by the operation of the tunnel?

Mr. MacGregor: Compensation will depend on how close the homes are to the surface route. Modern engineering and conditions mean that noise mitigation for those above a tunnel is well carried through.

I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments about the tunnel in Hackney. I know that there is some division on his side about Stratford station. As he will have heard from my statement, the decision will depend on the reactions that we receive in the months ahead.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I welcome my right hon. Friend's modest improvement in the compensation arrangements, but is he aware that tying the voluntary acquisition arrangements to a proposed noise theshold which, in the opinion of every district council in Kent, is too severe will produce a result for individual blighted households that is neither reasonable nor fair?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, we are still consulting on the threshold. We have extended the consultation period until 28 February at the request of some of the consultees to enable them to put in their responses. We shall then have to look at the position. We seek to apply broadly the same principles in compensation for this project as for projects elsewhere in the transport sector.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) is probably on his own in being glad that there will not be an international station at Stratford. We in the east end are very disappointed that the Secretary of State has not been able to announce this afternoon that the station will be in Stratford. Long box or short box, it is better than a cardboard box, but it is certainly not better than an international station. The station is the key to the regeneration of the east Thames corridor and docklands.

The Secretary of State said that a case could be made before the hybrid Bill was placed. Will the private sector and the public sector in the east end have to persuade him or British Rail that we need an international station at Stratford?

On compensation—given that the route goes immediately under my house in Forest Gate—will there be compensation for people in the north of Newham for the tunnelling under the borough?

Mr. MacGregor: I would not want to comment on any particular compensation case. I did not think that it would be long before the hon. Gentleman bobbed up to dispute the point that his hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) made. We have not taken the final decision on the matter; I have made that clear. The justification is not fully there yet.

Of course I accept the importance of the channel tunnel high-speed link to the regeneration of east London. It is one of many contributory factors. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government are doing a great deal with a large number of projects to achieve that regeneration. The financial case for Stratford station, however, has not yet been made out. It will be for the advocates of that station to continue to make that case, and I shall also listen to what they have to say before any decision is taken.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): My right hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we share his delight about the abandonment of the Nashenden proposal. He knows that there is a unique position over the River Medway: there is the rail-link bridge, and a further road link is being proposed by the Department of Transport, which will mean that two enormous bridges will overlook my constituency at Borstal and Strood. I know that it is possible that joint approval can be given in a hybrid Bill to allow those two bridges to be constructed at the same time. Will he assure me that that can and will be done? My constituents do not want a decade of construction.

Mr. MacGregor: We certainly recognise the need to co-ordinate the design of the high-speed link and the widening of the M2 so that their combined effects are as sympathetic as possible to the environment. I am aware of the local people's and my hon. Friend's concern that the schemes should be constructed in a similar time scale to minimise construction disturbance in the region. I am also aware of her feeling that it would be helpful to include a scheme to widen the M2 in the hybrid Bill. It could be promoted either under Highways Act procedures or as part of the Bill. No decision has been taken yet on that, but I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will be making further representations to me on the matter.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Is the Secretary of State aware that there will be dismay in most of east London that he is still dithering and that he has not announced that there will definitely be an international station at Stratford, despite all the support and co-operation that he has had from the London borough of Newham? Does he realise that it will be considered a stab in the back if that station is not built? The Government's pretence at partnership in the east Thames corridor and in docklands will lose all credibility unless that station is built. It is essential to kick-start the regeneration of that region.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will wish to consider the full Union Railways report. As I have already stated, however, the financing case has not yet been made out. All through the discussions, we have made it clear that we would expect the promoters to finance the stations. The issue is still open and I have made it clear that I shall be prepared to consider the long box for the hybrid Bill. It is still open to the promoters to make a convincing case.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I very much welcome the promise of my right hon. Friend that the project will now be built as quickly as possible. My constituents have already lived in the shadow of blight for five years, and they are likely to live in it for another 10. He must know that the mere statement of where the route will go does not remove blight. Blight continues because people cannot sell their houses if a big construction project is going ahead. Despite the speed with which we want the project to progress, my right hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that we will petition about the long tunnel in the Boxley valley.

Mr. MacGregor: I assure my hon. Friend that I fully understand the arguments about blight. That is why I have tried to move the project forward as quickly as possible. It is worth underlining the extent of last year's consultation exercise. Union Railways held 650 meetings in six months, and my Department received nearly 2,500 representations or petitions. There has been a massive amount of work done to reach the stage of my announcement today, which takes a significant step forward in dealing with blight. Safeguarding the route is the key essential.

[Mr. MacGregor]

I understand my hon. Friend's point about the non-statutory blight that occurs as a result of the construction programme. I hope that we shall complete that construction as quickly as possible. We have to take into account, however, that the hybrid Bill will take some time to progress through the House, not least because of the number of petitioners, of whom my hon. Friend will be one. I hope, therefore, that he will co-operate to ensure that the Bill proceeds through the House as quickly as possible.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that there will be much relief in my constituency that the route will go into deep tunnel under it? I hope that he will pay due tribute to the many campaigning organisations and the excellent document that they put together that obviously helped to persuade him to include the deep tunnel as part of the route.

Will the right hon. Gentleman explain exactly what is meant by the "grade-separated" junction of the line at the St. Pancras end? Exactly how far will the route run above the ground within the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)? Exactly how many properties will be affected by it? What compensation arrangements will be made? What will be the effect of blight on the community around King's Cross, which has already suffered so much blight because of the original King's Cross Railways Bill?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that my announcement about removing the safeguarding of the King's Cross railway lands will remove much of the blight, particularly in relation to commercial and other developments.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the tunnel. I do not believe that the decision was reached solely because of all the representations; it was reached also as a result of the thorough work of Union Railways. I pay tribute to the tremendous efforts made by that company and its consultants. I hope that those consultants will not be castigated in the future, as they have been by the Opposition in the past, because their private-sector expertise has enabled a thorough job to be done.

That has enabled us to reach the best possible solution for north London, given that some people will always be affected by such a major scheme. I have no doubt, however, that the tunnel under Islington will make a significant difference to everyone in north London. The hon. Gentleman will see from the report that the tunnel will come out just east of the Caledonian road.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the grade-separated junction. I invite him to look at the report. It is required to ensure that there are no future capacity constraints on the number of services coming in to St. Pancras station.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I thank my right hon. Friend for acknowledging the concerns of my constituents at Pepper Hill and Northfleet by reopening the alternative option to skirt the housing estate—that option was closed far too early by Union Railways. When will it report on that option, because that blight will continue and it is a matter of great concern? Will my right hon. Friend also take note of the fact that all concerned wish to see the lowest possible route passing under the carriageway of the A2?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. All aspects of the further alternative must be considered thoroughly in terms of their impact and financial costs in relation to the tunnel under Pepper Hill. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is necessary to reach conclusions on it quickly. Therefore, we will ask Union Railways to do so speedily so that we can take decisions and the extent of the blight is decided.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Is the Secretary of State totally unaware of the discourtesy that he has displayed to my constituents and the people of Essex? After he had explained and dealt with all the other objections and representations that he received, his statement completely ignored the legitimate claim of my constituents for tunnelling in the area that affects my constituency and splits the town of Thurrock. Is he blind to the security implications of having a surface channel tunnel rail link route crossing the M25 at the Queen Elizabeth II bridge? That is absurd. Surely that example alone presents an overwhelming case for tunnelling.

Is not the right hon. Gentleman aware that thousands of people who live along the route in Kent and Essex will hold deep bitterness against him for the fact that he continues to blight their homes? The safeguarded route will provide compensation only for those people whose houses will be knocked down, but nothing will be done to help those who must live alongside and abut the line of route for the next decade. The right hon. Gentleman's statement is outrageous and one for which he should be condemned.

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware that it is not possible to please everyone when such a major scheme is decided. As the hon. Gentleman will see when he studies the report, we have not ignored the issue that he has raised. I had to choose only certain items for the statement to avoid it being too long.

Mr. MacKinlay: Tory seats.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that that is true about north London and the lines going through it. The decisions were reached on the basis not of Tory seats but of the major changes announced. If I had tried to cover every aspect of the changes, I would have made a statement that was three times as long as today's statement.

I accept that the viaduct carrying the rail link past the Mardyke Park housing estate will have a noise and visual impact. There is scope for reducing the number of houses affected by means of revised mitigation proposals. The longer tunnel favoured by consultees simply could not be justified.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that support for an international station at Rainham remains strong, and that every opportunity will be taken by the promoters to persuade him of the case for it during the extra time that he has allowed?

As for the route, has my right hon. Friend been able to accommodate the anxieties of the residents of Havering, expressed to us in the House of Commons and elsewhere? In particular, has he been able to respond to the points urged on him by our hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), advocating a more southerly route through Rainham?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said about Rainham. I have no doubt that the promoters will strengthen their case in the discussions that will take place in the months ahead.

It has not been possible to meet all the requests about Rainham, but there have been slight adjustments to the route there.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): In respect of the possible Stratford international, boxed or unboxed, has the Secretary of State perused the memorandum that I sent him advocating such a station on strategic grounds? Can he deny the fact that more than 200 stations in Greater London and south-east England would be connected directly to Stratford, given current running and current plans? Would not such a facility for direct public transport to such a station complement the facilities in central London and reduce traffic in Newham, Hackney and even Norfolk as Liverpool street trains could stop at Stratford?

Mr. MacGregor: Stratford will be important in any case, irrespective of this decision, because there is a considerable number of links there. The problem is that the financial case has not yet been fully made out; the financial proposals that we must seek before we go ahead have not been forthcoming. I very much hope that the promoters will look further at that in the months ahead to see whether their case can be accepted.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Does the Minister recall that on 5 June 1986, when some of us suggested that the rail link would inevitably involve considerable public funding, we were told that that was nonsense—rubbish—and that our fears were wholly unfounded? Given today's announcement and the fact that £2·6 billion has already been given to the project by the EC, has my right hon. Friend yet come to the conclusion that the channel tunnel is an outdated white elephant which will cost the taxpayers of Britain a fortune?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not recall the statement in 1986 because I was not present—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] I do not recall precisely the date and the terms. I have, however, been looking at the issues since becoming Secretary of State for Transport. I made the position clear in March last year, and I have developed it further today.

I do think that there is a case for a public sector contribution—a large one—to the high-speed link. I am astonished by the reaction of the Labour party, which has been urging on me a high-speed link all the way through but which now believes that I have arrived at a mistaken view——

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Eight years late.

Mr. MacGregor: At the same time, the Labour party must recognise the fact that substantial public expenditure has gone into the existing route, which has the capacity to deal with the traffic at least until the turn of the century. Now we are discussing what we need to do for further capacity.

I believe—I would not have made the statement otherwise—that the high-speed link is important. It is right to make a public sector contribution to it; and I do not believe the channel tunnel to be a white elephant. I think that there will be substantial take-up.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Secretary of State referred in his statement to the St. Pancras link as facilitating through services to the midlands, the north of England and Scotland. Inadvertently or otherwise, he did not mention the possibility of through services to Holyhead, a matter regarded as important not only by north Wales but by the Irish Government. Can he give an assurance that the link has not been ruled out by the Government and that it can be facilitated as part of this package?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that nothing would be ruled out for the long term. One of the issues here is that of the electrification of the link to Holyhead, about which there was an exchange earlier today. That is relevant to my statement this afternoon.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that it makes sense for people travelling from the eastern counties to be able to connect by rail to the channel tunnel railway? If, therefore, Stratford station is ruled out in the end, will he ensure careful investigation of the possibility of the Thameslink network being spread sufficiently far into East Anglia that there can be connection at the new station to which he referred—the Midland road station at St. Pancras?

Mr. MacGregor: That would be a matter for the Thameslink promoters to consider. Needless to say, as my hon. Friend knows, I am anxious to ensure that the links between East Anglia and the channel tunnel high-speed link and the channel tunnel generally are as good as they can be.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will not recall that I was one of the very few Members who totally opposed the channel tunnel project on Second Reading. Is he aware that there is still a small number of us who see nothing in this ill-starred project but financial, ecological and, finally, physical disaster? But, in the interim, what archaeological investigations will be made into the effect of these developments on the recently discovered prehistoric walkways under various parts of east London, a very serious matter?

Mr. MacGregor: As so often happens, the hon. Gentleman speaks for himself. On the general point——

Mr. Faulds: And I am invariably right.

Mr. MacGregor: Perhaps frequently he speaks only for himself. Archaeological aspects will obviously be considered in the environmental assessment. As I have said, that will be carried out in full, complying with the European directive, at the appropriate time when the hybrid Bill comes forward.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. Friend spoke about the benefit to local services in north Kent. Will he spell out whether there will be a junction at Ebbsfleet that will allow trains from north Kent to join the new line? If so, it will be good news for my commuter constituents.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that I confirmed that earlier to my hon. Friend, but I am happy to do so again. I repeat that the benefits to commuters and other passengers in north Kent and in Kent generally are certainly one of the advantages of the project.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Given the amount of consultation that the Secretary of State says he has had on this project, does not he think that it is about time that we had the final, final statement on this route? What comment does he make to my constituents, especially those between Grove Park and Hither Green, and, indeed, others in south-east London, who will have to bear the burden of extra freight trains but will have no benefit from extra commuter trains or the link, and will have to suffer blight on their homes for the next 10 years while the fast trains go through to Waterloo?

Mr. MacGregor: Of course there will be benefits to the hon. Lady's constituents in other ways. I re-emphasise that my announcement safeguards by far the vast majority of the route. There are only two stretches—and they are not significant in relation to the total route mileage—on which we are undertaking further consultations. Those consultations will be completed within a matter of months, well before the competition for the private sector partner is completed and well before the Bill is presented. By then, of course, the entire route will be safeguarded.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I welcome three matters in particular: the Secretary of State's emphasis on improvements to Thameslink, on keeping the freight options open, and on his commitment to substantial public sector support for the project. I have argued for that from a somewhat lonely position on these Benches ever since the project was mooted. I never thought that it would happen without such support, so I welcome it.

I should like an assurance on two matters. First, will my right hon. Friend's Department continue to keep a close eye on ensuring that the services for commuters using the existing lines in Kent are not downgraded when they are in competition with the international cross-channel services? Secondly, will he ensure that the Bill and the construction of the link are pushed forward with a great deal more urgency than there has been over the past eight years?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome for the three matters that he mentioned. On the first of his questions, there will be no downgrading by my Department—of course, the issue does not concern only my Department—of existing commuter services in Kent. My hon. Friend will know about the efforts that are being made with British Rail to improve existing services and about the substantial investment in rolling stock and in other matters.

On my hon. Friend's second point, I hope that he will accept that there has been a pretty speedy resolution of all the difficult issues on the route in the past 18 months. We moved quickly to the preferred route. Six months was the minimum time that we could have given Union Railways to carry out massive tasks—engineering, environmental and others. They did that well. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that we took our decisions on the report as quickly as could possibly be expected, given the substantial implications. I hope that we can now proceed along the path that I have outlined, and with due speed. But, inevitably with a project of this nature, I suspect that there will be many petitions on the Bill.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Secretary of State knows well that not only the Thames corridor but much of the north of England is in need of regeneration. Will he assure me that links from the west coast main line and the east coast main line, which will need to be constructed before St. Pancras becomes a viable option, will be in place before the rest of the line is completed so that the disadvantage already suffered by the north of England in channel tunnel links is not worsened by the changes that have been announced?

Mr. MacGregor: The two points that the hon. Gentleman has in mind—the connections with the west coast main line and the east coast main line to ensure that services coming out of St. Pancras go direct, as I have said, to the north of England, west midlands and Scotland—are an intrinsic part of the proposal.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Will my right hon. Friend give the House an assurance that, at the present time, the north of England and the rest of the United Kingdom are not disadvantaged and that the links to which he has referred will be adequate and proper? If he is able to give that assurance, does he agree that the channel tunnel rail link will benefit not only southern England but the whole of the United Kingdom?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend; he makes an important point. I am quite sure that, as with the Jubilee line, there will be construction jobs for firms all over the country. My hon. Friend will know that that is the case with the Jubilee line.

As for freight, a substantial part of the investment that has already been made is designed to benefit the north of England, Scotland, west midlands and other parts of the country apart from the south-east to gain the full benefits that long-distance freight can gain from having the channel tunnel. I repeat that there will be dramatic reductions in journey time for freight on rail compared to the present time—and, indeed, compared with road—when freight services open. There will be direct passenger services from the north of England through the channel tunnel in 1995.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Does not the Secretary of State understand that the upgrading that we all anticipated for the west coast main line is extremely important for the industrial heartlands of the west midlands, the north-west and the west coast of Scotland? Will not the lack of urgency in his statement confirm the suspicions of those of us who believe that he does not have a commitment to the fast rail links, without which there will be no regeneration in the industrial heartlands and regions along the west coast main line?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman obviously framed his question before I answered my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks). I dealt with some of those issues in that answer. We are proceeding with the greatest speed that we can get on the high speed link, because, as I have said repeatedly, it is a complex issue, involves a large number of organisations and people, and must be thoroughly argued through. We are proceeding with it with due speed.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, we attach priority to the upgrading of the west coast main line generally and the southern sector, which is the sector most in need of improvement. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport said at Question Time, we expect Railtrack to announce shortly the results of the competition for the specification stage. That is moving ahead, too.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the Secretary of State tell us what communications links there are between Ebbsfleet and the London Underground? What communications links are there with the potential crossrail link? Is it not ridiculous that, instead of taking advantage of linking the channel tunnel link to Stratford, the whole of the Central line and the rest of the underground system , he comes up with an announcement that will be seen as bitterly disappointing by my constituents in Ilford and other people near to the area who could have benefited so much from those proposals? Those of us in east London already have appalling conditions in travelling to this place and into central London generally, and the proposals do nothing to improve that situation.

Mr. MacGregor: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will talk again to the promoters of the Stratford station. I have made my position on that very clear.

The hon. Gentleman will know that a number of other improvements—unconnected with the high-speed link—are to go ahead. Improvements to the underground and other transport systems in the east end are being considered, and substantial improvements in all aspects of transport are taking place to assist the regeneration of east London.

I was not able to mention this in my statement, but the report makes it clear that Union Railways and the operators have decided that there are no operational benefits in a direct connection between crossrail and the high-speed link. We have therefore decided not to proceed with the direct link at Forest Gate, and at one other location. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should read the report in that context.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): In his statement, the Secretary of State referred to the importance and significance of the link with the north. Can he give us some idea of when it will be completed? This concerns many of my constituents whose properties are blighted by the proposal for a terminal in my constituency. When will the Department of Transport or the Department of the Environment give the go-ahead for the Wakefield terminal? Can the right hon. Gentleman give the project any assistance?

Mr. MacGregor: I was not sure what link the hon. Gentleman meant, but I now understand that he is referring to the rail freight terminal. We hope to make a statement shortly; as the hon. Gentleman knows, there have been financing problems.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): What should have been a great national project has been delayed to such an extent that it has taken eight years for it even to reach this stage. Does that not speak volumes about Tory government? The channel tunnel link has been seen as a holy grail into which not a penny of public money must go. Now that has been thrown away, and we are having to start all over again.

Is that the way in which great national infrastructure projects should be treated? Is it not astonishing that the Secretary of State should announce a route to us, while still being unable to tell us with any assurance where the money will come from? Why do not the Government get on with it, and end the national embarrassment that they have inflicted on Britain? Anyone can see the contrast between what has been done in France and what has been done in this country, under successive Tory Secretaries of State.

Mr. MacGregor: That reaction is typical of the hon. Gentleman. Let me make two points.

First, a substantial amount—about £1·4 billion—has been invested in transport infrastructure and rolling stock to enable the railway system and the passengers and freight involved to gain the full benefit when the channel tunnel opens. That will make a huge difference to the travelling time of both passengers and freight, and it will be possible to deal with all likely demand until the turn of the century.

Secondly, all aspects of the channel tunnel high-speed link must be examined very thoroughly. It must be engineered correctly; all the people and businesses likely to be affected must have an opportunity to be consulted, and we must ensure that their views are taken fully into account. There must be a sensible balance between securing value for money for the taxpayer and enabling the project to be financed partly by the private sector.

I believe that the way in which we are proceeding will produce considerable benefits. The capacity will be there when it is needed; the private sector will make its contribution, not only financially but by securing real value for money in the building of the link; and the taxpayer will be given value for money. The hon. Gentleman's answer to every question is simply to demand more and more of the taxpayers' money, irrespective of the merits of the case and irrespective of whether a private sector contribution can be made. That makes nonsense of the Labour party's claims about tax.

Orders of the Day

Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

A year ago, I announced a long-term review of the social security system. The aims of the review are to improve the system, to safeguard the position of the most vulnerable and to ensure that the system does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay. I subsequently published my analysis of the growth of social security over the rest of this decade. That document showed that one of the three areas accounting for most of the likely growth in spending was invalidity and related benefits, so that has been the first sector that I have chosen to tackle.

The Bill, together with the Statutory Sick Pay Bill, introduces a comprehensive reform of the system of benefits for those too unwell to work. The Bill has three objectives: first, to ensure that the huge and rising sums devoted to sickness benefits are properly focused on those who are genuinely too unwell to work; secondly, to ensure that the cost is affordable; and thirdly, to provide a more rational structure of benefits.

The Bill replaces sickness and invalidity benefits with a new benefit called incapacity benefit. It introduces a new and more objective test of incapacity for work, and abolishes the lower rate of statutory sick pay.

Before going into the detail of the Bill, let me knock one accusation firmly on the head. The Bill is not an attack on the sick and disabled; it is the very reverse. It is designed to protect their benefit against those who abuse it. As a result, it will make their benefits sustainable despite the other pressures on the social security system. That is a worthy objective, and one which the whole House should share.

Invalidity benefit is the fastest growing contributory benefit, and it is already second in cost only to the basic pension. Spending on invalidity benefit has doubled in real terms in the past 10 years, from £2·7 billion to £6·1 billion last year. If we left it unchanged, it would grow by a further 50 per cent. or more in real terms by the end of the decade.

It is working people who have to pay for it through their national insurance contributions. Already, on average, the cost for everyone who contributes is £275 a year, and the cost is rising because the number of claimants is growing. Over the past 10 years, the number of people on invalidity benefit has doubled. It has trebled over the past 15.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The right hon. Gentleman may know that several thousand people in west Cumbria draw invalidity benefit. In his calculations, does he assume that, in the event that invalidity benefit is stopped and restrictions are introduced which mean that fewer people can draw incapacity benefit, many people will move on to the unemployment register? Does he believe that that will be the impact of the changes?

Mr. Lilley: Clearly, many people who draw this benefit at present and who do not have jobs would initially draw unemployment benefit or other benefits for the unemployed. I want those who are fit enough to work to be helped back to work by the benefits appropriate to them. It is wrong to give people who are able to work benefits which can eventually lead to their becoming unable to work because of unfamiliarity, lack of motivation and the staleness of skills caused by their being on benefits for some time.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On that point, how many——

Mr. Lilley: I would rather make some progress. I answered the hon. Gentleman's question perfectly well.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: How many people——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot ask questions when someone else has the Floor.

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that that issue will arise in due course.

I pointed out that the number of people drawing this benefit has more than doubled in the past 10 years. Can it really be that Britain's health is getting so much worse? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is very important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that it is very important, and if the hon. Gentleman catches my eye he can put it with even more conviction, but not from a sedentary position. Mr. Secretary Lilley.

Mr. Lilley: I believe that, from those questions, the question arises whether we are becoming less healthy as a nation. Is there really an epidemic of incapacity? Of course there is not. The nation's health has been improving. Let me give a number of indicators of that.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: In a moment.

There has been a dramatic reduction in incapacity caused by peptic ulcers. There has been a marked reduction in the number of strokes, roughly halving the number of people aged under 65 who have died from them since 1970. With developments of modern surgical techniques, long-standing painful and disabling conditions, such as osteoarthritis of the hip joint, can now be successfully cured. Moreover, the general household survey has shown that there was no increase in disability in the general population between 1976 and 1988. Therefore, we have to re-examine the way in which the benefit works.

According to the statute, sickness and invalidity benefits were originally intended for those people who,

> "by reason of some specific disease or bodily or mental disablement",

were unable to undertake work. However, successive commissioner rulings and court case law have resulted in non-medical factors being taken into account. As a result, the rules have been progressively widened and complicated.

General practitioners have the job of assessing whether their patients are medically too unfit to work and are therefore entitled to the benefit. That has always put GPs in an invidious position. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

On the one hand, they have an obligation to their patient; on the other, they have to act as gatekeeper for the social security system. That job has become harder as the definition of incapacity has become fuzzier.

Our research has shown that GPs are far from sure about what the legal position is or whether their decisions conform with it. An independent study conducted by *Weekly Monitor* found that two thirds of the GPs surveyed had issued medical certificates to people who were either not sick at all or not sick enough to be incapable of work.

We should not blame doctors for that situation. It is up to Parliament to resolve their conflict of interest and to clarify law. Until we do so, access to the benefit will remain haphazard, controls will be lax and the system will be open to abuse.

The public at large resent that abuse. People who work for a modest wage resent seeing neighbours, apparently as fit as themselves, living on invalidity benefit. Too many people regard invalidity benefit as a readily available supplement to their occupational pensions when they take early retirement.

Some employers are as much to blame as employees. It is not unknown for personnel departments to advise perfectly fit staff whom they are making redundant how they can claim invalidity benefit. There are well publicised cases of people on invalidity benefit earning money by cleaning windows at the very same office where they were claiming that benefit, enjoying cycling holidays and winning javelin contests.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): My right hon. Friend rightly draws attention to some of the abuses. He is aware that I had a very pleasant day close to my constituency last year, when I attended the grand national. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the man who waved the flag at the grand national was on invalidity benefit? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Lilley: Obviously, I cannot comment on individual cases, but I have to say that in that case there was come evidence of capacity to perform that task.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Before the Secretary of State plunges the entire nation into the chaos that the grand national suffered last year, will he take a tiny bit of blame himself and confess, before he scapegoats the sick in the way he is doing, that £8 billion was taken from the national insurance scheme by his predecessor's decision to withdraw the Treasury supplement from the national insurance scheme? That was left out for those three years, and that is the main reason for any shortfall in the national insurance scheme, not the problems of the sick.

Mr. Lilley: I do not think that that is a telling point. We have agreed to top up the fund from taxpayers' money, and we are doing that significantly at present. In other words, the recipients of contributory benefits are receiving benefits of which the total value exceeds the current value of contributions going into that fund.

Surely that is one reason why we should look closely at those benefits and ensure that they are going to people who are genuinely sick and disabled—people who are intended to receive them and on whose behalf those contributions have been paid. The hon. Gentleman thinks that is targeting the sick and disabled. It is targeting the benefit on the sick and disabled, which is what we want to achieve.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Bermondsey): The Secretary of State knows that my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) is ill and that otherwise he would be speaking on the matter in my place.

Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree with the general view, before he is selective in targeting, that the best way of reducing the number of those who honestly or dishonestly may seek to claim benefit is by maximising the opportunity for people to do a hard day's work and therefore minimising unemployment?

There will never be a system in the world which somebody will not get round. It is important that the system, although tough, deals with individual circumstances and the individual applicant in every event. A strict medical test that does not take account of age or of history of medical illness or of environment or of work will never be able to take account of everybody's circumstances, all of which are different.

Mr. Lilley: I strongly agree with both points. We want to help people back to work: that must be the most constructive thing for people who can work. A test must be sensitive enough to take into account the vast array of different conditions from which people suffer, and I shall be coming to the test and the way in which we are trying to ensure that it achieves that, while being objective and effective.

We obviously need to restore the original policy intention of providing help only to those who cannot work because of their medical condition. I want to clear away the clutter of conditions and focus the benefit on fitness to work. That is why I am proposing a new test of incapacity for work. The test will be more objective, simpler to understand and easier to apply.

Throughout the year, we have had extensive discussions with experts on disability and occupational medicine. As a result, we have developed a test based, first, on identifying the key faculties whose impairment can make people unable to work. The essential physical faculties include bending, lifting, walking, vision, hearing, reaching and so on. Following consultation, we have included climbing stairs and tinnitus as well. In addition, there are a number of measures on how mental health problems affect the ability to handle different situations.

The second step is to calibrate the extent to which loss of any of those faculties impairs ability to work. A number of people have tried to mock that approach and the basic test, which we have spelt out in the consultation document. I regret to say that even the hon. Member for Glasgow, Gaescadden (Mr. Dewar) has, rather uncharacteristically, joined in the mockery. That mockery is not appreciated by disabled people. The approach underlying the test is highly respected by disabled people and their representatives. It has the same basis as that used in the definitive study measuring the extent and severity of disability in Britian.

Our new test has already been welcomed. Today I received a letter from the National Back Pain Association, welcoming a more objective test. If the hon. Member for Garscadden says that we should listen to the views of disability organisations, let me read him the NBPA's conclusion:

> "For some time now the Back Pain Association has been concerned with the issue of benefits of those disabled by back pain. The nature of the condition, with its invisibility, its many causes and often difficult diagnosis, has led both to some abuse by claimants and also to unfair views of the back pain sufferer as

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> a malingerer. A move towards a more 'objective' test would thus be welcomed. The NBPA is pleased to note that the added emphasis on self-assessment in the proposed process."

The association adds:

> "However, this organisation feels that the ability to sit must be added to the list of functions assessed."

We have duly added that function. *[Interruption.]* No, that is the only function that the association mentioned in its conclusions.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Let me just correct the record. I think that I am right in saying that the National Back Pain Association has also made it clear that it is deeply concerned about the present test, especially as it affects remission. Someone may be able to do the physical test satisfactorily on day A, but may pay a heavy price for it on subsequent days. The association has made strong representations and, as I understand it, remains unsatisfied on that point.

Mr. Lilley: A number of organisations have stressed the important point that the test must not be merely a snapshot taken at one point in time. We have taken that on board—indeed, we had done so before we issued the consultation document. The test must take account of the fact that conditions come and go. That fact will be taken into account in the assessment; that is right and proper. I shall deal shortly with the consultation and evaluation procedures. We want to take such comments on board, and the National Back Pain Association's letter shows that we are doing so.

The third step in developing our test is to establish how partial loss of two or more faculties may combine to make someone unable to work. The fourth step, which we have introduced as a direct result of our discussion with the expert panel, is to cross-check how the loss of faculty would influence ability to undertake the 100 most common occupations in this country. Together, those occupations account for three quarters of all people in work, so it will be a fairly comprehensive check.

The fifth step is to establish a threshold of incapacity beyond which people will qualify for the benefit. Clearly, that is a crucial decision. The threshold must be set at a reasonable level and must not exclude the people whom we want to help—the genuinely unfit. I want to draw upon the widest possible expertise in setting it. That is why I have set in train a wide-ranging process of consultation and evaluation before bringing forward regulations to implement the test.

I have published a consultation paper setting out our proposals in detail. I have sent more than 4,000 copies to individuals and organisations who expressed an interest in them. I have also formed a panel of some 80 experts, including disabled people, doctors, academics and representatives of disability organisations. I have asked those experts to help define the threshold of incapacity and to refine ways of measuring it. Their involvement will help to ensure that the threshold is set at a fair and reasonable level.

In the spring, I will be carrying out a full trial to evaluate the new procedures. We will examine how the test would work if applied to a large number of specific individuals. We will check that the test gives results that are consistent with those from a direct medical examination of each individual. I hope that that will reveal any pressure points, unforeseen problems and exceptional cases. Following that process, we can refine the test and the adjudication procedures.

I intend to publish the results of both the consultation and the evaluation process before introducing forward secondary legislation to implement the test. Parliament will therefore be able to make an informed judgment on the effectiveness of the new test before considering the regulations.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Secretary of State is trying to establish a definitive set of conditions —a level above which someone may be entitled to benefit and below which he or she will not be entitled to it. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that disability varies enormously from individual to individual—that it is not a homogeneous condition? It may be well-nigh impossible for people to operate such clinical rules unless there is a considerable degree of latitude. Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to give that latitude?

Mr. Lilley: I have a great deal of respect for the expertise of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who has specialised in these matters, and I take to heart the point that he has made. I said earlier that we are trying to ensure that the test is sensitive and that it absorbs and incorporates the expertise of a whole range of different experts and groups.

We want to get it right. We have an interest in doing so, because we want to get the benefit to those who are entitled to it and who have the underlying requirement for it. We seek only to exclude those who are not entitled to it—those who are fit enough to work and who ought to be helped back to work through the back-to-work benefits.

We recognise that the test should not be a single snapshot of a particular point of time; that we must take into account the nature of the ailment or incapacity from which a person suffers; and that we must ensure that the test achieves that. That is why we are going through the evaluation and consultation process. I hope that the publication of the findings will enable Parliament to be sure when it comes to consider the detailed regulations that we have done precisely that.

Clearly, however, any benefit must have a criterion attached to it and that criterion must be applied. Ultimately, the choice is between an objective criterion and a subjective one, and a subjective criterion relying on the simple opinion of an individual and his luck and good fortune in having a sympathetic local doctor can be much more unfair and unjust than an objective one. I hope that the procedure will result in something fair, reasonable and sensible that meets the complexities to which the hon. Member for Caernarfon referred.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have perhaps been hoist with our own petard? In our compassion, we tried to give a very generous benefit to those suffering from invalidity. We are now replacing that with something that is more fair because it is targeted on those who are genuine invalids. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House the difference between the rewards that someone enjoys who can get on to invalidity benefit—even if he or she is not really entitled to that benefit—and what he or she will get in future?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Invalidity benefit is a more attractive benefit than the back-to-work benefits. *[Interruption.]* I am talking about the present, and at present invalidity benefit is more attractive than the back-to-work benefits and does not have the conditions attached to it that the benefits intended to encourage people back to work carry. There have therefore been attempts to get on to invalidity benefit when it is not the best or most suitable benefit.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman for the second time.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Can the Secretary of State give me the figure that really interests me? How many tens of thousands—in the view of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens), perhaps hundreds of thousands—of new people will be seeking work and want to register unemployed?

Mr. Lilley: We estimate that it will be some 95,000 in the first year, rising in the second year to 190,000. That is working on the most pessimistic assumptions.

Let me explain how the new test will be applied in practice. For the first 28 weeks of sickness, claimants will be entitled to statutory sick pay or the lower rate of incapacity benefit which replaces sickness benefit. During that first 28 weeks, the criterion for entitlement—normally inability through sickness to undertake one's current occupation—will be unchanged. So will the current reliance on a general practitioner's certificate. After 28 weeks, however, claimants will automatically move on to incapacity benefit at the middle rate.

Those who could not be expected to handle a questionnaire on their fitness—because of severe mental illness or terminal illness—who will be identified from their records during the first 28 weeks, will be handled directly by the Benefits Agency medical service and their doctor. But most people will then be sent a copy of the incapacity benefit questionnaire to assess long-term incapacity for work. That will ask claimants to give details of how their sickness or disability affects each of the key faculties. The process will be similar to that required of people claiming disability living allowance.

Their GP will then simply be asked to give his diagnosis of their illness and the principal disabling conditions to which it gives rise. He will not be asked to confirm the patient's self-assessment. Nor will the GP any longer be required to express a view of his patient's ability to undertake any kind of work.

The Benefits Agency medical service will then examine the claim form. In straightforward cases—for example where the diagnosis is of an invariably serious disabling condition—the adjudication officer will accept the claim without medical advice. But we would expect the adjudication officer to seek advice from the Benefits Agency medical service in about 85 per cent. of cases.

BAMS would then assess whether the questionnaire and diagnosis leave room for doubt. If so, it may seek further clarification from the GP and, if appropriate, invite the claimant for examination. We estimate that it will want to examine two thirds of cases referred to it. That means that just over half of all claimants may be called for examination.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I understand that the arrangements for passporting, for the purposes of the new incapacity benefit, people who are currently in receipt of invalidity benefit will mean, for example, that those on the higher-rate care component of disability living allowance will not be required to undergo a further medical test. Can my right hon. Friend say whether new claimants going straight on to incapacity benefit will be exempted similarly? That would be helpful to them. Such an assurance would be encouraging to the House and to people outside.

Mr. Lilley: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. The move has been widely welcomed. It is obviously sensible, in that it removes the need of those people to undergo an unnecessary second test, and it will save the time of Benefits Agency medical staff.

As I have said, we expect that roughly half of all cases will involve an examination. The agency doctors will provide an assessment for the adjudication officer. Although the measure of incapacity given by the test will provide the main basis for the adjudication officer's decision, he will not be obliged to follow it mechanically if other evidence suggests a different conclusion.

Claimants will, of course, have a right of appeal against decisions. As at present, appeals will be heard by the Social Security Appeals Tribunal, but the Bill provides for a medical assessor to be present at any appeal where the degree of incapacity is in question.

Under the present, admittedly inadequate, system, existing recipients of invalidity benefit are subject to periodic review by Benefits Agency doctors. This may involve no more than review of the claimant's case notes. If the notes indicate a condition that is not likely to have changed, no further action may be taken; if not, the claimant may be called in for examination.

Each year, under the present system, about 900,000 people have their cases reviewed, and more than 300,000 cases involve an examination by Benefits Agency doctors. As a result of this review action, invalidity benefit was withdrawn in about 100,000 cases each year. Last year, 5,350 appeals against refusal or withdrawal of invalidity benefit were heard, and 2,856—a little over half—were upheld.

The hon. Member for Garscadden has claimed that the results of appeals show that few people are on this benefit who should not be. The fact that, even in the absence of a rigorous and objective test, 100,000 people have benefit withdrawn and that, of these, less than 3 per cent. are reinstated on appeal disproves the hon. Gentleman's point.

Naturally, when the new test is introduced, it will be used in the review of existing cases. To do otherwise would be inequitable. No existing recipient of invalidity benefit who is genuinely incapable of work need have any worry. The test is designed precisely to ensure that such people continue to receive this benefit. Indeed, we want to reduce as far as possible the number of claimants—particularly severely disabled claimants—who will even have to complete the test questionnaire. I do not want to waste their time, any more than I want to waste the time of Benefits Agency officials.

So we have tried to identify the groups who we can tell a priori are clearly unable to work. None of these will undergo any review process at all in future. As I have just mentioned, they comprise: people who are receiving the highest-rate care component of disability living allowance;

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people who are terminally ill; and people who are suffering from any of a number of specified severe and chronic conditions.

I can give the House an up-to-date list of conditions that we propose to exempt from any review at all in future. The proposed list of serious chronic, degenerative conditions is as follows: tetraplegia, paraplegia, persistent vegetative state, registererd blindness, severe learning difficulties, severe and progressive neurological or muscle-wasting diseases or disorders—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members find this humorous. *[Interruption.]* Of course they should be exempt. I am saying that they are exempt. I imagined that Opposition Members would want to reassure their constituents that people in these categories will not have to go through even a review procedure.

Examples of the severe and progressive neurological or muscle-wasting diseases or disorders that I have mentioned are the later stages of multiple sclerosis, Huntington's disease, Parkinson's disease and motor neurone disease. Then there are active and progressive forms of inflammatory polyarthritis, impairment of the cardio-respiratory function—for example, as a result of a severe heart attack—dementia, dense paralysis of the upper limb, trunk and lower limb on one side of the body, such as occurs as the result of a severe stroke, and multiple effects of impairment of function of the brain and/or nervous system, such as a brain tumour. We are consulting leading disability organisations with a view to seeing whether the list can be extended.

In addition, people who are 58 or older at the time of the change and have been continuously receiving invalidity benefit since I announced these proposals on 1 December will not have to go through the new test. In total, some 850,000 people will not be bothered by a review. I hope that Opposition Members are thus reassured that I am not talking about just one or two cases.

This approach has been welcomed by the Disablement Income Group, which was particularly concerned that people on the higher rate of disability living allowance might have to undergo a second test. I believe that our approach demonstrates our determination to reassure severely ill and disabled people that they have nothing to fear from the sensible new procedures we are introducing. They certainly will not lose their benefit, and we want to cause them as little distress and bother as possible.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The Secretary of State is telling us that this measure will save the Exchequer a considerable amount of money. The saving will result from the fact that fewer people will be able to claim benefit. Will the right hon. Gentleman set for the Benefits Agency a target number of people who, although they qualified for benefit hitherto, will now have to be refused?

Mr. Lilley: Certainly not. If I were to do so, adjudication officers would, under the law, ignore my attempts. Adjudication officers are not allowed to work on that basis. They have to consider each person as an individual. That is what Parliament has rightly set down, and I would not try to interfere with it.

Mr. Field: The Secretary of State is telling the House, as, presumably, he tells his Treasury colleagues, that these savings will be made, but there is no guarantee that they will be made.

Mr. Lilley: That is quite correct. We have no savings target, but it is our intention to ensure that benefit goes only to those who are entitled to it. We cannot be absolutely sure how many people will be excluded. Following a dry run to see how things might work out, we have made an estimate by means of a case study of people who have applied for the benefit. If the actual figure turns out to be lower than the estimate, we shall certainly not change the severity of the test, which will have an objective rather than a financial basis.

Mr. Field: So the Secretary of State has a target. Benefit will be targeted on those who are eligible, and those who are not eligible will have benefit withdrawn. The people working in the Benefits Agency know that there is a Chinese wall between what the Secretary of State says in the House about the potential savings and the actual delivery of those savings.

Mr. Lilley: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. This is why we in the United Kingdom do not have cash-limited benefits and why, from time to time, I have to come to the House for supplementary provision for the amount by which demand has exceeded provision. We are of the opinion that benefit should be geared to the needs of the individual, and not cash-limited across the whole spectrum. It certainly will not be so cash-limited in this case.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): We have been provided with an explanatory memorandum giving a very strong indication of the savings that are expected. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that, if such savings are not achieved, he will not seek even further tightening of the capacity tests?

Mr. Lilley: Of course, one is required to give the best possible estimate of the financial implications of the Bill. This we have done. However, estimates and forecasts are often out, one way or the other. None the less, I repeat that we are not in the business of basing the severity of tests on financial targets. The threshold will be set after we have involved experts to ensure that it will really measure whether people are able to work. If they are able to work, clearly they should not be receiving that benefit. If they are not able to work, clearly they should receive it. In that case, we want them to receive it. That is what it is for.

Mr. Frank Field: The heads of benefits agencies had their pay related to performance. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that the performance-related pay of the head of the Benefits Agency is not linked to delivering the savings announced in the Bill?

Mr. Lilley: That is quite correct. *[Interruption.]* There is no question of there being any flexibility in applying or disapplying the benefit. It relates only to the efficiency of providing and completing forms.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: No, I want to make progress, as I have already given way at least half a dozen times.

I want now to spell out the new benefits structure. The present invalidity benefit is not well focused on need. It is not means-tested or taxed. It continues five years after pension age, and it is earnings-related. We do not propose to means-test it, because that would reduce the incentive for employees and employers to provide additional provision for long-term sickness, and penalise those who do so.

However, it has always been our stated intention to bring invalidity benefit into tax, in the same way as all other benefits which replace earnings. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated in his Budget that new recipients will be liable to tax from April 1995 if they have sufficient other income to exceed their tax allowances.

The new incapacity benefit will also cease for those who reach state pension age after April. There will no longer be an earnings-related additional pension element for those who come on to incapacity benefit from its inception in April 1995. That additional pension is somewhat of an anomaly. It is the last remaining earnings-related element in pre-pension benefits. By removing it, we are going back to Beveridge, who believed in a system of flat rate benefits.

The additional pension is very poorly targeted, since it is highest for those who earned most and worked longest, yet they are the most likely to have private occupational sickness or early retirement schemes. Indeed, about half those who receive additional pension, which can amount to an extra £70 per week, also have some other income.

Strangest of all, even though it is calculated on the basis of notional entitlement to the state earnings-related pension scheme, it goes to those who have opted out of SERPS. That can mean that some people who have opted out of SERPS can benefit three times over: they receive additional pension paid with invalidity benefit; they pay lower national insurance contributions; and they may also have an occupational pension as a result of opting out.

It is wrong to continue paying such high amounts without any regard to need. The financial burden that this was storing up for the future was not anticipated at the time; nor was the growth in occupational pensions which has happily occurred. Additional pension alone would cost about £2 billion a year by the end of the decade, even after restrictions introduced in 1992. I shall listen with interest to hear whether Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen mount a rearguard action in defence of that somewhat anomalous element in the benefit structure.

Of course, existing recipients of additional pension will continue to receive it, but, unlike the rest of their benefit, it will no longer be uprated for inflation. By contrast, there is a far better case for the age-related invalidity addition. That is the extra amount given to those who become incapacitated early in their careers, and therefore have less time to build up invalidity pension rights or savings.

I propose to simplify and bring forward the dates of entitlement to that element. Those incapacitated before the age of 35 will receive an extra £12·15 a week on top of the basic benefit as long as they remain on incapacity benefit. Those incapacitated between the ages of 35 and 44 will receive a supplement of £6·10.

The only other important change I propose in the structure of the long-term benefit is to restrict the allowance for dependent adults to those who are looking after children and therefore getting the child increment as well and to dependents over 60.

The new benefit will be payable at three rates—the longer the period of sickness, the higher the benefit. I am also simplifying statutory sick pay, replacing the two existing rates with a single rate set at the present higher rate. That is implemented by the Bill. That will be worth an extra £3·70 a week for the lowest paid employees.

Most people receive statutory sick pay for the first 28 weeks of incapacity. For those who do not, incapacity benefit will be payable at the same rate as sickness benefit now. After 28 weeks, the middle rate of incapacity benefit will be payable at the same rate as statutory sick pay. At that point, the new benefit will be taxable.

After a year of incapacity, the benefit will increase once again to the same rate as basic invalidity benefit. That restructuring will provide a basic income to those who cannot work. It will continue for as long as they remain incapable of work and can be supplemented by private provision and, if necessary, with income-related benefits. Existing recipients will be protected. There will be no cash losers when the scheme is introduced.

Many people who receive incapacity benefits would prefer to work. I have four proposals to provide tangible help for them to go back to work. They can already receive a wide range of help and advice from the Employment Service in finding employment or appropriate training. People with particular needs, including those with disabilities and the long-term unemployed, are rightly given priority.

First, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will be reviewing the measures necessary to help people who become unemployed after being disallowed incapacity benefit to get back to work. Secondly, I propose a change which has been sought and will be welcomed by many voluntary and charitable organisations. That is the proposal to allow people on incapacity benefit to carry out up to 16 hours voluntary work a week without losing their benefit.

People will continue to be able to undertake therapeutic work, which is all they are allowed to do at present. That will also be subject to a limit of 16 hours. People who work for 16 hours or more can claim disability working allowance. In addition, I announced in my uprating statement that people who receive disability working allowance will automatically qualify for free prescriptions and free dental charges when incapacity benefit is introduced.

A further change sought by disability organisations is to allow people to undergo a period of employment training between their final payment of incapacity benefit and starting a job and still qualify for disability working allowance. We intend to introduce that.

The Bill brings in sensible and well thought out reforms to tackle undeniable problems in this area, while protecting the position of the sick and disabled. However, what have we heard from the Opposition on this subject? The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) dismissed the proposals as "a petty change" to make "minor savings". By contrast, his right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition described them as a

"continued and vicious assault upon the welfare state".—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 941.]

He also said that they were odious and deplorable. Far be it from me to stir up discord between them, but it cannot be both a petty measure, making minor savings, and the end of civilisation and the welfare state as we know it.

Both the hon. Member for Garscadden and his right hon. and learned Friend are wrong. The proposal is a major change, but it is a major improvement. It tackles with sensitivity a major problem. However, apart from those sniping and contradictory remarks, we have heard very little from the Opposition on the whole subject. They have come up with no coherent or penetrating criticisms of our

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approach. They have offered no alternative of their own. Indeed, they seem to have given the subject no serious thought whatsoever. They just seem to have handed it to the Commission for Social Justice and dozed off.

An aggressive Opposition would oppose. A constructive Opposition would propose. However, this lethargic Opposition just repose. The test of commitment in this area is a willingness to give it serious constructive thought. Anyone who really believes in the welfare state must have the courage to take the decisions necessary to make it sustainable. Anyone who is really concerned about the sick and disabled must be prepared to tackle the abuse of benefits which were meant for them.

We believe in the welfare state. We are determined that it should survive and improve into the next century. We believe that everyone fortunate enough to be fit and able to work has a duty to help those who are incapable of working. That is why we have had the courage to undertake these reforms.

The Bill will ensure that those who are not able to work through sickness receive appropriate help through an affordable system; that those who are able to work are helped to do so, and that resources are not diverted to those who are able to work but do not seek to do so. I commend it to the House.

5.9 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The Secretary of State, at the end of his speech, tried to stir things a little. I am not sure whether his taunts were very effective, although I suspect that they worried some Conservative Members who will have to serve on the Committee, as they sounded like an invitation to lengthy and stern Committee proceedings.

Perhaps I should help the Secretary of State. I should at least admit my error in terms of the quotation that he gave from me. There is no doubt that, the more I have considered the measure, the more I have talked to people in the disability world, and the more I have considered the somewhat tardy trickle of information that has come from the Government, the less I like the measure. It has to be judged against the sweep of Government policy; it should not be seen in isolation. It is certainly not a measure by a Minister with a tidy mind putting his house in order, and, to be fair, I do not think that the Secretary of State saw it in that light.

Everyone is conscious of the public anger about a Government who owe their office to specific promises not to raise taxes and who won the previous election not even by discreet silence about embarrassing facts but by deliberate misrepresentation.

Undoubtedly, hypocrisy and cynicism are at large, and it is not difficult to see why. The Prime Minister has been arguing that "back to basics" has nothing to do with personal morality. I must say that we are fascinated to know that we owe it all to Barbara Cartland, according to today's papers. It certainly explains quite a lot. The Secretary of State, who has remained remarkably silent —I congratulate him on his good sense—during the "back to basics" argument, has missed that lady's splendid interviews, in which she explained that she cooked the whole thing up with the Prime Minister over a cup of tea, I think at Downing street.

In any event, if it is not personal morality, it is obviously public standards that the Prime Minister is stressing, and the public are entitled to ask what trust is to be put in an Administration whose own authority is built upon shaky and shabby foundations.

I am coming to the specifics of the Bill because it fits very well into the general picture. It is not just the tax hike and the size of the tax hike—the £24 billion over three years; the pay-now, pay-later, pay-more-and-more Government—it is also where the burden is distributed. Where the burden is distributed is worrying people in Britain as much as the size of the tax increases.

When we examine the measure as a whole—I include the taxation of incapacity benefit, the alteration in eligibility for the new benefit and the cuts in the new benefit as against invalidity benefit—we see a pretty vulnerable group by any standards—those who are struggling with the effects of long-term ill health and disability—being targeted with almost unerring accuracy by the Government. I do not think that it is a partisan point; there will be uncomfortable consciences among Conservative Members also. Very many people do not like what they are seeing.

The charge is straightforward, and it is damaging. Eligibility for incapacity benefit is being artificially restricted. Payments for those who get over the hurdles, pass obstacles and pass the test at the end of the day are being significantly attacked. It is fair to say that it is a mean-minded measure and that it will be resented. It is right to protest that the Government's overriding priority has not been protection for the long-term sick, as has been suggested, but protection for the Treasury.

The figures are impressive. I accept that they are estimates and not targets. The Secretary of State has given an assurance, and I will not challenge it, certainly at this stage. But, according to the best estimates, as he called them, in the financial memorandum, in 1995-96, the Government will save £550 million gross, and in 1996-97, they will save £1,450 million. That point might come out quite usefully in respect of the money resolution.

The offsetting figure is £265 million in the second year. I cannot remember what it was in the first year. Anyway, the offsetting figure for income support increases is very low. I am slightly puzzled by that, as I would expect there to be quite an impact in terms of a knock-on to income support as a result of the measures. However, the gross figures are formidable. The savings—it is an important point—will escalate very substantially subsequently.

We are talking about £1,450 million in the second year. However, as many people will still be on invalidity benefit and will be coming up for review—presumably they will then have to face the test for the new incapacity benefit —it is expected that a large number of them will fall out at that stage and, presumably, there will be additional savings to be added on to that. It will be interesting to see the projection continued from 1996-97 to 2000-01, as I suspect that the figure will be very much more substantial. I underline that point, because it emphasises the importance of what is being done and the number of people who are likely to be affected by it.

There is an interesting comparison to make. I recognise that the Secretary of State will not want to comment on it. However, the right hon. Gentleman will remember that a document came into the public domain in June last year, which revealed with remarkable accuracy the discussions that were going on between the Treasury, the Prime

Minister's office and the right hon. Gentleman's office. They had an objective test written in, they had cuts in benefit, and they also took into account the savings in taxing invalidity benefit. They came up with expected savings of £180 million in 1995-96, £495 million in 1996-97, and £1·3 billion by the end of the century.

I ask my hon. Friends to consider that escalation of cost and to start with the very much higher base that has been projected for this package of changes. They will see that, by the end of the century, it will be a very substantial sum indeed. I hope that we will have more information about that either in Committee or in the House when we debate the money resolution. I am concerned because those expected savings included an objective test, but one that seemed to us, when we read the papers which reached us, to be very tough indeed.

I do not need to remind the Minister of the well-known example of the 55-year-old builder with angina, who gets chest pains after excessive bending, heavy lifting and carrying. He is unable to walk on the flat for more than 200 yd before he has to stop because of chest pains, and he has to climb stairs slowly. That is an example of someone who, under that package, which would save a substantially smaller sum than the present package, would be excluded from invalidity benefit. That suggests to me that the Government anticipate that the impact will be very considerable. That is certainly a matter of concern.

I shall say a word or two about the so-called objective test. I do not want to have a long, convoluted argument with the Secretary of State about the view of the groups who represent people with disabilities. The other day, I had a meeting with about a dozen representative and well-known organisations, some of whom—I certainly do not want to particularise the reasons; I am sure that the Secretary of State will recognise why—are involved in the consultative process. Not one of them rested content. Not one of them was happy with the test. Everyone who spoke at length challenged the basis of the league table on which we are now building.

Those organisations responsibly took the view that they had a duty to their members, to the people whom they represent and to their colleagues at least to take part in the consultative process and to try to bring about improvements. It would be an abuse of that responsibility —I say this seriously to the Secretary of State—if the right hon. Gentleman represented to the public that, because they are taking part, they are happy with what they are consulting about.

My impression is that they would like to advise that the Secretary of State should go back to the drawing board and start again, but they know that that advice would not be heeded; therefore, they are reduced to arguments about important points—I do not belittle them—about whether a certain measure of disability should be worth three, five or seven points on the scale. I would be the last to mock that, but it would be interesting to hear from the Minister whether there are terms of reference within which working parties are operating.

I will draw an analogy—perhaps one that is slightly far away—and I will do so quickly. There has been the most extraordinarily full consultation process on paper over trust hospital status in my area of Scotland. The trouble was that when one wrote to say that one wanted to make a representation against the concept of trust hospitals, one received a smart reply saying that that was not open to consultation and that it was a fait accompli. One could merely make representations about minor details.

I suspect that that is the situation that we face with the Bill. If I am wrong, I shall be glad to be reassured. If I am wrong and the Secretary of State says that he is prepared to listen to fundamental changes, I think that he will find that quite a few will be forthcoming.

Mr. Lilley: Will the hon. Gentleman reveal whether he is going to propose any fundamental changes or just sniping criticisms? If he has an alternative to the idea of an objective medical test, the Government would be interested to hear it. However, so far we have not.

Mr. Dewar: I was dealing specifically with the right hon. Gentleman's claim that there was widespread support for the test among disability groups. That is something which he must recognise is open at least—I put it charitably—to serious doubt. My view is that the approach is too mechanical, and that measuring the loss of capacity in a rather absolute sense does not tell the whole story.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will accept that there is no necessary correlation between disability and ability to work. There are many examples—we all have them in our personal circle of acquaintances—of people who would score a high total in the test, but who are able fortunately to hold down demanding and responsible jobs. There are real concerns that the cut-off will be too arbitrary and hard-nosed, and that many who need help will be left outside.

It is difficult to comment in detail on some of the matters that will be settled later by regulation. The Secretary of State will say that he wanted to leave the matter open, so there could be a wide expression of opinion. It is difficult for the House and it will be difficult for the Committee. We do not know how the threshold will work or what the final form of the test will be. The general feeling is that it under values pain, for example. There are general conditions that are debilitating but which are difficult to fit in the test even on a non-snapshot basis. These would be difficult to take account of even if there were one or two moving pictures over a period.

I pointed out in an intervention that representations have been made from people who are interested in back pain, and also from who are concerned with arthritis. In those cases, people are often in a position to perform tasks, perhaps because of remission or because they can do the task on a one-off basis but are unable to repeat it for a period. It will be difficult to take account of that in the general range of the test. The remission point has been made to us by those who are interested in multiple sclerosis, for example. They are entitled to be concerned about the ability of the system to take account of special cases and circumstances.

I remind the House of the June 1993 memorandum which referred to discussion about a continuous qualifying period for invalidity benefit. The memorandum said that that would have some disadvantage, particularly for those

"who suffer from progressive diseases eg multiple sclerosis."

The rather unfortunate conclusion that was drawn was that the principle of continuous and long-term sickness seemed right, and therefore it was suggested that the measure go ahead. Such an approach shows a certain lack of sensitivity. There are concerns about the way in which the whole thing has been envisaged.

[Mr. Dewar]

There are understandable worries about how one fits mental health into the pattern. From reading the section on mental health—apart from one rather startling misprint, for which I blame no one—I find it difficult to envisage how some of the cases of which I have some personal contact would get the help that they need. The problem is that objectivity for one man may result in rough justice for others, particularly if the priorities are out of sync. I hope that there is progress on the monitoring panel, and we await keenly to hear whether the Minister of State has anything further to say about that. However, he must not take that as an endorsement of principle.

I understand why that has been done. We know, because the Prime Minister told us, that the growth in the number of people on invalidity benefit beggars belief. It is well documented that the number has gone up substantially, from 600,000 to 1·5 million, since 1979. The Secretary of State is entitled to consider that fact, and to be concerned about it. He must not, of course, make a simplistic analysis. There is a great deal of evidence about the complexity of the reasons for that phenomenon, and there is no simple answer for it.

With all respect to the Secretary of State, there is a tendency to suggest that the increase is due to malingerers, lead-swingers and people on the make; there was a touch of that in the right hon. Gentleman's presentation. It is not like that. The right hon. Gentleman will be probably more familiar than I with the evidence if he has been as thoroughly briefed as normal by the Department.

I refer for example to the Policy Studies Institute report, of which the Secretary of State will certainly know. The report pointed out that 29 per cent. of the increase was accounted for by pensioners who were staying on invalidity benefit—presumably for the advantages of not being liable to tax. That 29 per cent. will not be an extra charge in terms of the public purse or in terms of the benefit paid by the Department, because those people will drop immediately to their retirement pension entitlement. In any event, that matter will come to an end as a result of the provisions of the Bill.

I hope that we will not be told that there has been a substantial fall in the number of people in receipt of incapacity benefit as a result of the new test. That reduction will relate to the fact that a substantial part of the "problem"—I use that term in inverted commas, as that is the way in which it is presented—comes from pensioners who have stayed on invalidity benefit.

The PSI suggests that 16 per cent. of the increase results from something that most of us would see as a hopeful phenomenon—the increase in the number of women in the labour market. Those women are now paying and running up a significant national insurance contribution record, and they are therefore entitled to invalidity benefit in a way in which they would not have been a few years ago. It may be embarrassing for the Secretary of State, but it seems to me that there is nothing to criticise there—that is something which we should broadly welcome.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for about a quarter of an hour. I have been trying to make note of any positive proposals he has, but I have still not heard any. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if an objective test were applied to the Opposition, all it would show would be an instinctive knee-jerk reaction? That test would not show any positive mental processes at all. What are the Opposition's policies?

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman is showing advanced symptoms of knee-jerk reaction. I do not think that that was a particularly helpful intervention.

The research has not just come from the PSI. Much has been commissioned by the Department, and has been published over recent times. That research makes it clear that there are complex reasons for the rise in numbers, and it must not be assumed that it has the sinister complexion which is sometimes put on it.

I remember the evidence given by the permanent secretary at the Department of Social Security to the Public Accounts Committee in 1990. He distinctly linked the increase in numbers to demographic factors, and particularly to the rise in unemployment and the knock-on effect from the stress and anxiety of unemployment. The Secretary of State will, I have no doubt, have discussed the Department's position at that time with the permanent secretary.

The Disablement Income Group, the Disability Alliance, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and a range of organisations—I will not delay the House by quoting them in detail—have looked at the Department's research and the available evidence and have reached a different conclusion from that of the Secretary of State.

I rather deplored the Secretary of State's saying with a little coolness that he did not believe in commenting on individual cases. I suppose he meant naming names, but he went on to deal in a direct way with a rather odd collection of individual javelin throwers and window cleaners. I do not think that that is a sound basis on which to launch a defence of the measure. I was interested in what my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) was challenging, and no doubt we will pursue that later.

If about 90,000 people, rising to 195,000 in the second year, will be put on the unemployment register and there is an inevitable swing from invalidity benefit to incapacity benefit, shedding more and more people over the next three, four, five or six years, it will be interesting to see the estimates for beyond the first two years. It will be interesting to see how many more than 195,000 we reach. That will also be a matter of considerable interest to the Department of Employment and worried Conservative Back Benchers.

I accept that invalidity or incapacity benefit should not be an alternative to unemployment benefit in the long term. There may be a need to tighten up the arrangements and build in safeguards. The Minister has been doing that in the past year or so with the improvement of, as he put it, the medical control arrangements. He expects to save £240 million in the next two years.

I do not quarrel with the assertion that a Department is entitled to examine safeguards. If there is genuine abuse at the edges, it should undoubtedly be stamped out. However, I hope that the Minister will persuade his colleagues to pursue the black economy—which is what he was talking about—as rigorously and enthusiastically in other areas.

I do not accept what the Minister of State said on the radio this morning. I heard a brief snatch as he talked to Scotland—an uncharacteristic role for him. He said:

"Invalidity benefit is not being used for the purpose it was intended for in the first place."

That was an overstatement. It may lie at the heart of some of the difficulties. If one believes that statement, one may well feel that there is a case for the changes that are being proposed. However, the statement cannot be substantiated on the evidence.

The test should be not simply a test of disability but a test of capacity for work. That means that some other factors must be relevant. It is not the doctor who takes the final decision: it is the adjudication officer in the Department. With the proper training and framework, he should be in a position to hold the balance and ensure that the benefit is sensitive and helps those who most need and deserve help. I want to cut the £6 billion or so bill that is run up every year, but we should concentrate heavily not only on safeguards and eradicating abuse but on the positive action that is needed to give people a chance to get back to work. I welcome anything that the Government do in that direction.

We all know, and certainly the Minister of State knows, that barriers to employment still exist for people with a disability or an illness record. We note the remarkable and persistent failure of the Government to give fair wind to anti-discrimination legislation, which is badly wanted by those who deal with people with disabilities. The decision that employers should pay up 50 per cent. of the equipment and services required for disabled people in employment after six months is deeply resented not only by the disability groups but by the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and employers in general. It is seen as a direct disincentive and it puts in some perspective what the Minister has said.

As the Minister knows, the switch in who bears the cost of statutory sick pay may be another disincentive to employers to hire those who have a disability or people who, because of their previous record, may be thought to be liable to ill health. I accept entirely the point that the Minister of State makes about the enthusiasm and commitment to work of people with disabilities, which may result in a good attendance record. However, I am talking about perception and there is no doubt about the widespread perception of disabled people and the barriers that I fear may be built in.

I commend to the Minister "An Evaluation Supported Employment Initiatives for Disabled People", which has been commissioned by the Department of Employment and was published in October 1993. The Minister may have studied the document. I must confess that I had not done so until recently. It says:

"Supported Employment is the process of enabling a person with a disability to secure and maintain a paid job in a regular work environment, by supplying all appropriate training support to them in the workplace".

According to that substantial piece of research, the general outcome is that

"Agency clients are finding real jobs with real wages . . . Job retention is excellent".

That is an encouraging report, although it is important to note that the number of people involved is still small.

The conclusions of the report are:

"overall agency provision is:
fragile in terms of the scale and scope of funding it receives. . . .
a long way from meeting the extent of need in the community."

If the Minister turned his attention to the lack of funding for such projects and the apparent progress that has been made on the limited and occasional scale that has been possible until now, he would encourage people to look more hopefully to the future and to the provision of jobs. I hope that the Minister of State will say a few words about the projects that I have described, although I recognise that they are Department of Employment led.

Has any consideration been given to some form of partial incapacity benefit? I know that many people have argued strongly for an allowance not merely for 16 hours of voluntary work but for some sort of part-time work. Many people can manage perhaps one or two days a week. The trouble at present is that as soon as they do so, they sacrifice heavily on the benefits side.

There might be a case for introducing on a phased basis, obviously with a taper, a partial incapacity benefit to encourage people to take the first steps back to work. They could mirror in their employment pattern their gradually increasing capacity for work. That could perhaps be considered positively. I am not in a position to do the technical and financial assessments, but in principle it seems a sound concept and one which the Minister ought to consider. I should be interested to know whether it has been considered; if it has been considered and rejected, on what grounds was the decision made?

I noticed that, perhaps in unconscious humour or irony, the Secretary of State said that the changes were being made to protect the benefits of those who were entitled. An awful lot of recipients will think that that is an odd way of describing what is about to happen. We can argue about the objectivity of the test. I am sure that there will be subjective opinions about it. However, there is no doubt about the substantial cuts in benefit which will come with the transfer to incapacity benefit. I say that with some diffidence, because the arrangements are intensely complex. If the new benefit was intended to be a way of simplifying the position, it failed that test almost immediately.

Many of the provisions have still to be embodied in regulations, so it is difficult to follow them. I understand that details of the age allowance will be spelt out in regulations. I am not clear to what extent they will be an improvement or otherwise on the present provision in section 34 of the 1992 Act. We shall have to consider that.

I shall illustrate my fears with two examples. They are in the same area. Let us assume that a married man with two children has qualified for incapacity benefit and is within the 28-week and 52-week period. In other words, he is receiving the upper rate of the lower level—or is it the upper level of the lower rate? The Minister will follow what I mean.

That man will receive a basic incapacity benefit of £52·50 compared with £56·10, which he would have received under invalidity benefit. He loses £3·60 a week. The adult dependency allowance was £33·70. It will now be £26·40. So he loses £7·30. He received £10·95 for each of his two children under the invalidity benefit system. Between the 28th and 52nd week he will receive no children's allowance, so he loses £21·90 a week. *[Interruption.]*

Perhaps the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) will pay some attention to my example. I know that she will have a warm and compassionate heart when it comes to the individual family. Leaving aside the additional pension, which normally averages about £13·40—I accept that that is a separate argument falling into a different category—that

[Mr. Dewar]

family will be £32·80 poorer under the incapacity benefit system than it would have been under the invalidity benefit system between the 28th and 52nd week.

The Minister may say that that is equivalent to throwing people off benefit to protect those who are on benefit, but he has chosen an odd way of doing that. It is the hair-shirt approach and I am particularly unsympathetic to such an approach when it is enforced on other people.

The second example is that of a married man with no children. According to the same calculation, he will be £3·60 down on his basic benefit. He will lose his adult dependency allowance of £33·70, so he will be £37·30 worse off during those six months. Even after the 52 weeks, that man's adult dependency allowance will not be reinstated until his wife is 60. That is a long time to wait.

Mr. Lilley: Not for someone with children.

Mr. Dewar: My second example is a man without children. The right hon. Gentleman is correct that that allowance is reinstated after 52 weeks for a man with children. That difference is one of the complexities of the system.

It is clear that people will lose almost £40 during those six months. If we went through the small print, we would find other hidden examples of substantial cuts. They will go towards making the substantial savings that are mentioned in the financial memorandum.

The examples that I have cited are one reason why I am so certain that the Opposition are right to vote against the Bill tonight. I do not need to rely on the argument about additional pensions which are derived from SERPS. People have contributed over the years to that system, however, and they did so on the basis that they would receive a benefit. Now, that benefit will be taken from them. That raises a point of principle, although I accept that it is something of an anomaly when considered within the general pattern of benefit provision.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman has still not told us what alternatives the Labour party has in mind. *[Interruption.]* He has referred repeatedly to cuts, but he knows that, even after the proposed changes, the real amount of expenditure on the benefit will not decline. If he proposed no changes to the system, there would be a substantial increase in that expenditure. If he has no alternatives to our proposals, the hon. Gentleman owes it to the House to tell us how much extra tax he would impose to finance that extra spending.

Mr. Dewar: The loyal baying behind the right hon. Gentleman sounded rather tired. He must realise that the old tax card, always a solid friend in a tight corner, is not quite as effective as it once was.

I have tried to outline some of the positive things that should be done to encourage people to go out to work and to remove the barriers to their doing so. I have made it clear that the test is not simply disability but incapacity for work. I concede that that means that the adjudication officer must take into account a wider gamut of circumstances than he is allowed to consider under this system.

If the Government are looking for savings and tax increases, they should not start with this group of people. That may be something which the Secretary of State finds hard to comprehend, but most people would understand it.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The hon. Gentleman is the Opposition spokesman on social security and he has just said that he would not start from here. That is exactly what every other Labour spokesman says. Where would the hon. Gentleman start in the search for savings in public spending?

Mr. Dewar: I know that the hon. Gentleman would love, above almost anything else, not to be here as a representative of his Government, given the state of their fiscal and tax policy. We are therefore entitled to say that we would not make their daft mistakes.

I have sought to make a kind remark to the hon. Gentleman. I am not challenging the fact that, due to mismanagement of our affairs, we are faced with a problem with the public sector borrowing requirement. I accept that the Government feel that they must take steps to deal with that. I have suggested, however, that one would not start with a group of people who are vulnerable. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would accept that. Those people receive invalidity benefit and I am sure that many of them will receive incapacity benefit, because there is no doubt about their entitlement to it. They are struggling with the impact of long-term ill health.

If the hon. Gentleman wanted to look around Britain for people who might shell out a little bit more to help the national effort, I should like to think that he would put that particular group rather low on his list. If I am wrong, I can only say that perhaps I am paying him a compliment that he does not deserve. I suspect, however, that he would agree with me.

Problems lie ahead with the interrelated issue of taxation of incapacity benefit. It is not right to tax that group of people at this stage. It will lead to perceived inequality. I trust that the Minister of State will say something about that when he replies to the debate. I accept that this is a Treasury matter, but the right hon. Gentleman mentioned it and it knitted into the argument about incapacity benefit.

My concern about the perceived inequality is that anomalies will arise for a considerable time. Perhaps two people in the same street, or certainly in the same district, who are in similar financial circumstances and who perhaps suffer from a similar disability or long-term ill health, will not be treated in the same way for tax purposes. Those on incapacity benefit will pay tax on it, while those who remain on invalidity benefit, although they will have passed the same test to retain that benefit, will not pay tax.

The other day, someone asked me whether that meant that the Labour party is in favour of taxing invalidity benefit as well. The answer is no and I made that clear. Unless I have misunderstood the Bill—it is all too easy to misunderstand its technicalities—such differences in tax treatment will last for some time. I welcome the fact that 850,000 people will not be subject to the review process and will remain on invalidity benefit. I therefore presume that they will not be taxed. People who join the system and who will receive incapacity benefit, however, will be taxed. That will involve many people, once the cycle is run through. The House should consider that.

On 21 June 1993, I asked a question about that matter. I was told that if one applied taxation to invalidity benefit, 900,000 people in receipt of it would pay, on average, another £500 a year in tax. Once the new system is operating, I presume that about that number of people, or slightly fewer, because fewer people will be on incapacity benefit, will be taxed. Until the system has run its course, many people will be exempt, but an increasing number will be caught. Ministers have underestimated that figure.

Can the Minister of State tell me what will happen to those people who will be liable to pay tax, but who have no other income apart from incapacity benefit? I was told that there would be 200,000 such cases under invalidity benefit. It may be that the take-up of incapacity benefit will be so much lower than that of invalidity benefit that those people will disappear.

If the Government agree, that will be an expensive concession by them. If it is true, it is a clear illustration of how people will be prejudiced by the change. If that is not true, and a substantial number of people will still have to pay tax when they have no other income apart from incapacity benefit, how will that be managed under the pay-as-you-earn system? Who will be their employer? Will it be the Department of Social Security or will those people be considered to be outside the PAYE system, with all the complications that may ensue?

I hope that the Minister of State will respond to some of the points that I have raised. I make no apology for saying that I do not believe that the Government should have started from here. They should not target the long-term sick and disabled. Even if they believe that changes in eligibility are needed, it does not follow that those who qualify should be hit by reduced benefit and taxation, We must remember that many of those people are already fearful about the impact of VAT on domestic fuel and are already suffering as a result of the freeze on personal allowances, which hits those who are just marginally above the tax barriers.

The cumulative impact of the changes resulting from this Bill will be considerable. I have done rough and ready calculations—I am open to correction later—and it looks to me as though about 25 per cent. of the cost of invalidity benefit will rapidly disappear. [*Interruption.*] I can take the Minister through the figures if he wants. The figures that I have quoted already make my point about the substantial sums at stake.

The saddest thing of all is that the Bill is creating, and will create, an enormous amount of anxiety, distress, frustration and fear among those who are on invalidity benefit. Evidence of that comes in from every side—the people we meet, the people who approach us, the people who write to hon. Members on the subject. Ministers are responsible and they should think again and not push through a Bill that is misconceived in principle and which will prejudice many people who have more problems than anyone in this House is ever likely to face.

5.50 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I have always been proud of the fact that it was a Conservative Government who, in 1971, introduced invalidity benefit. I have often heard Ministers drawing attention, as grounds for satisfaction, to the large increase in spending on the long-term sick and disabled during the period of Conservative Government.

However, it is right to review the operation of any benefit—certainly of one for which claimants and expenditure have increased so rapidly. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, no responsible Government could ignore the increase in expenditure on invalidity benefit from £1·5 billion 10 years ago to more than £6 billion this year. It is right to ensure value for money, to see that the administrative means are appropriate to the purpose of the benefit, to see that the benefit is reaching the people for whom we intend it, to see that there is no abuse, and if there is, that it is suitably and sensibly dealt with, and to ensure that the benefit fulfils sensible purposes in terms of personal and social need and of the economy.

Why has the number of recipients of invalidity benefit increased so much? Has there been, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State suggested, an epidemic of invalidity in a nation that is getting healthier, or is that formulation perhaps based on some misconception of the issues?

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) drew attention to the study by the Institute for Policy Studies, which found that 29 per cent. of the increases had come from the increase in the number of people over pensionable age choosing to draw the benefit. Another 16 per cent. of the increase derived from the number of women in the labour market paying national insurance contributions and thus qualifying for invalidity benefit. A further 13 per cent. of the increase arose for a demographic reason, the increase in the number of disabled people in the relevant age groups. I do not think that we can complain about any of those features of the growth in numbers.

Another 42 per cent. of the increase arose from the growth in numbers of disabled people claiming invalidity benefit. Why should that have been so? It does not appear to be on account of any increase in the number of new awards being made. The Department's research, carried out for it by Bob Erens and Deborah Ghate, found that new awards to men declined during the 1980s and new awards to women increased only slightly. That background factor was mentioned in the introductory section of the study. We need to look more closely to see who those people were and what were their characteristics.

Erens and Ghate found that the great majority of all invalidity benefit recipients were over 50. They were poor. The vast majority of them earned, in the last job that they had had in 1991 or 1992, between £2 and £5 an hour. As the researchers say, they were much more likely than the working population in general to have worked in manual jobs.

No evidence that I have seen suggests that their invalidity was not genuine. The most common causes of health problems were found by the survey to be accidents at work at 12 per cent., followed by industrial diseases and other work-related causes at another 12 per cent. So unless one supposes that doctors are signing bogus certificates wholesale, it is impossible to contend that there is large-scale abuse. In any case, in most of the cases referred to the Benefits Agency medical service, the claimants were still found to be incapable of work. A parliamentary answer on 13 July 1992 told us that in about eight out of 10 references, and six out of 10 of those actually examined, the claimants were found to be incapable of work. Moreover, over half of appeals in respect of invalidity benefit are decided in the claimant's favour.

Other evidence also strongly suggests that claimants are most unlikely to be swinging the lead. The relationship of benefits to earnings, past and future, points to that judgment. As Erens and Ghate tell us, calculation of the backward-looking benefits-earnings ratio shows that the amount received in benefit replaced less than half of earnings for half of all respondents. Only 13 per cent. were

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

receiving more than 80 per cent. of their earnings in benefits. So there is no perverse structure of incentives there.

Likewise, the forward-looking benefits-earning ratio shows that, of those returning to work, two in five earned twice as much in their jobs after returning to work as they had received in benefit, and 15 per cent. were earning less than a fifth more then they received on benefit, but they clearly wanted to be back in work.

Interestingly, Erens and Ghate go on to observe that it is precisely those groups that are most likely to exhibit a higher ratio—women and the young—who are the most likely to return to work and to be attached to the labour market. A high proportion of people on invalidity benefit had a stable employment history before they went on to the benefit—half of them had been in their last job for 10 years or more. The vast majority of recipients under 50, including those most severely affected by health problems, were attached to the labour market—they wanted to return to work if they could.

However, it is vastly more difficult for people over 50 to return to work. The age of 50, the research shows, is the real watershed. By their second round of interviews, Erens and Ghate found that, up to the age of 40, about two fifths of people had left invalidity benefit. That proportion decreased to about one quarter for 40 to 49-year-olds, and to one in seven for 50 to 64-year-olds.

That diminished likelihood of getting off the benefit, which is what very many people over 50 want to do, is explained in part by motivational factors. We can easily understand the demoralisation and pessimism that can set in. It is also partly explained by the nearness of retirement age. But it is mainly explained by labour market conditions.

It is hard for many people on invalidity benefit to get back into work. They tend to have poor educational qualifications. Only 17 per cent. of those surveyed by Erens and Ghate had remained in full-time education after 16, and 48 per cent. of them had no formal educational qualifications at all. Only 5 per cent. had A-levels and only 9 per cent. had higher educational qualifications below degree level. A further 14 per cent., only, had a recognised trade apprenticeship or had gained some commercial qualifications. So it is reasonable to suppose that those people lacked the skills and confidence necessary to re-enter work, and that employers did not see them as desirable recruits.

By far their best hope has been to go back to their previous employer, and 64 per cent. of those returning to work did so. It is often not easy or possible for people to go back to their last employer, who may no longer be in business—the recession has eliminated the possibility of return in all too many cases. More broadly speaking, the decline of manual jobs in the economy has made it more difficult for a significant proportion of those on benefit to get back into work.

Men over 50 with poor, or no, qualifications, are in deep difficulties in the labour market. Another problem that Erens and Ghate identified was the fact that employers were disappointingly inflexible in their attitude to the employment of people with sickness and disability problems. Three out of four respondents on benefit said that their previous employers had not provided them with any assistance to help them carry on working, despite their ill health.

Of those who returned to work, 81 per cent. went back to work hours similar to those of the last job. Half of those who were not able to stay in their return-to-work job said that their employers knew about their health condition but in only one case in five in which the employers knew did they provide any sort of assistance to help their employees to continue working.

Another disappointing finding of the research was that only two in three respondents on IVB were aware of Government schemes designed to help them, and only 10 per cent. of respondents had direct experience of them.

From all that, I conclude that the main reason for the growth in the number of people on invalidity benefit is the difficulty of returning to work.

What will happen if my right hon. Friend's proposals are implemented? An unknown but considerable number of people who previously received IVB will not receive incapacity benefit. Some will go on to unemployment benefit. There is no precise estimate of the number, although there are some speculative estimates in circulation. The Secretary of State made it clear that he does not have any forecast of the number of people who will not receive incapacity benefit. However, he has advised us in the Bill that he estimates that savings of £1,450 million will be achieved by 1996-97.

People, I am sorry to say, will become poorer as a result of the measure. They will be those who have a history of sickness and disability, who have been low earners when in work, who are poorly educated and skilled and who must be among the least fortunate and confident of our fellow citizens. It is estimated that those who fail the test and will no longer receive the benefit may be some £80 to £90—perhaps as much as £160—a week worse off. I do not think that that is what the Government want and it is not what I have understood the Conservative party to be about. Disraeli in his Crystal Palace speech in 1872, as you will recall, Madam Deputy Speaker—I mean from your deep knowledge of Conservative party history—said that one of the great objects of the Tory party was to improve the condition of the people, and he had a particular concern for those suffering from ill health.

The Secretary of State has assured us that he is committed to the welfare state. In his Budget speech, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor similarly reassured us, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has done so on many occasions. However, the freezing of the additional pension for existing claimants, and the decision that there should be no additional pension for new claimants, the reduction of the age allowance for women claimants aged between 45 and 55 and for men between 45 and 60, the lower level of benefit between the 28th and the 52nd week of benefit entitlement and the reduction in the dependant's allowance for people under 60 without children will mean that those who are among the least fortunate in our society are likely to experience still lower incomes. Low-paid workers are to contribute more through increased employees' national insurance contributions, only to receive less for their benefit.

The income of those who go on to unemployment benefit followed by the job seeker's allowance is likely to fall. There will be tighter eligibility tests for the job seeker's allowance and it will be received later than would previously have been the case. I am concerned about the danger that some people will be found too fit for incapacity benefit and not fit enough for the job seeker's allowance. Those who fail the new medical test for incapacity benefit will be disqualified from disability premiums for means-tested benefits—income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit. We cannot assume that they will fall back from invalidity or incapacity benefit on to means-tested benefits, because invalidity and incapacity benefits are contributory, whereas entitlement to means-tested benefits is based on an assessment of family income.

What conclusions might the Government draw from that analysis and an observation of those facts? They should conclude what my right hon. Friend says that he has concluded, that the strategy should be to do everything possible to get people who are on invalidity benefit and, in due course, those on incapacity benefit, into work. That means a macro-economic strategy to secure growth and a panoply of policies to ensure that jobs are generated.

We need to look again at a number of relevant policies. If we want people to be in work and not on benefit, is it sensible to ask employers to bear a larger part of the costs of statutory sick pay? The Secretary of State argued that it will encourage them to promote the health of their work force. I fear that it may at least equally encourage them not to employ people with health problems.

Will the Government look again at the proposed new access to work measures? Is it sensible to ask employers to pay 50 per cent. of the cost of equipment that enables disabled people to work? That has been raised with me with some emphasis by the Council for Disabled People, based at the Royal Midland Counties hospital in south Warwickshire.

Will the Government consider the effect of taking people off incapacity benefit or making it harder for them to be on it, given that it is a passport to disability working allowance? I may have misunderstood that, in which case I shall be glad to be corrected. Disability working allowance has proved somewhat fragile and it has been difficult to ensure an extensive take-up. While I welcome the reforms and improvements that the Secretary of State was able to announce in the uprating statement at the end of last year, it would be unfortunate if other changes made it harder for people to move to disability working allowance.

I hope that the Government will look positively at the case for anti-discrimination legislation to make it illegal for employers to discriminate against disabled people. That is the proper and decent thing to do; it is right in itself. The disabled have a great deal to contribute, much more than all too many employers recognise, and we should do all that we can, on humanitarian and economic grounds, to get them into the productive economy.

I hope that the Government will draw from the analysis of DSS research the moral that we have to continue to make every effort to improve education and training. That includes an intensified emphasis on distance learning, credit accumulation and transfer and support for part-time students. We also need to do more to create awareness of Government schemes and their opportunities.

We must be careful not to penalise disabled people who undertake education and training. The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation has expressed concern that disabled people undertaking a formal course of study at an educational establishment may lose benefit. I was pleased to note my right hon. Friend's assurance that the Government intend to be positive about transitional training.

We must ensure the continuing improvement of health and safety at work. As I said, 24 per cent. of people in the survey were on invalidity benefit following an experience at work that had damaged their health. I know that the Government do not intend in the new deregulation legislation to do anything to undermine genuine health and safety, but it is important to be careful.

We must encourage employers to be flexible about the hours and conditions of work that they are prepared to offer disabled employees, just as they should be in helping single mothers to get back into work. The Government need to make a renewed effort, working with representatives of industry, to ensure that more and more employers are sensible in their own interests as well as in the interests of those who are on the margins of work, who want to work and are finding it difficult to find employment.

I hope that the Government will look at the possibility of a more differentiated policy on incapacity benefit which will take account, sensitively and constructively, of the varying circumstances of claimants. We have found that the big divide among those who are on the benefit is between those who are under 50 and those who are over it. The Government should look at the case for more generous rules for people over 50.

The research also shows that, naturally enough, there are problems for claimants in relation to travel to work. Erens and Ghate found that two thirds of their respondents said that it was important to find a job close to home. Can we examine the possibility of more flexible and generous rules for claimants in remote areas, where, with the best will in the world, there are few jobs to be found?

More importantly, should we not look at more relaxed and generous rules in unemployment black spots, those unfortunate areas where we have endemic unemployment rates of 20, 30 and even 40 per cent.? Is it appropriate to apply the same stringency to the long-term sick and disabled when we know that, realistically, in areas where it is desperately hard for anybody, it is hardest of all for them to find work?

I hope that, as has been argued, we shall think carefully about the principle of an objective medical test. When he announced this change in the uprating statement, my right hon. Friend said that it was his intention to have a "more objective" test. I hope that that means that he will be willing to recognise that a mechanistic set of scores related to bodily or mental capacities will tell adjudication officers very little that is useful to know about the capacity of an individual to work, relative to his or her education or skills, work experience, history of disability and so forth, and relative to the jobs that may be available. My right hon. Friend risks giving a new and unfortunate meaning to the Benthamite calculus of pain. I shall say nothing about pleasure, because I do not think that there is any pleasure involved in this set of calculations.

I hope that the yellow consultation document—"A consultation on the medical assessment for Incapacity Benefit"—is not a tablet of stone and that discussions will lead to modifications. I appreciate my right hon. Friend's assurance that he wants to be flexible and is looking to ensure that the methodology really works. I fear that, as a matter of essential principle, it will not and cannot work.

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

We should recognise the impossibility of a medical officer who does not know the individual concerned making a worthwhile assessment not only of the whole variety of disabilities that disabled people have but of the fluctuating conditions that an individual disabled person may experience, such as varying degrees of pain and the varying impact of mental ill health.

I feel that doctors should accept responsibility in that respect. I am sorry that some of the doctors consulted by the Department felt that it was not a proper part of their responsibility. The DSS sample was of only 40 doctors and they were not unanimous. For example, one is reported as saying:

> "Somebody's got to decide whether people are fit to work or not . . . who else could know, who else could do it . . . Because the GP knows more about the medical history of the patient than anybody else and he knows the patient well. He is the only medical person that knows the patient well."

That is a sensible and important observation.

The citizens advice bureau in Stratford-on-Avon, in my constituency, takes the view—I endorse its opinion—that local doctors feel that it is an appropriate part of their responsibility to make those assessments. We should look carefully at what self-assessment might mean. I may be wrong—perhaps this is not what is envisaged—but if it is the intention to ask people with learning difficulties to score their own cognitive impairments, that would not seem to me to be a sensible or proper policy.

I welcome the provision that the Government are introducing to make it permissible for people to do 16 hours of voluntary work without forfeiting their benefit. However, let us again be careful in the practical administration of the system. I hope that, if people do do voluntary work for up to 16 hours, it will not be held on that account that they are fit for other work. I know that that is not my right hon. Friend's intention, but it is extremely important that we should be careful about that. That point has been put to me strongly by the council for disabled people at the Royal Midland Counties hospital in Warwickshire.

I should like to make an allied point about therapeutic earnings, an issue that we should treat with great sensitivity. Often, the agreement that a claimant can have therapeutic earnings is an important halfway house, easing a person back to work and helping to build their confidence, particularly perhaps in relation to a new and unfamiliar job. That is a point about which the Warwickshire welfare rights service is particularly concerned.

I ask my right hon. Friends to be willing to make rather less savings than is envisaged in their present policy. Of course I understand the need for control of public expenditure and I respect that motive. Of course we must be satisfied that the money being spent is going on proper purposes. In politics at the moment we are having a bit of a discussion on tax. There are good reasons and bad reasons to tax. The good reasons include helping the poor and the sick to live in less poverty, more dignity and more hope. Are these the people who should bear the costs of our economic difficulties of recent years? The good reasons also include enabling benefits claimants to have a better chance to get back into work. That would be the positive way to limit expenditure on that aspect, as others, of social security.

6.15 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). I hope to develop one or two of the themes on which he commented. I hope also that I shall be able to make my criticisms no less effectively, if more robustly, than he has done. If there is a financial crisis surrounding the payment of the benefit, it is one largely engendered by the Government. That is one of the themes on which I wish to speak. The way in which the Government are arbitrarily going to disengage themselves from this financial crisis, which is largely of their own making, will disadvantage thousands of our poorer constituents. That is the second theme to which I wish to address my comments.

The Secretary of State said that there was some puzzlement about why the numbers of people claiming invalidity benefit had increased. I suggest that there is no puzzle at all. There are two main reasons, one of which was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). It pays people who are on benefit, once they have passed retirement age, to continue to draw invalidity benefit. It is to their advantage, for the obvious reason that retirement pension is taxable and invalidity benefit is not.

The civilised way of dealing with that local difficulty would have been to bring invalidity benefit into tax, which the Bill does. I would claim that that is long overdue. Hon. Members should note that, although I am saying that it should be taxable, I am not necessarily saying that people should pay tax on it. People will pay tax depending where the tax threshold is. If I went down that path, I am sure that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would say that I was out of order, so I will leave that to one side.

That is one reason why there has been an explosion in expenditure on invalidity benefit. People have not been taking their retirement pension; they have continued to draw invalidity benefit. There is another reason. If we look at the figures of claims, we see that they begin to rise steeply after 1986. We should devote some of our time this evening to the question why that happened after 1986.

Again, I suggest that there is one simple reason for that: the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, thought that one could not win an election if unemployment totals were rising. One did not have to get it down to full employment to win; one had to get the total falling. Therefore, her Employment Minister, Lord Young, a Member of the other place, instructed his officials to persuade those people who were drawing unemployment benefit, or who were registered as unemployed and drawing the then means-tested support, wherever possible, to move over to invalidity benefit.

In our surgeries, those of us who were Members of Parliament at the time were puzzled at first why the Government appeared to be suggesting that people should make themselves better off by moving from a lower-paid benefit to a higher-paid benefit. Of course, it did not take us long to rumble what the reason was. It was part of the massaging of the unemployment figures. It was important in the run-up to the next general election to see the total fall.

Those are two of the main reasons for the escalation of expenditure on invalidity benefit. The Government have engaged in passive connivance with pensioners; they have also exercised passive discrimination, putting pressure on the unemployed to stop registering as unemployed and start claiming invalidity benefit. Then they have the audacity to say that they have a financial crisis on their hands: they tell us that the number of people claiming benefit should be cut, and that the cost of putting the books in order should be borne by many of our constituents—people who are already disadvantaged, and are least able to fend for themselves in today's world.

We must not allow the debate to continue without relating these changes to fundamental changes in the job market that have occurred, are occurring and will continue to occur. If we are favourably disposed to the Government's job creation record, we will exclude the first two years of Mrs. Thatcher's stewardship, and the current recession or slump. If we do that, the Government can say that the number of new jobs has increased considerably; but who secured those new jobs? They were secured, to an overwhelming extent, by women workers.

Men have been increasingly disfranchised in regard to the job market, finding it more and more difficult to get and keep jobs. According to the most recent figures published in the *Employment Gazette,* twice as many men as women lost jobs in the latest batch of redundancies. This year—probably for the first time in our history—there will be more women than men in work.

It could, of course, be said, in relation to the claiming of this benefit, that the Government have been helpful and thoughtful: that they have been anxious to soften the blows inflicted by a fundamental change in the job market, and to cushion the impact of the costs that the transition has imposed on male workers. The Government have worked themselves up into a panic over their mismanagement of the economy. Because of that, it will be largely the male workers who are disfranchised from benefit.

Let me give some examples of the way in which low-paid households, with males claiming invalidity benefit, will be affected by the Bill. Again, my hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden teased its consequences out of the Government. Many people who currently claim benefit will not be eligible for the new benefit; they will be unable to draw income support, because they will be unable to work. If another member of the household is working, that will disqualify them from claiming income support.

The financial savings, therefore, will be made at the cost of women workers who are managing to hold on to their jobs. They will not merely have to meet most of the bills, with their income supplemented by invalidity benefit; in future, they will have to meet the entire cost. That, too, will expose the vulnerability of males.

Already, under the present Government, one in five prime-age males is unemployed. Giving the Bill a Second Reading will add to that total, as well as depriving those males of any benefit. While making these savings, we should ask what people from whom we take benefit are to do. In a previous Parliament, the House confidently took benefit from 16 to 17-year-olds. We were told that their families would look after them—as families do, of course, if they can. But what do families do if they are on their uppers, and a benefit package is taken away when there is already not enough money to go round?

We do not have to be clever to answer that question. We are confronted with the answer every night when we leave the House after a Division to go back to our safe beds: we see people sleeping in doorways. That is one of the consequences of taking benefit away from people when there are no jobs.

What disturbs me so much about the Bill is the fact that the Government, sitting in their watertight compartment, have decided to ignore what is happening in the job market. More and more males are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain and hold down jobs. What will the Bill do to them and their families?

I shall not make easy points about the "back to basics" approach, because I am a heretic in regard to that issue —among others. I think that it involves an important theme: the way in which we can support families and enable them to do a good job, and how we can minimise the pressures on them at a time of massive economic changes not only in this country, but throughout the world.

Every hon. Member who holds surgeries knows of the near-violent tension in unemployed males who are desperate to receive invalidity benefit so that their wives can continue to work, or who face the prospect of losing it. The Bill will massively increase the pressure—violent pressure; breaking-up pressure—in many low-income families. For that reason, if for no other, I hope that the House will reject it.

This is a financial crisis of the Government's own making, but the way in which they are disengaging themselves places the burden not on the broader shoulders, but on some of the narrowest. They will completely disfranchise some male claimants from benefit. We have already seen the consequences of denying young people benefit when no jobs are available. If the Bill had contained provisions designed to return prime-age males to work, it would have been received sympathetically. However, because the Government have failed to link it with employment measures to protect the most vulnerable group, I hope that the House will throw it out.

6.27 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): Stumbling into the debate this afternoon, I felt that I was part of a particularly close-knit fraternity—a group of people who had pondered social security issues for many years. Such people—for instance, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—are able to make the kind of speech that can be made only with the confidence that results from having dealt with such issues of a long time. Another example is my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who—on the other side of the House—has taken up a cause long espoused by my predecessor, Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: the cause of the poorest and most disadvantaged in the land. That demonstrated that it takes time to become expert on such matters, and that he is fast on his way to becoming so.

I am here partly to learn about some of the issues, and partly with a view to continuing in the same vein if I am selected to serve on the Standing Committee.

The Secretary of State should be congratulated on highlighting this issue. The reform of the welfare system will be as important and painful a task in the years to come as it was over the years in the 1950s and 1960s, when hon. Members on both sides of the House built it up with Beveridge as their guide. There is no doubt that the system will need reform, and that reform will be the leitmotiv of politics over the next decade.

Because it prompts so many emotions, the difficult issue of invalidity benefit is a good basis on which to consider how society is to retreat from a welfare system that we

[Mr. Dudley Fishburn]

know we shall not be able to afford in the years ahead as the population grows older and as those in work become fewer relative to that population.

I feel comfortable with the fact that the Bill is the first step in a reform of the welfare system because of the Government's extraordinarily good record in recent years in dealing with those who are invalids or who are incapacitated. Their record bears all the hallmarks of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State who, perhaps more than any Minister, has systematically introduced measures to protect those people.

For example, 2 million people now receive help for care and mobility, five times more than in 1979. Total spending on invalidity benefit and other benefits for invalids has increased by almost £10 billion in real terms since 1979. Care has become such an important element in the new understanding of how we can help invalids and, as a result, the invalid care allowance has gone from nothing a few years ago to about £360 million. In other less dry and less statistical terms, the Government have a good, sensitive and decent record in helping the very people for whom we are this evening once again, although in slightly different terms, trying to redress the balance by helping those most in need and pulling away from those who are less so.

Members of the Government Front Bench have heard criticisms of the Bill from Conservative Members and, most tellingly, from the hon. Member for Birkenhead, but I hope that they will take succour from the Government's impeccable record in dealing with those who are incapacitated.

Why have we, as a party, and why have the Government, made such an effort? First, the Government have recognised that it is the Government's duty to help those who are unable to work, a duty that Beveridge and the movement that followed him recognised later than some other reforms. Secondly, the Government have recognised the extra costs, needs and standards of care which have encouraged the caring industry that has come to the forefront in the past few years.

Finally, and most important, we have recognised that in a society in which there is ever more free enterprise and in which, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead said, there is an ever freer labour force, more women workers and more part-timers, we have a greater responsibility to those who are left out and who cannot take advantage of the opportunities which, as the hon. Gentleman said with great force, put great strains on the family because they make it less easy for the man to find work while making it more possible for the woman to do so. The greatest strains are on those unable to find work at all because they are incapacitated.

The Bill contains much that is to be welcomed. Attention has already been drawn to the 16 hours of work that people can do for voluntary organisations without losing invalidity benefit. Clauses 6 and 7 go a long way to making the system of payments more efficient and targeted more on those whom we seek to assist. We have heard how 850,000 people will not have to undergo tests and they are, of course, the very people who most need reassurance. I was therefore pleased to hear a categoric reassurance. It is also good news—I think that all hon. Members will recognise it as such—that invalidity benefit will be brought into the tax net. All other benefits have gone the same way and invalidity benefit was an outsider in that respect.

For the past 15 years, I have been a trustee of the Open university, which has done a great deal—perhaps more than any other institution of learning—to help people left at home either because they are permanently incapacitated or because they are ill for a short time and want to use that period of adversity to upgrade their skills, so that, when they re-enter the labour market, they can do so at a higher level and find a better job. I was pleased to hear the reassurance that those who embark on higher and further education will not have their benefits cut and will therefore not be discouraged in any way.

In the years ahead, as all parties come to grips with what we need to do to reform the welfare state so that we are able to help those most in difficulty, we shall return time and again to the central fact that we shall need less welfare if we can educate people more. Higher standards of education will mean that more people can find and create jobs and the burden on the state will be less so that we can redirect welfare to those who need it most.

Today's debate is part of a larger debate that will continue as long as most of us are in Parliament. It is also taking place in every western European country. As we have all become aware, regardless of party, it is not possible for our welfare systems and public expenditure to continue unaltered. In most European countries, they now account for about 50 per cent. of gross national product. If that were to continue, the next generation would lynch us and refuse to pay the bill.

6.36 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): We have tonight heard the Conservative party speaking with a voice similar to that of Disraeli, whom the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) mentioned. Even the Secretary of State spoke in rather gentler terms than we are used to hearing from him, especially in view of the Nuremberg-style rallies that the Conservatives hold every year and at which he produced his little list.

Perhaps the threat of crucifixion, real or imaginary, concentrates the mind, but the authentic voice of Toryism —the backroom, saloon-bar voice that we have frequently heard in the Chamber—is very much the inspiration behind the Bill. There is no doubt that the views of those who believe that we must crack down on scroungers and that the welfare state is being looted on a large scale were, in large measure, the inspiration for it.

In a revealing intervention of which I made a note, the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) asked:

> "Is my right hon. Friend aware that the man who waved the flag at the grand national was on invalidity benefit?"

It is worth underlining the fact that last year's grand national was not our greatest or most successful sporting occasion. Was the hon. Gentleman saying that the man who started the race should be fully employed, should start all the races or should quietly stay at home with a towel wrapped around his head and exist on invalidity benefit? I am baffled and do not understand the hon. Gentleman's point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) correctly identified the two main reasons for the increase in the number of claims for invalidity benefit. The first that he mentioned was the Government's desire to ensure that people were taken off the unemployment register in the pre-election period. The second was the advantage that people see in staying on invalidity benefit rather than drawing a retirement pension. There is, however, another reason.

If people question those reasons, as they well might, and if they do not believe that Government policy is skewed in a pre-election period, they need only consider what happened with the disability living allowance and the disability working allowance before the previous election. They were both ludicrously over-advertised, to the extent that 90 per cent. of the claimants of one of them had to be turned down because they were misled by the Government into believing that the claim applied to them.

That advertising was done a matter of weeks before the last general election, as a feel-good campaign by the Conservative Government, to give the impression that they would care for the disabled. It was a massive, expensive deception, the bill for which should have been paid by Conservative central office.

Invalidity benefit claims have increased especially sharply in Wales. One of the reasons—as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) recognises, because it is an area in which he has been much engaged throughout his parliamentary career—is that the people who claim invalidity benefit now are people in the 50 to 60 age group who, during the bulk of their working lives, worked in industry that was very much deregulated. We are returning to it now. It is another fashionable crusade on which the Government are embarking but which has its dangers.

At the time when industry was so deregulated, many people who worked in the quarrying industry in north Wales or the mining industries of south Wales were exposed to dust and suffered from silicosis and pneumoconiosis, and also had their bodies exposed to risks that we would all find intolerable now. In the steel industries, men worked in front of baths of boiling sulphuric acid while the steel was being pickled, without wearing any type of mask. People were deafened by the noise of machinery. There is a famous poem by Gwenallt, who spoke in the Welsh language, about his father coughing up his life-blood into a bucket in the kitchen—a graphic account of what happened to that generation of people who worked until literally they dropped.

That generation, especially in south Wales, is responsible for that increase in claims for invalidity benefit. Those people, now in their fifties and sixties, of which there is a greater concentration throughout Wales and in the industrial area of Wales than probably anywhere else working in those unhealthy industries, leave their work prematurely. The old compassionate practice was for them to go on to a light job; to continue in their occupations but to do something in which there was not much demand for physical effort, where they could carry on semi-invalided. In these hard days, that is no longer possible. They go on to sickness benefit and eventually on to invalidity benefit, which is absolutely just and right.

The explanation which was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), and that which I have just given, show why the increase has taken place. There has been no analysis by the Government that suggests that there is any other reason for it. It is nonsense that we can contemplate such a major piece of legislation without possessing firm evidence. The Government are motivated by anecdotal evidence only.

There is one aspect about which I have attempted to question the Government, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). We asked the Government to name the 80 experts who will convene to consider the detail of the proposed medical test for incapacity benefit. It is crucial that all the organisations that wish to contribute to the discussion—we have been told that the Government's mind has not been entirely made up—know who those people are so that we, as Members of Parliament or outside organisations, can make a contribution.

Today the Secretary of State mentioned one organisation that I do not think many of us had heard of. He quoted selectively from a letter. We know, however, that the mass of organisations for people with disabilities very much oppose the Bill and are highly critical of it.

Instead of giving us the names of the panel members, the Government have said that the members have asked them to respect confidentiality until the exercise is completed. They intend to publish a report containing the names of the members of the panel, the summary of its work and findings and the results of the exercise, after the event. Why on earth should that be, and why should they reject the two parliamentary questions that have been tabled on that basis? It is crucial that the information is communicated to those people.

The only possible reason that I can think of why the membership of the panel should be treated as confidential is that members are ashamed of what they are doing and do not want to be named. Perhaps the Minister can tell us at the end of the debate why that star chamber is meeting in secret to make those decisions and we will not know who the "guilty people" are until they have made their decisions. It seems an extraordinary situation.

The Secretary of State looked a little puzzled at the amusement on the Opposition Benches when he mentioned certain categories of people who will be exempt. One of the categories that he mentioned was that of people in a permanent vegetative state. It is not much of a concession to say that someone who is in that state will not be asked to take a job down the nearest coal pit. That is our brave new world.

Are the Government really saying that Opposition Members should receive that news with great gratitude—that the nation will be told that people who are permanently, hopelessly incapacitated should not be pressurised into doing an extra job?

The Bill fails because the test that the Government are applying is not a test of incapacity for work—that would be the sensible course for them to take—but one of disability. It should be a test of incapacity. If the test is adopted, the result will inevitably be that many people who are incapable of work will be refused benefit because they are not disabled enough and presumably others who are capable of work will receive incapacity benefit because they pass the disability test.

It is an irrational basis for a major piece of legislation, but we all know what it is about. It is about the Government again saying—the hon. Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) seems to have swallowed the myth entirely—that we cannot afford our welfare state, which we have afforded for many, many years. We afforded it in the 1940s and the 1950s when we were a very poor nation relative to our wealth now and relative to many other countries in the world. At that time we could afford a welfare state that was regarded generally as adequate. The Government are also saying that in 40 years' time

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

—when we shall be infinitely richer, by all forecasts, than we are now—we shall not be able to afford an adequate welfare state.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who never takes part in these debates but writes well about them, would disagree with that analysis. The Government have exaggerated the demographic trends because it suits their case and they have also exaggerated the burden that the welfare state is and is likely to be.

The Bill, as so much of the Government's legislation at the moment, is designed to shift spending from the people who are in greatest need. They will make a case for it. Virtually every organisation representing people with disabilities has objected to the measure. It will mean a massive cut in the incomes of those people whose income is already very low. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead has said that many of the people who now receive the present invalidity benefit will not qualify, and we have had the figure—95,000 in the first year, 195,000 in the next year. We know that virtually none of those people will qualify for the current unemployment benefit. We know that very few of them will qualify for income support if someone in their family works, so there will be a massive cut in the income of the great army of people who are already on low incomes.

I will finish with a final argument. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead spoke about the people we see on our streets now. The fastest growing industry in Britain is drug trafficking. We know that the great attraction for young people, young or old, is not to take a job on dirt pay that they may get in McDonald's Hamburgers Ltd. or to take some other low-paid job where they work for pennies above the level of income support, but to recruit themselves into Britain's fastest growing industry where they can make huge moneys in the area of criminality: the business of trafficking drugs.

The financial inducement of that industry will recieve its greatest boost from the Government's attempt to drive people into deeper poverty. The entire message of the Bill is an attempt by the Government to soak the sick.

6.49 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): In the health debate in the past week, we heard how sensitive Opposition Members are to any proposals to reform the welfare state. Today, to adopt the phrase used by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, "there is evidence that the Opposition are in repose". I have not the slightest doubt that, in due course, he shall have to endure ritual protest alleging that he has betrayed the memory and the ethos of Beveridge.

What did Beveridge actually say? In establishing the concept of a safety net, he made it clear that the role of the state should be limited. He said:

> "The state, in organising security, should not stifle incentive, opportunity and responsibility. In establishing a national minimum, it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than a minimum for himself and his family . . . The danger of providing benefits, which are both adequate in amount and indefinite in duration, is that men, as creations who adapt to circumstances, may settle down to them".

In other words, the risk of people becoming dependent on welfare and flouting the original and worthy intentions of the legislation was recognised. The result would be, first, a disincentive to work and secondly, his outlook on life would be damaging to the individual, his family and, also importantly, expensive to the taxpayer. It is precisely that problem which has arisen in relation to sickness benefits in the social security system.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has clearly re-read the Beveridge report recently. Would he remind the House what Beveridge said about the giant idleness, by which he meant unemployment, and what Beveridge said about the need for Government to maintain full employment?

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I welcome that intervention from my near namesake. We can all quote selectively from Beveridge and I am trying not to do so. Even the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the concept of full employment is a worthy objective, which parties on both sides of the House, whenever in government, have failed to fulfil, yet I believe that it is still a worthy aim.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his courage in tackling what is bound to be an emotive issue. It cannot be right that the number of people who receive invalidity benefit has trebled over the past 15 years, which implies that almost 1·5 million people are unable to work when the health of the nation has been improving steadily. On the other hand, as the prosperity of the country improves, provision for those truly in need should be all the better, which partially covers the intervention of the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West.

The present system is bureaucractic, arbitrary and expensive. The transition from stautotory sick pay and sickness benefit to invalidity benefit is wholly unsatisfactory. Problems occur because while statutory sick pay is taxed, invalidity benefit is free of tax. More importantly, while invalidity benefit is free of tax, unemployment benefit is taxed. It is these distortions which are clearly the major factors causing invalidity benefit to rise from £2 billion a year in 1979 to over £6 billion a year today. Some estimates are as high as £8 billion.

The so-called gatekeeper to invalidity benefit is the general practitioner who is asked to issue a certificate. All hon. Members have heard representations about the invidious position in which the GP has found himself. Any doctor, acting on the best motives and knowing something of the personal, domestic and financial circumstances of his patient would find it difficult to deny him or her access to a higher system of benefits. Thus, the number of people on invalidity benefit has risen inexorably.

That unsatisfactory state of affairs is compounded by other anomalies. For example, invalidity benefit, which is more generous than the state pension, may be received for five years after pension age. What an extraordinary state of affairs. Also, periods of receipt may be linked to include periods of unemployment during which claimants were not incapacitated. Perhaps most telling of all is the fact that, once people are on invalidity benefit, an infinitesimal number come off it. It has become a one-way track. That system flies in the face of common sense and the whole operation must be re-examined to ensure that only those who are genuinely disabled and those who are chronically ill qualify.

Speaking as a physician myself, I have the greatest sympathy for GPs who are put in a near impossible situation.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I misunderstood the Minister. I thought that he said that 100,000 people a year came off invalidity benefit. Perhaps he would wish to confirm that.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister nodded, so when the hon. Gentleman said that it was one-way traffic, clearly, he did not get the record right. The Minister disagreed with him.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I accept that intervention. I did not have the exact statistics to hand. I accept that there is now a three-way communication and look forward to my right hon. Friend the Minister's elucidation. I correct myself on saying that it had become a one-way track. It has become a tendency.

I have the greatest sympathy for GPs performing the difficult task which the regulations have imposed on them. How can they dispute a claim for invalidity benefit without impairing the doctor-patient relationship? Why should they confront their patients over a dubious claim, when they often have neither the time nor the training to assess people's fitness for work? For example, a large proportion of claims are based on musculo-skeletal disorders, two thirds of which are associated with back pain, which is notoriously difficult to assess.

It was thus with great interest that I heard from my right hon. Friend that the National Back Pain Association has made representations, which I am sure will be taken extremely seriously. The British Medical Association—here I part company with my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth)—says that GPs do not want to be cast in the role of policemen, making judgments which may be based as much on social factors as on medical factors.

I welcome the proposed incapacity benefit, which while consolidating and simplifying the system, also introduces the medical incapacity test; an objective, medical yardstick. It involves the claimant, the claimant's GP and the Benefits Agency medical services. A simple questionnaire will be sent out before the end of 28 weeks, at least I hope that it will be simple.

The general practitioner merely has to confirm the diagnosis and, after scrutiny by an adjudication officer on purely medical grounds, I understand that about 85 per cent. of cases will be referred to the Benefits Agency medical services, which has discretion over which claimants shall be examined. It is just as important that the case must be reviewed at intervals thereafter, to check that there has been no change in the medical condition.

Let me give an example. We heard today about a patient suffering from angina. I do not know the circumstances of that particular case, although they sounded rather doubtful and perhaps worthy of re-examination. Clearly, a patient suffering from angina who subsequently has surgical treatment—a coronary artery by-pass—may well be fit to resume a normal way of life. *[Interruption.]* I hear a bit of jocular comment from the Opposition Front Bench. I happen to be a practising physician who deals with such problems daily. I have numerous patients who have gone back to an entirely normal way of life after the appropriate surgery.

Mr. Dewar: There is no dispute about the efficacy of by-pass surgery. If someone has surgery and his or her physical condition changes, that should clearly be taken into account at a review. My objection is that the Government were contemplating with satisfaction a state of affairs in which the person, before by-pass surgery—with all the disadvantages of constricted arteries and the pain that the condition brought—should not be on invalidity benefit.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I have already said that I should like to know more about the case. The hon. Gentleman has missed my point, which was that, before the introduction of the proposals, the patient who had had surgery did not automatically come back to be reassessed and could have stayed on invalidity benefit indefinitely and with no form of monitoring. The Bill is in part designed to remedy that situation.

I am sure that those on the Opposition Front Bench will welcome the exemptions that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has granted. Those near pensionable age, those with terminal illnesses and those in receipt of disability living allowance will be exempt from the tests proposed. Above all, those genuinely unable to work need have no fear about reassessment under the new scheme because hon. Members on both sides of the House will be monitoring their effectiveness in practice.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman said that, in the case to which he referred, the claimant would not be subject to review. Did he not hear the Minister refer in his opening speech to the fact that 300,000 cases annually were being reviewed, including cases of that nature?

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: The hon. Gentleman exhibits the phenomenon of the perfect being the enemy of the good. The ethos behind the Bill is to make absolutely certain that a mechanism exists and can be stringently applied to ensure that the system works properly.

I welcome the concession enabling those on benefit to continue to do voluntary such work. Many hon. Members have espoused the concept of active citizenship. We have not heard much about that recently and I hope that the Government will again pick up that theme. The concession is certainly an example of their encouragement of voluntary work. I welcome, too, the undertaking that groups representing the disabled will be involved in advising on the setting of medical standards.

The principle is undoubtedly right. The exact mechanism should be examined in Committee. We must be wary of having too many tiers of decision making and excessive bureaucracy. If 85 per cent. of cases examined by the adjudication officer are, indeed, to go to the Benefits Agency medical service, there will be a large element of double handling.

I ask my right hon. Friend to consider whether the Benefits Agency medical service should not itself be the decision maker. Could we not cut out the role of the adjudication officer entirely? That may be a radical suggestion, but I invite my right hon. Friend to address it none the less. Whatever system we end up with must be backed up by an appropriate appeals procedure to protect aggrieved claimants.

On a more positive note, I believe that nothing but good can come out of market-testing the Benefits Agency. Does my right hon. Friend see any scope for the independent sector to become active in this area? I assume that there

[Dr. Goodson-Wickes]

would have to be an appropriate governing body to ensure the maintenance of comparable standards and some uniformity across the country.

When all the emotion is swept aside, we are left with a proper and overdue examination of the system, applied in a practical and humane way. Sadly, the abuses predicted by Beveridge have come about. They cause resentment to the beleaguered taxpayer and further deprive the most vulnerable in society. The balance must be restored. I am confident that my right hon. Friend will tackle the unfairness, protect those needing benefits and show a fair and feasible way forward.

7.4 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I must say that I should have more confidence in the Bill if it did not come from this stable and at this time. We have heard so many attacks on scroungers and so much about the need to roll back the state in recent months that attempts to dress the Bill up as legislation designed to allow us more effectively to target disabled people leave me highly sceptical.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes). He said that only genuinely disabled and chronically sick people should be entitled to invalidity benefit. I put it to him that there are many grey areas—that many people who would not be defined as chronically sick according to the definition in the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 should, none the less, certainly be entitled to invalidity benefit and would qualify even under the new definitions that are to be applied.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I do not dispute that for a moment. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would accept, however, that the necessary flexibility has been built into the Bill to cover those in categories that he describes as grey areas and to ensure that those who need benefits are given them.

Mr. Wigley: I shall be coming to that point. I do not believe that there is adequate flexibility, as I said in an intervention in the speech of the Secretary of State. The hon. Member for Wimbledon has experience as a doctor. I can well understand the difficulty facing general practitioners, especially given that they must maintain their relationship with their patients. But if a GP is not in a position—either directly or through his or her access to specialists—to make a judgment on the validity or otherwise of an application, who on earth is?

The danger is that the necessary flexibility will not be there and that we shall be unable to look at the needs of the individual in the light of all his or her circumstances—circumstances that are often not known to those on faceless boards and panels who make decisions.

Hon. Members have sought to imply that it is a redeeming factor of the Bill that terminally ill people will not be subject to review. I do not suppose that they will; that is part of the tragedy. If such cases have to be invoked as a justification for the rationale behind a Bill, that Bill needs to be looked at very carefully indeed.

I oppose what I believe to be a dishonest Bill. I do not believe that it is a Bill intended to target the existing cash resources of £6·1 billion on those who need it. I might have some sympathy with the Bill if, rather than clawing back money for the Treasury or other Departments, it retained that same sum within the broad ambit of the needs of disabled people who have been claiming invalidity benefit—either giving more money to the limited number of beneficiaries or replacing wrongful beneficiaries, as the Government see it, with the numerous people who should undoubtedly be receiving benefit but are missing out for a variety of reasons, including ignorance and lack of advice. In reality, however, the Bill is aimed at cutting expenditure by £1·5 billion, not at re-targeting that cash among the group from which it is being taken away.

I do not accept the logic of taxing invalidity benefit—certainly not in its entirety. Part of the benefit has been regarded as intended to cover needs over and above the basic necessities of a person or a family; it has gone to meet exceptional requirements arising out of the circumstances of a person's invalidity. That part of the benefit should most certainly not be taxed any more than should specific disability provisions—which, indeed, they are not.

The Bill acknowledges—and the Secretary of State acknowledged—that 195,000 people who fail to get work after losing their invalidity benefit will depend on income support or unemployment benefit if they are entitled to it. The cost will be £265 million—about £30 per person per week. That is an indication of what those people will lose.

In fact, a Government document that was issued to the press last June indicated that the estimated average cost of failing the incapacity test was £87 a week and that, in some circumstances, the loss could be as high as £160 a week. The people concerned will at the very least have found themselves in circumstances which justified the payment and which, it could be argued, justify its continuation.

There will be real difficulties. Many people will not qualify for income support. For example, a disabled man whose wife does some cleaning or cooking in the local school and makes a pittance in an effort to sustain her family will no doubt lose entitlement to full income support. Modest savings, too, will debar people.

Is this what the Government mean when they talk about targeting resources towards those in need? It strikes me that we have here a pretty venomous piece of legislation whose intention is to take money from one of the many groups of have-nots of society—people who are in no position to do much to help themselves.

The Secretary of State has laid great emphasis on people whose condition may render them fit for work and who should therefore be seeking work. The right hon. Gentleman defined medical and disablement conditions that would make a person unfit and would automatically entitle him to the new incapacity benefit. I think he said that the number of people in this category was 850,000.

One is glad that those people are provided with a safeguard, so far as it goes, but 700,000 are left out. Although existing benefits may be safeguarded to some extent, such people will fail to receive help, and about 750,000 will be open to being tested and will run the risk of not succeeding. It remains to be seen how the figures will work out in practice.

When the Secretary of State talked about people being fit for work; he did not define "work". The guidelines that the Government have given to benefit offices in recent months suggest that there is already a move towards tightening the interpretation of invalidity. The National

Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has drawn our attention to reports from its local offices. Let me mention some of the examples that it has given.

Disabled people have been told that, if they are fit to sit as artists' models, they are fit to work. Are we really going down that ludicrous road? It may be technically true that a person who is acting as an artist's model should be paid. If that is the definition, and if people are to be refused benefit on such a basis, as is already beginning to happen under the existing system—the danger is that the regulations will be even tighter under the new system, since the whole objective is to cut back—the Government must be taken to task.

It is totally demeaning for disabled people to be addressed in this way. In addition, there simply are not enough jobs as artists' models. It may be that a person could sit in a chair for a couple of hours, but if no job is available he should not lose benefit on that ground.

NACAB reports that pressure has been put on Benefits Agency doctors. I quote from a recent document:

> "Recent CAB advice indicates that, despite the test for invalidity benefit remaining unchanged, regional medical officers are taking a much tougher line on capacity to work, and invalidity benefit is being inappropriately withdrawn from some people who are disabled and incapable of work. Many CABs have reported their concern that Benefits Agency doctors appear to be responding to administrative pressures and declaring more people fit for work."

That is based on the experience of a cross-section of CAB offices the length and breadth of these islands.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Surely the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that the "artist's model" test is being applied generally. I imagine that if it were, there would be no one at all drawing invalidity benefit.

Mr. Wigley: In the context in which I am bringing these reports to the attention of the House, the question is whether modelling for an artist, as well as other occupations to which I shall come in a moment, is a job that the benefit assessors are being told to regard as suitable for disabled people. There is evidence from more than one CAB that this is what has been suggested. The hint is that such guidelines have gone out.

If that is the road that we are taking under the existing rules, and given that the whole intention is to tighten up with regard to the definition of disability, I have some misgivings, as no doubt does the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen). I am sure that if this is the Government's intention the hon. Gentleman will be unhappy. Indeed, he indicates assent.

I should like to refer to several more CAB examples. A bureau in Wiltshire reports on a client who has been off work for three years as a result of chronic back problems and has been claiming invalidity benefit. That person has been told by the Benefits Agency that he should be a van loader.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: How could he do that?

Mr. Wigley: Well, he could not do it. However, his refusal would be deemed to be unwarranted. This underlines the crisis that will be faced by some of the most vulnerable people in society.

A citizens advice bureau in Humberside reports on a client appealing against disallowance of invalidity benefit. The client's GP wrote:

> "Any interference leading the client to accept any form of occupation may even lead to his death."

If that is the degree of sensitivity among those addressing this question, people deemed to be unfit for work will be forced to take jobs and could die as a consequence. As they go down the path that they are starting to tread, the Government will have to face up to this problem.

A CAB in Yorkshire, reporting on a client who suffers from severe depression and has had two nervous breakdowns, says:

> "His doctor maintains he cannot work and he is covered by a medical certificate until next January. The DSS has decided he is capable of doing some form of work and has stopped his benefit accordingly."

In other words, Big Brother knows best. It is the disabled person who suffers.

A CAB in Wales reports on two cases in which general practitioners admitted that they felt that they had little alternative to signing clients off the sick, despite their own opinions, in the light of the decisions of the regional medical officer.

All these cases highlight the problems that are being faced at present. If such situations are arising now, what on earth will happen when the new legislation is enacted?

We have seen in recent months the emergence of a consistent pattern in the jobs being suggested for the recipients of invalidity benefit. I was about to refer to some others when the hon. Member for Shoreham intervened a few moments ago.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The cases to which the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) refers ought to be commented on specifically in the Minister's winding-up speech. I am not suggesting that individuals should be named, but if modelling for an artist is regarded as an acceptable occupation in this context, the Minister ought to address the matter at the Dispatch Box. We are entitled to hear his view on the proposition. All the cases to which the hon. Member for Caernarfon has referred are of great interest. I should like to hear what the Minister has to say about them.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. We need such a response. We need to know whether the Department has issued guidance with regard to cases such as those that I have mentioned.

Let me refer to the other occupations that have been reported to more than one citizens advice bureau. We are seeing the emergence of a pattern which suggests that local authorities have been provided with guidance generally.

It has been suggested that a disabled person could become an embalmer. If a disabled person could find a job as an embalmer, he would be considered fit for work. Other suggested jobs include swimming pool attendant, petrol pump attendant, van loader, radio telephone operator, repetitive assembler, checker and packer. Those suggested jobs appear to be part of a pattern of guidance issued by the Department under current legislation.

As the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) said, the Government should come clean and tell us whether guidance has been issued along those lines, describing the jobs to which I have referred. If that is the case, how on earth can the Government justify their position? If that is the basis on which they are building the background for the new legislation, my goodness, disabled and sick people have a lot to fear.

Mr. Dewar: I am listening with great interest to, and have much sympathy with, what the hon. Gentleman is

[Mr. Dewar]

saying. I do not mean to belittle what he has said, but perhaps he would like to address a more mainstream difficulty.

What happens to someone who has no special skill or training, who has been a manual worker all his life and who is told that he must come off invalidity benefit—and presumably may not qualify for incapacity benefit—because, theoretically, that person could get an office job which, at the age of 52, he has absolutely no chance of obtaining? That is where the really damaging moral dilemma arises and where the danger signals fly in respect of the Government's proposals.

Mr. Wigley: It seems that the hon. Members for Workington and for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) have read my mind. The hon. Member for Garscadden has referred to the category that I was just about to raise.

What happens if a labourer who has broken his back is deemed to be fit to work as a computer programmer although he does not have the skills to perform that job and cannot reasonably be expected to have those skills? What happens if a teacher has had a nervous breakdown and cannot face a class of children? What happens if a person is told that he is fit to be a labourer, even if he is 50 years old and may never have worked as a labourer? Are those the questions that we will have to face as a result of the redefinition in the Bill?

We have often heard of people being told by tribunals that they are fit for light work and, in that respect, I refer to a point raised by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). A former slate quarryman in my constituency has a chest infection as a result of dust diseases—but, as we hear on so many occasions, "only a little dust, not amounting to pneumoconiosis". However, he is incapacitated in the same way that coal miners are incapacitated. Such people may be told that they are fit for light work, but what if there is no light work available? Are they expected to perform heavier work which may endanger their health?

A CAB in Berkshire stated:

> "Many clients we see suffer from fatigue or exhaustion on the slightest effort and although they may be physically able to carry out the tests would suffer a severe deterioration in their health as a result."

Is it to be an acceptable definition of "fit for work" that someone can actually do the work, although the consequences may not be acceptable?

To what extent is the question of the type of work available in an area relevant? That is not a medical consideration and, given the way that we are going, it will not be taken into account. There may be no work available, but a disabled person may be capable of undertaking work which might possibly be available in a handful of instances somewhere scattered around these islands. If he or she does not try for that work, that person is deemed not to be seriously going after work. Is that the road that we are going down?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is not the critical issue the fact that, once that decision has been taken, within months that person will be drawing social security benefit and, therefore, his assets will be taken into account? That might lead to the depletion of someone's assets when that person is deemed fit for work, although he could not work anyway.

Mr. Wigley: Inevitably, if such a person had assets over and above the threshold for income support, they would be eroded until they came down to that threshold. Many people have worked hard in difficult industries and, by their fifties, have saved a certain amount of money. People are proud and want to look after themselves in their old age. They will lose their money in the way that the hon. Member for Workington has described.

To what extent are the general capabilities of an applicant before he or she became sick or disabled to be considered relevant? In other words, what consideration will be given to an applicant's ability to work as a computer programmer or labourer if that person's background is completely different?

If such factors are not taken into account, we will have a right pig's ear of a situation and there will be many cases infinitely more harrowing than those I have quoted from citizens advice bureaux. There are also problems in rural areas involving difficulties in travelling great distances to work and the costs involved. There are also problems in areas of high unemployment, such as the old industrial areas and the valleys of south Wales and other coal-mining areas. In those areas, there are high levels of unemployment and also a high level of invalidity benefit claimants.

In the context of the definitions about which I was asking a moment ago, it is worth considering the way in which case law has developed over the years. In order to deliver some kind of justice, case law has found it necessary to ensure that there is a more flexible definition of incapacity for work. In 1951, a tribunal of commissioners explained:

> "a person is incapable of work within the meaning of the National Insurance Act 1946 . . . if, having regard to his age, education, experience, state of health and other personal factors, there is no type of work which he can reasonably be expected to do."

That kind of definition is broad enough to assuage our worries. It is the kind of definition that is being cut out as a result of the Bill. That is an extremely worrying development.

Another difficulty facing a disabled or sick person when trying to obtain a job arises from the danger of the possibility of recurring sickness being in the employer's mind when considering whether to employ that sick or disabled person. Such an employer might steer clear of someone who has a history of sickness, because of the danger of absenteeism. We are all aware of the prejudice that often exists against a person who has suffered disability.

The Bill underlines even more the need for anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people. When the private Member's Bill is introduced in March, I hope that the Government will give it their wholehearted support, because many disabled people will need the provisions of that Bill when they have to face up to the implications of this Bill.

The Government's assessment of the potential for work for disabled people has been shown to be woefully inadequate by the experience of the disability working allowance. In 1990, the Government thought that 50,000 people might be entitled to claim DWA. Just before Christmas, it was revealed that the number of people claiming that benefit was 3,178. I fear that the Government's assessment in relation to the Bill will be just as misleading and erroneous.

In conclusion, I can do no better than to draw to the attention of the House the words of Ann Robinson, the chief executive of the Spastics Society:

> "The Government claims to be scrapping Invalidity Benefit on the basis that many people who can work are claiming it, but we've yet to see any evidence of this. This legislation is about reducing public expenditure, not ensuring the right benefits reach the right people. Once again, disabled people seem to be getting a rough deal as a result of Government cost-cutting. This new benefit will not meet the needs of disabled people who cannot work."

7.27 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): The Bill is extremely important and we must abide by two guiding principles. First, we must have a realistic appraisal of the level of invalidity. It is inconceivable that, with the improvement in the health of the nation over the past 15 years and before, we have seen such an increase in the number of people qualifying for invalidity benefit.

There have been massive health improvements. Many hon. Members have referred to angina. When I think of the improvements over recent years in coronary artery bypass grafts, in angioplasty, in the introduction of long-acting nitrates and in the benefits that they have had in terms of reduced morbidity, if not improved life expectancy, for patients, I find it inconceivable that a large number of such people should be entering the invalidity category. That is simply not credible.

Likewise, the improved control and management of diabetics at hospital and general practice levels over recent years must have contributed to the much greater ability of diabetics to be able to continue working during their normal working lives.

Again, I find it rather difficult to accept that, as the Opposition would have it, the figures show that the population are becoming less healthy. An increased number of patients have been treated in hospital in recent years, and there has been increased productivity among GPs, especially in health promotion. All that has contributed to increased health of the nation, yet, paradoxically, more people are on invalidity benefit.

The second principle is that we must target benefits on those who need them. Opposition Members have said that that will mean that some people will not receive the benefits that they are receiving at present. That might be the case, but there is a strong case for honesty in our public policy. If that means that more people are seen to be on the unemployment register, for example, I will not flinch from that, but I do not want people to be given invalidity benefit, with all that that entails and implies, when they are not invalids. Giving somebody invalidity benefit undermines their sense of self-worth in many respects. Hon. Members have not taken account of that point.

As somebody who practised as a general practitioner before coming to the House in 1992, I know that GPs do not like the current system of invalidity certification. GPs and other doctors should not act as unpaid agents of the Department and Social Security. That is not what they were trained to do, and it is not a suitable role for people who have been trained to have a neutral and objective relationship with their patients.

Far from providing flexibility in dealing with certification, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) mentioned, doctors are not qualified to deal with many of those matters, as I shall show later, and their relationship with their patients has been undermined by a system which asks them to be judge and jury on state benefit. That is not what medical practitioners are trained to do, nor what they take their medical oaths for.

All GPs find difficulty with the complexity of the system. I am sure that all hon. Members would accept that. We have self-certification for a week, then we have F Med 3, which is issued after that, with the diagnosis causing incapacity for work, and a time limit put on that. For the first six months, doctors must decide whether the patient can do his normal job, after which they must decide whether the patient can do any sort of work.

That is an important practical point. We must consider what is actually involved in this job, that job and the other job. If one has spent one's life at university, at medical school, in hospital or in general practice, one has precious little knowledge of what many specific jobs require. It is much easier in the first six months to determine what the patient might require for his own job, because one can ask the patient what is involved, but it is difficult to determine whether the patient would be fit for work in one type of industry or another when one has no experience of it. As a GP, I found that decision difficult, if not impossible.

Off the case goes to the adjudication officer, who will decide whether one of the Benefits Agency doctors should see the patient. If it goes to the Benefits Agency doctor, he will decide whether the original doctor should give a statement. In fact, he may require the original doctor to give a statement about why the patient was put on benefit. That, plus other information, will decide whether the patient should be examined by the Benefits Agency medical service doctor at home or at the medical centre. When all that is done, the case goes back to the adjudication officer to decide whether the patient should be put on invalidity benefit.

That is a cumbersome process, which puts patients who are suffering from genuine invalidity under great pressure. It is an unsatisfactory system from the point of view of patients and general practitioners.

However, for a new system to work, several points must be fulfilled. There has to be a proper scientific assessment procedure. That must be very detailed and exact, and its field trials have to be very thorough before we can introduce it into the system. It must deal not with the nature but with the effect of pathology. There is a grave danger that we will introduce categories of illness and categorise patients by the nature of their illness rather than the effect that their illness has upon them. That can be deeply undermining for some patients.

For example, I refer to certain types of physical disability or blindness. Patients might be willing and able to carry out many types of work, but, if we introduced categories for those patients automatically to receive invalidity benefit, there would be a danger of reducing the self-worth that those patients feel. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take note of that point.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): As a person who learned to walk in plaster and was considered disabled for much of his childhood, I certainly take great issue with some Opposition Members who implied that, because a person is deemed disabled for one type of work, it does not mean that he is perfectly able to perform service to the community or service to his own family by taking a totally different job. The medical assessment should be only on the basis of his condition as

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it affects him at the time. That should not become a way of saying that such and such a disability or disease precludes him from work, full stop.

Dr. Fox: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. Although I readily agree, as with most things in life, there is a balance to be struck. We must not expect people to do more categories of work than they are able to do. That is why the specificity and sensitivity of the test will become extremely important.

Patients who suffer from diabetes can have a wide range of capability for work. For example, early-onset diabetics may be perfectly controlled, and late-onset diabetics increasingly have a longer life expectancy nowadays and will therefore have more complications, especially renal complications, which now cause the second largest bed occupancy in the national health service. We must be very sensitive with the tests and make sure that we do not exclude groups who should be on invalidity benefit; but, likewise, we should not go too far in the other direction.

When we bring in the tests, we must consider not only mechanical function—many Opposition Members tend to be obsessed with mechanical function—but cognitive function, which is extremely important. Although it is right to consider many categories, such as walking, standing, rising from sitting, manual dexterity and so on, it is extremely important to recognise the importance of cognitive function—learning difficulty, for example—and especially psychiatric morbidity.

It will be extremely difficult for my right hon. and hon. Friends to make sure that psychiatric morbidity is dealt with in a deeply sensitive way. It is always very difficult to assess, because of its fluctuating nature. Full credit to the Government for making sure that, at the very outset, that is one of the main categories that will be considered. In many debates on the subject, mental health issues have not been adequately addressed.

The test, however, must score not only individual specific limitations but combinations of limitations. Perhaps that is where the greatest difficulty of all will arise. Previous studies in other subjects have shown how difficult that will be. For example, the Oregon study was flawed because of the difficulty of taking comorbidity into account when dealing with health rationing. That will be a matter of some difficulty. We will require secondary regulations. I wish my right hon. and hon. Friends well in that matter.

Again I plead with my right hon. and hon. Friends to shy away a little from including specific disease entities as categories. We all know what our mailbags would be like. The more specific pathology groups that we include in such a Bill, the more we will encourage specific interest groups to try to have their particular pathology or disease entity included in legislation for automatic eligibility for benefit at a later stage. That is not a healthy attitude. As I have said, we must look at the effects of a disease upon patients and not at diseases themselves.

With all due respect to them, for far too long hospital doctors have regarded patients as pathology with a name. We must now regard patients as individuals. Of course, we GPs have regarded patients as such for a long time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hear my hon. Friends who have had the same experience. My files will be available to the Whips Office for a six-figure sum after the debate.

Under the new system, GPs will still issue certificates for the first 28 weeks. The hon. Member for Caernarfon mentioned that matter. It is right that GPs should continue to do that. First, in that 28-week period, the conditions are usually relatively minor, or ones of which the GPs have had full experience, or the patient is recuperating from surgery or so on. The GP is the best person. The GP will have more information than a hospital about how an illness is affecting the patient.

There is also the issue which I mentioned earlier—that of a patient's own job. Incapacity should mean physical or mental impairment, causing a medical incapacity for all, or almost all, work. I thank the Secretary of State for recognising that some groups will not require to be reassessed. That is an important principle.

The Opposition were, as ever, relatively small-minded in pointing out one or two cases to which my right hon. Friend referred during his speech. My right hon. Friend went through a large number of conditions which will not require to be reassessed. That is important if we are not to frighten patients about the change.

If there is one charge of which the Opposition are certainly guilty, it is that of frightening patients. The groups who will not be required to be reassessed include those who are near to pension age, those who are aged 58 and over on the day the new scheme is introduced, those who were receiving invalidity benefit on 1 December 1993 and those suffering from certain serious, specified, long-term or terminal conditions. Also included, as my right hon. Friend mentioned, are those receiving the highest rate care component of disabled living allowance.

It is right that we should remove the element of fear from the debate, and get back to the basic issues involved. It is right that others who are not included in those groups should be reassessed if the system is to be fair and just, not only to all those involved in the benefit system, but importantly to those who are contributing to keep the welfare system afloat—all this country's taxpayers.

I was a little confused by the opening speech from the Opposition today. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)—I am sorry that he is not in his place—said that he rejected the charge that the benefit was not being used to help those for whom it was intended. Does that mean that the hon. Gentleman believes that the trebling of the numbers receiving benefit does not include some people who could be working?

Were it not for the oath of confidentiality, I could give the hon. Gentleman a good number of cases of people who are receiving invalidity benefit but who could certainly be out working. Those people are getting through the system in a way which was not intended. There are a number of people on invalidity benefit who are quite clearly capable of a wide range of work. I am sure that all hon. Members know of such cases, and for the Opposition to pretend that it does not happen is quite ludicrous. Well might the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) smile—I know that he must know of a couple of such cases, too.

The Opposition have been small-minded and confusing. We heard that we would be driving youngsters into drug dealing, rather than taking jobs in McDonald's, because of the wicked legislation which we are bringing in. The Opposition have been cynical because, as with many pieces of recent legislation, they have tried to frighten those currently in the system.

The current system provides excess work for GPs. Colleagues whom I phoned this morning to see what was happening in their surgeries today say that up to 30 per cent. of patients had come for certification, and certification only. That not only demoralises GPs and provides unnecessary paperwork. It means that they have less time to spend with patients who are genuinely ill and who need to see them. We must welcome the deregulation for GPs, and were I still working, I would find it an extremely pleasant change that that was one burden that would be taken away.

Mr. Wigley: The hon. Gentleman expressed concern at a high level of certification applications which were taking up the time of GPs. Does he accept that, if hundreds of thousands of people who are in receipt of invalidity benefit come off that benefit, a large proportion will go to their GPs more often to get certification for the illness, as they will not be covered under invalidity benefit?

Dr. Fox: The objection of GPs is not simply to the amount of work that they have to do. They object to being the gatekeeper for the Department of Social Security and to carrying out duties for which they are not trained. A great burden will be removed from them, because their real problem is their difficulty in maintaining relationships with their patients.

There are huge pressures, and even threats, from patients who are demanding to be kept on invalidity benefit. Those pressures come not only from patients, but from patients' families and relatives, all of whom can put an intolerable burden on the GP. The GP feels that he must give in, although he knows that it is not the right thing to do because of its adverse effect, not only on the patient directly, but on other patients in his care. Surely that cannot be right, and we have to change the system for that reason.

GPs will tell us of a patient in his late forties who has a bit of back pain and who may be facing redundancy. The GP knows all the social pressures which exist, but it is not the place of the GP to determine what effect that will have on the DSS. A doctor's job is to make sure that the patient is getting the correct treatment and that, if the patient is eligible for genuine invalidity benefit, he gets it. The problem of the current system is that GPs are under duress to get a settlement for a patient which is financial and not medical.

The Bill at long last brings something to the House which will better target benefits, and will reduce the abuse which is relatively widespread in the system. There will be a diminished burden on doctors, which will give them more time to spend with patients who genuinely need their time. The Bill will remove from GPs the odious job of being gatekeeper for the DSS, and will give better value for money for the taxpayers. For all those reasons, I urge my hon. Friends to support the Bill.

7.47 pm

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): The background to the Bill has been well trailed over probably three years now. We have heard tonight many of the comments and clichés which we have heard many times from the Dispatch Box. For example, there is the talk of the trebling of the numbers receiving invalidity benefit at a time when the health of the nation is increasing. That, of course, has much to do with the use of preventive, rather than curative, medicine.

There is also a contradiction in the words of the Minister of State, who has said that we recently celebrated reaching a total of 1 million people who are receiving disabled living allowance, which presumably gives some evidence of incapacity. It is rather strange that self-certification is deemed to be a good thing for a benefit as significant as DLA in terms of providing a passport to other benefits, and yet this is not the case in terms of invalidity and sickness benefit.

The aim of the Bill is to reduce the invalidity benefit bill by whatever means possible. We have heard it said many times—usually at the time of a Budget—that it has always been the Government's intention to bring invalidity benefit into the tax net. There is something of an anomaly in the fact that statutory sick pay, which is payable at a much lower rate, is taxable but invalidity benefit is not. However, surely that is a separate issue from whether people qualify or not. It is significant that statutory sick pay is subject to national insurance, and we have not heard whether invalidity benefit will be subject to a national insurance charge also.

Against that backcloth, the Bill brings forward a principle. However, as usual with social security, the regulations are to follow. Too often the principle turns out to be far worse when the regulations are up and running and in effect. If people need reminding, they should read the debates on the Child Support Agency, which bore no relation to what came into being by way of the regulations.

There is a wide continuum between full and able capacity to work and total incapacity to work. Some Government Members recognised that by way of referring to the definition of grey areas. Within them, the Bill makes a tacit attempt to address that issue by talking about a period when one is unable to follow a normal occupation, and a period when one is unable to follow any occupation, but even that has its drawbacks and flaws.

Where, for instance, does one categorise somebody with a mental illness which is not severe enough to be classed as permanent? The illness may be such that, at different times of the day or week, the person can be absolutely incapable of work, whereas an hour later the situation may be different. Where does one place myalgic encephalomyelitis, an illness which is slowly getting recognition, although not at Richmond house? People suffering from ME can be severely incapacitated in the morning, feel better in the afternoon and be almost bedridden by the early evening.

Such cases cannot be dealt with adequately by the principle of a Bill such as this. I am afraid that, when we see the regulations, we will find that such circumstances will not have received full recognition or been given sufficient weight. In the not-too-distant future, Conservative Members will be protesting about how their individual constituents have been mistreated by the Bill that they seem to welcome so much.

In the continuum of work, there is a point at which people can be declared fit for some work. Let us examine the type of work that is suggested. I shall not repeat stories of officers who suggested work as an artist's model. That was a stupid one-off and I hope that the person has been suitably and permanently disciplined. Often people are told that two types of work are suitable for them. One is work as a swimming pool attendant and the other is work as a car park attendant. In the great and glorious private sector, National Car Parks may have attendants, but I know of no local authority car park that has attendants; such car parks

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are mechanised. The system is called pay and display. So that is one type of job that is not available, certainly in the public sector.

It is ludicrous to suggest that someone who has been disabled or sick for a considerable time should find work as a swimming pool attendant. Such work is a form of emergency service. Certain degrees of fitness and capability are required. Life-saving abilities are needed. Nevertheless, adjudication officers recommend such employment as suitable work.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): My hon. Friend is right in everything he says. Indeed, in Bradford at one stage the alternative job offered to people in this circumstance was work as a lift attendant. Such work was recommended for several years as an alternative job to justify not paying a person invalidity benefit, until it was pointed out that there was only one lift in the whole of Bradford in which an attendant was employed and that, as there was only one job and it was occupied, it was unlikely to be available.

Mr. Rooney: The days are long gone when we could wander into a lift and be escorted to the floor that we wanted.

The role of GPs has been championed a great deal tonight. Most illness and sickness lasts less than four weeks and certainly less than 28 weeks. Up to 28 weeks, it seems that it is all right for the GP to judge a person unfit for work. Suddenly, at 28 weeks, it becomes a major problem—a crisis of conscience, almost.

Dr. Liam Fox: The hon. Gentleman may have overlooked the fact that there is a significant difference in the position before and after the 28-week watershed. Before then, the doctor is asked to say whether the patient is fit for his own job. After 28 weeks he is asked to say whether the patient is fit for any work. That is much more difficult for a doctor to determine.

Mr. Rooney: I accept that the hon. Gentleman is a former GP, but he glosses over the point. I am not aware of any point at which GPs are informed that 28 weeks are up and from then on they must specify whether the person is unfit for any work.

It is a proper role for an adjudication officer to adjudicate on the capacity of the person to do work. That is what they are there to do. The GP will continue to fulfil that role—it has been called the role of the gatekeeper. They will still be expected to issue medical certificates stating the health of the individual concerned. The only difference will be the people will be subject much earlier and more often to medical examination by the Benefits Agency.

The Bill may be a wonderful job-creation wheeze. Certainly the regional medical officer service could not cope with the numbers who currently receive invalidity benefit. The Bill is a fundamental breach of the contributory insurance principle. It is not the first that we have seen, especially in recent weeks. According to that principle, the benefit is not targeted, but one pays a contributory insurance premium in return for specified and given benefits. Targeting means nothing less than means testing. If that is what the Government want, they should abolish national insurance, full stop. That was never the intention of the contributory insurance system.

There has been much maligning of the words of intent of Beveridge. It is a tragedy that, in this 50th anniversary year of Beveridge, his memory has been so polluted by the statements of Conservative Members. The issue is not the number of people who qualify for invalidity benefit each year; it is the method and the appropriateness of exit from the benefit.

Proper research, debate and discussion might find an avenue to deal with the issue. We have not had that proper research, debate or discussion. The Bill is a finance-led measure and a Treasury-driven initiative. The real damage will come later in the regulations. That is when Conservative Members will, as usual, start screaming and squealing about the implications. The Bill should be rejected tonight.

7.55 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): In Britain today we give more help to the sick and disabled than we have at any time in our history. That is fully consistent with the traditions of the Conservative party established by Disraeli and even before. In Britain we spend no less than £6·1 billion on invalidity benefit. Let me tell Opposition Members that in the constituency that I represent, £6·1 billion is a very large sum of money.

The health of the nation is undoubtedly improving. Any of us who look at it—as I am sure we all do when we go to our hospitals and talk to our GPs—realise that. Spending on the national health service is up by almost 50 per cent. since the Conservatives came to office. More people are being treated and receiving better treatment than ever before. More money and more effort is being put into preventive medicine, particularly child vaccination. Yet the number of people claiming invalidity benefit is rising inexorably—by a factor of three, we are told. Clearly, there is something wrong.

Opposition Members have sought to explain the increase by suggesting that it is something to do with the fact that it is difficult to find work at present or that the people are really retired. Yet those who are fit for work and cannot find it should be on unemployment benefit. Those who are retired should receive their pension. Neither of those two categories of person should receive a benefit intended for a person who suffers from invalidity, if they do not have an invalidity.

Opposition Members tend to forget, not only in this context but in almost everything else that we discuss in this place, that benefits are paid by working people—by our working constituents—many of whom live on modest incomes and some who support a sick or elderly relative themselves. I suggest to the socialist parties—both of them, or perhaps I should say all three of them—that they should care a little more about those people.

The socialist parties frequently tell us that this or that item is Treasury-driven, and that all that the Government are trying to do is save money for the Treasury. I should hope that the Government are trying to save money for the Treasury. As I said a moment ago, it is our constituents who fund the Treasury. Opposition Members seem to think that there is a crop of gold out of which all state schemes can be financed. I shall let them into a secret: there is not.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) referred to a matter which was not relevant to a debate on this subject, but as he did so, let me say a few words about it. At present we are paying rather more tax than any of my hon. Friends or I would like. The difference is that the Conservatives tax because they have to, but the socialists tax because they want to. Everyone knows that socialists believe that our constituents cannot be trusted to spend their own money. Socialists wish to take money from them and spend it themselves. That is the difference between the socialists and us.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he said that Conservative Governments tax because they have to—because they get the economy into such awful difficulties—but Labour Governments tax because they want to—in order to provide decent services for the people that we represent?

Mr. Stephen: Labour Governments tax because they do not believe that people can be trusted to spend their own money. Liberal Democrat Governments would to the same if they were ever in a position to do so. Conservative Members have voted for higher taxation than we would have wished because of something called the world recession, which has been obvious to us, but seems to have escaped the notice of Opposition Members. It is the worst recession in the western world since 1929. I know it is inconvenient for Opposition Members to recognise that; they would much prefer it if the present recession were the fault of the Conservative Government. But the world recession is much more likely to have been made in Washington and Tokyo than in London.

Mr. Dewar: I wonder whether the hon. Member can help me. He claims that it was self-evident that high taxation was necessary because of the world recession. Was that obvious to him in May 1992?

Mr. Stephen: The world recession has been obvious to me for quite a long time. It has not, apparently, been noticed by Opposition Members. It is remarkable that, during the worst recession since 1929, the Conservative Government have been able to maintain spending on the national health service, on social security and generally on our welfare state.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Dewar *rose*——

Mr. Stephen: I shall not give way; I have given way enough.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my hon. Friend agree that, at the last election, it was not obvious to any Member, Conservative or Opposition, that the recession would continue as long as it did? No one could have forecast the length of the recession, and that made an enormous difference.

Mr. Stephen: My hon. Friend is right. As Groucho Marx said, it is dangerous to make predictions, especially about the future.

One reason why the Conservative Government have been able to maintain spending on the health service and on the Department of Social Security is that, during the good times of the 1980s, we repaid so much of our national debt that we were able to borrow to tide us over the difficult times.

Notwithstanding that we pay more tax than any Conservative Member would like, living standards have increased dramatically since 1979, and the great majority of people have a much greater disposable income than ever before. Our constituents often say that they have paid into the system, so they should have the money. However, when I considered the figures, I discovered that the amount of money collected in national insurance contributions was just about enough to pay the old-age pensions, and precious little was left to pay for all the other benefits. Essentially, all those other benefits are paid for out of general taxation.

The Bill seeks to resolve another difficulty. If benefit goes to the wrong people—as it does in some cases—there is less money for the right people. Opposition Members should think more about the right people, who are not getting as much money as they should.

Mr. Dewar: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stephen: No, I have given way already to the hon. Gentleman.

There is some debate on whether we should tax incapacity benefit. We should consider the matter from the view of somebody who is a low earner, but pays some tax. Is it fair that another person, who receives the same amount of money and has the same amount of disposable income, but receives money through invalidity benefit, should not pay tax? I do not think that many constituents would think that fair.

The issue of the general practitioner's role as gatekeeper has been raised. I was grateful for the contributions by my hon. Friends the Members for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) and for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), both of whom are doctors and know what they are talking about. It occurred to me as a layman that a doctor with a long-standing relationship with a patient and his family might find it embarrassing to refuse a sick note. I appreciate my hon. Friends' confirmation that that is a source of embarrassment for doctors. They also mentioned something that should be obvious to all of us: doctors have enough administration to do without acting as unpaid officials for the DSS.

Clearly, we need a proper objective medical test. Now is not the time or the place to debate that test. I hope that my hon. Friends who are doctors will be involved when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State devises the test and the regulations that the House will be called upon to consider later.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does not my hon. Friend find it embarrassing that Opposition Members, who know that the amount of money for incapacity benefit has risen to £6·1 billion and is expected to rise to £8 billion in 1994-95, are not prepared to confront that issue? All they say is that we should carry on with the current system. There is something wrong with the Labour party, which is prepared for his constituents and mine to continue to pay such money.

Mr. Stephen: My hon. Friend is right. As I have said, the Labour party does not care about the people who have

[Mr. Stephen]

to pay for those benefits. It does not care about the people who are not receiving as much as they should because the money is going to the wrong people.

Opposition Members have had their fun commenting on categories such as the terminally ill and people who are human vegetables who will not be required to submit to the test. Of course, we would expect the Minister to say that those people would not be required to submit to a test and he has done so. It is ridiculous to suggest, as Opposition Members seem to do, that it is a concession given by a Government who really think that human vegetables should earn a living. That shows the standard of debate of which Opposition Members are constantly showing themselves to be capable.

While at the Bar, I was for some time a personal injuries practitioner and I know that if there is a financial incentive, people sometimes tend to be economical with the truth when it comes to their physical and mental condition. There are malingerers—I was amazed when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told us that a man who had been claiming invalidity benefit had won a cycle race. That is quite remarkable.

There is nothing dishonourable or demeaning about being an artist's model, or a swimming pool or petrol pump attendant. Opposition Members should think of the reaction of a swimming pool attendant. How would they like to ask him, "You are earning your money and paying taxes?"? The attendant will answer, "Yes and why should I pay tax to support someone who is capable of doing my job but prefers to sit at home and draw invalidity benefit?"

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) has said that a considerable number of people will lose benefit if the Bill is passed, as I hope it will be. The Labour party cannot have it both ways. It accuses us of massaging the employment figures. The Bill is a gift for it—we are going to do something to reveal those people who are unemployed. We will take off invalidity benefit, those who are not invalids and put them where they belong—on the employment register.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the unemployment figures, which are issued by the Government, are deliberately lower than they should be because of people on invalidity benefit and that the real level of unemployment is above 3 million?

Mr. Stephen: I am not saying anything of the kind. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman was present for the earlier part of the debate, but if he reads *Hansard*, he will see that that issue has been discussed.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead drew attention to the extremely worrying problem of male unemployment. All Conservative Members have male constituents who have been unemployed for a long time and we are extremely worried about them. Most hon. Members have factories in our constituencies. If we visit them, we see that the roaring factories are no longer roaring. That has not happened because the Conservative Government have decided to close down manufacturing industries. Anyone who visits a factory will see not hundreds of people scurrying round or engaged over the work bench, but row upon row of gleaming robots doing their meticulous tasks, with the assistance of very few people. It is the inexorable march of technology that has caused so much male unemployment, and if they were honest, the Opposition would accept that.

To put the debate in an international context, the House may be interested to know that the Netherlands, a country renowned for the most generous welfare system in the world, now expects higher contributions from employees with a long sickness record. Employers are fined up to one year's salary for each employee discharged into the disability scheme. Legislation has been passed to reduce the level and duration of benefits for new disability claimants, and the regulations governing the examination of claimants have also been tightened. All people over the age of 65 must contribute to the social security general disability insurance scheme.

As I listened to the hon. Member for Garscadden, I was reminded of the farmer in a remote part of Ireland who was asked by a tourist the way to Ballymena. He thought for a moment and replied, "If I were going to Ballymena, I would not start from here." Anyone with any sense, and I would have thought that the hon. Member for Garscadden had a little bit of it, would realise that we must start from where we are, not from where we would like to be. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that, in attempting to reduce the burden upon our taxpaying constituents, we are starting with the people who are drawing invalidity benefit, he has obviously not listened to the debates in the House, because the whole range of public spending is being closely examined to cut waste and to reduce the tax burden.

What is the Labour party's policy? Opposition Members have been asked endless times by my hon. Friends to explain their policies, but all they can do is yell, "You're in the dock". Nobody here is in the dock. We are trying to work out what should be done in the best interests of our constituents. I would have expected, and the people expect, some kind of constructive opposition from the Labour party, but all we get is yah-boo politics.

The Labour party cannot cope with the burdens of opposition, and it is totally unfit to be trusted with the responsibility of office.

8.12 pm

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): This debate is about an important aspect of social security policy but, not surprisingly, many hon. Members have returned to the theme of employment and employment policy. The interface between those policies is one of the most crucial issues to take into account when deciding whether to support the Bill.

We must decide what the prospects will be for those who are denied benefit in the future. How many of them will join the labour market and find jobs?

The Secretary of State said that he has evidence to suggest that malingerers are cleaning windows, apparently at their own offices. I am not sure whether he witnessed that act. When he mentioned cleaning windows, I wondered whether he was about to go through the George Formby song book. I thought that he was about to talk about witnessing a scrounger leaning on a lampost at the corner of the street, but he did not go that far.

The Secretary of State obviously believes that many in receipt of benefit are in employment. We must ask ourselves serious questions about the prospects of those who will lose benefit, at a time of mass unemployment, should the Bill survive the House. Will they find employment? We all know that evidence suggests that many people with disabilities find it extremely difficult to secure employment.

One survey carried out in 1990 by Social and Community Planning Research, SCPR—I am bound to say that official data are sparse—found that, among those with disabilities who were actively seeking work, 22 per cent. were unemployed. Today, experts estimate that those with disabilities who are seeking work are two and a half times more unlikely to find jobs than those without disabilities. That survey is one indicator of the scale of the problem.

Mr. Nigel Evans: The hon. Gentleman has quoted from a survey. How does he react to the survey of GPs, in which two thirds of them admitted that they had signed people off for sickness benefit who were not sick and were able to work?

Mr. Wicks: I was talking about people with disabilities and unemployment. The hon. Gentleman is talking about another survey.

Another survey conducted by the Spastics Society—the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) is obviously interested in surveys—found that employers are six times more likely to turn down a person with disabilities for an interview, even if that person had the same qualifications and experience as a person without disabilities. That survey suggests that, if we believe that those who will be denied benefit as a result of the Bill will easily find work at a time of mass unemployment, we are being naive.

Public policy has long sought to enable those with disabilities to find work. Back in 1944, shortly after the publication of the Beveridge report, an Act of Parliament was passed that stated that employers with more than 20 workers had to have a 3 per cent. quota of employees with disabilities. That was a decent and vintage Act of Parliament. In practice, three quarters of employers have failed to meet that quota and, since 1944, only 10 prosecutions have been brought. That suggests that public policy is not working.

At a time when the Government are seeking to restrict the social security benefit entitlement of people with disabilities, another Department of State, the Department of Employment, recently introduced a programme—in June 1993—called access to work. That programme is a move backwards in terms of the ability of people with disabilities to find employment, because four schemes have been wound up as a result of it.

The adaptation of premises and equipment scheme, which provided grants of up to £6,000 to enable workplaces to be adapted to accommodate people with disabilities, has been wound up. Special aids to employment and a personal reader service, which enables sight-impaired people to find employment, have also gone, along with the fares to work scheme.

As a result, and not surprisingly, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, RADAR, has commented:

> "There is absolutely no evidence that employers will be prepared to pay extra money to retain disabled staff . . . on the contrary, there is extensive evidence that workers tend to lose their jobs when they are disabled."

How can the policy that the Secretary of State has outlined square with that of another Department, which is actively discriminating against people with disabilities entering the labour market by withdrawing such useful schemes? We need to examine the impact of two Departments on a particular scheme.

The difficulty is that Governments inevitably seek to cut public spending on social security at a time of mass unemployment. They indulge in rhetoric and pursue policies designed to push people into the labour market at the precise time in the economic cycle when jobs are not available. That is what they are seeking to do under the Bill.

It is therefore incumbent on Government to go back to basics of a kind and to try to pursue again policies of full employment, which are vital to many groups, not least those with disabilities. It is only when we begin radically to cut unemployment and provide people with decent jobs —not any old jobs—that people with disabilities and others who suffer from discrimination will have a fairer chance of getting good jobs. So far that has not happened.

A key theme for the future, illustrated by this Bill, will be the following choice: will more and more people become victims of the dependency culture, forced to go on benefits—if not decent invalidity benefits, then income support? That will drive up social security costs and encourage the Government to be mean-minded and introduce mean, and usually means-tested, benefits.

Or will there be another sort of future? Conservative Members have challenged the Opposition to discuss alternatives. The alternatives are clear: instead of a dependency culture we must encourage the active society. We must have public social and employment policies which enable people to be active, drawing more of them into the labour market by means of training schemes, schemes for the disabled, child care support and so on. That is the alternative, but it is not pursued by the Government, who merely encourage dependence on the state.

We need a vigorous employment policy that includes training and positive policies towards people with disabilities. That should replace the negativism that we have heard today—and recently from the Department of Employment. The Government have the cheek to introduce an incapacity for work Bill while showing themselves incapable of providing work for our people.

8.21 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I had some difficulty following the points made by the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks), who appeared to be saying that the Government are cutting social security at a time when unemployment is rising. In fact, unemployment is falling; the whole point of the review is that social security spending is rising—the very opposite of what the hon. Gentleman said.

I apologise for having left the Chamber for part of the debate, but I took the opportunity to obtain a copy of the report on supported employment initiatives which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) kindly drew to the attention of the House. I was not aware of it before; it looks interesting; I have only had a chance to glance at the summary and conclusions.

The report refers to 1,600 supported employment places, and to the need for much more research into, and understanding of, what can be done. There is a great deal of common ground in this debate in this area—there are many unanswered questions about how we can best help

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

people with disabilities to find employment. There is indeed a need for more research and understanding, and for greater awareness by the public, and by public and private employers, of what can be done.

The hon. Member for Garscadden tried to say that he would not start from here with a review of social security spending, but it is to the credit of the Secretary of State that he has started from here. There are difficult issues that need dealing with, and my right hon. Friend has dealt with them sensitively.

The consultation paper on the new medical tests lists about 200 organisations that have been consulted, and doubtless more of them will respond before the consultation period expires early next month. I understand that the United Kingdom has one of the worst sickness records and absenteeism rates in the European Community. The number of invalidity beneficiaries has soared from 500,000 to 1,500,000 in the past 15 years, and the cost, which has risen to £6 billion, could rise to £8 billion in 1995-96 if this reform is not put into effect.

The Secretary of State is right to bring the Bill to the House. He said that his primary aim is to help people back into work if they are fit for work, and that is what I should like to talk about this evening.

It is vital that businesses and organisations be helped to provide opportunities for people to work, both for people's own fulfilment and for the benefit of society. That is much better than leaving people to live on benefit. It is impossible to assess with a medical test alone whether someone will be able to get a job—Professor Hawking, on any test, would rate as severely disabled, yet he has proved perfectly capable of employing himself, to his own benefit and the benefit of the rest of society.

I have been struck by some of the points made about voluntary workers by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It has pressed strongly for allowing the concession due to take effect in April 1995 to apply now. I do not know whether the Minister can tell me that there is a possibility of allowing the concession to apply now. The argument advanced by NACAB is that the concession would not incur any cost, and it would at least benefit some people. My local paper has reported that some disabled volunteers feel that they cannot volunteer for charitable work at the moment.

The Government are reviewing the disability working allowance at the moment. Before I became a member of it, the Social Security Select Committee reported on the need to look at aspects of the allowance that are not working well—for instance, the poverty trap problem, the disincentive to work, and the high failure rate of claims. It is disappointing that only 3,000 or so people have got jobs with the disability working allowance, given that the Government's own target was 50,000 and that more than that could, in my view, have benefited had its application been wider. After all, 300,000 people with disabilities are thought to be seeking work.

Many Opposition Members have pressed for anti-discrimination legislation, but the Government are wise to keep an open mind on that—indeed, to be sceptical about it. A recent report by the TUC—it is undated, but I believe that it came out last autumn—on the number of disabled people working in the public sector highlighted the remarkable fact that many organisations in the public sector—30 health authorities and trusts and 12 local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland—employ no registered disabled people at all. The report considers the various sectors of public employment and shows that about 100,000 jobs could be provided for disabled people if the public sector approached the quota of 3 per cent.

I query the usefulness of anti-discrimination legislation for the private sector while the public sector—presumably it should set an example and can be given directions—falls so far short itself. Overall, the report shows that only 0·8 per cent. of workers in the public sector are registered disabled. Only the Department of Employment meets the 3 per cent. quota.

Even an organisation such as the BBC, which one might imagine could set a better example, employs only 0·3 per cent. The usual argument is that these organisations employ people who are disabled, but not registered disabled. Given that that probably applies generally, there is a great deal of scope for parts of the public sector to improve—without worrying about legislation for the private sector.

The hon. Member for Garscadden said that he has not yet had an opportunity to read all the conclusions of the report. He should certainly study it, and study it in connection with the excellent work done by the Shaw Trust, whose director general, Tim Papé, was in Central Lobby just now—which is why I had to slip out to see him for a prearranged appointment. I have with me the latest —last year's—annual report of the Shaw trust. The trust was set up 10 or 15 years ago and provides sheltered placement employment for 2,200 people. It provides training for about 1,000 a year and seeks 700 extra placement positions every year.

Despite current employment difficulties, the trust is to be commended for increasing its number of places last year. In the report, Mr. Papé states:

> "Within the United Kingdom today, over 300,000 people of working age have some form of disability, and are unemployed. One in four families has someone with a permanent or temporary disability or knows a close friend in that position.
>
> Disability is widespread, yet it is a subject that is still surrounded by misunderstanding and fear.
>
> This lack of understanding is based on a deep-rooted belief that disability means 'no ability' and that the only suitable response is sympathy and segregation.
>
> More often than not, this kind of well-meaning attitude is the single biggest impediment for people with disabilities.
>
> By focusing on what these people cannot do, to the exclusion of what they can do, society hopelessly overlooks their huge potential for education, training and for work.
>
> Shaw Trust performs a vital role for people with disabilities in the United Kingdom.
>
> Our commitment to them is a commitment to the varied and invaluable abilities which they have to offer.
>
> If a person can work and wants to work, the Trust is dedicated to finding them an opportunity to make the best use of their talents, whatever their disability.
>
> Shaw Trust prepares people for work and ensures that they have the skills and training that they need to realise their full potential."

I should be glad to make a copy of that report available to any hon. Member who would like to know more about the trust. When I met Mr. Papé, he gave me the outline of a discussion paper that he is preparing, on which I hope to work with him. It lists two and a half pages of questions, the answers to which will make evident the right way forward to develop employment opportunities for the disabled.

The striking fact about the sheltered placement scheme is that it costs less than £5,000 a year to help people to gain jobs. Workshop provision through Remploy and workshops elsewhere costs double that—about £10,000 a year per job. If we could redirect the money that is currently devoted to sheltered workshops, we could provide twice as many employment opportunities for the amount that is available.

I support the Bill and I congratulate the Secretary of State and the Minister on tackling difficult issues in a constructive and positive way. I wish the Bill good progress through both Houses. If we have an opportunity to amend it and to provide for volunteers, I hope that amendments will be considered and that there will be a chance to review further the provision for increased sheltered placements and the improved working of the disability working allowance.

8.32 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on Second Reading of another social security Bill, although the proliferation of such Bills is not at all welcome. They bring bad news and are followed by bad news. I spoke in the debate on the Statutory Sick Pay Bill when the Government rushed it through on an unwise guillotine motion—one of the causes of the breakdown in co-operation between the Government and the Opposition. I am pleased to note that that Bill, which was rushed through with unseemly haste in a day, is now hurtling slowly through the House of Lords.

Mr. Stephen: The hon. Gentleman complains about Bills being guillotined. Is not he shedding crocodile tears because when he and his hon. Friends had time to debate the issues about which they said they were concerned, they wasted it on procedural wrangles?

Mr. Foulkes: That argument does not stand. I am glad that I am not in court being defended by the hon. Gentleman, because if I were, I would feel very vulnerable.

We should prefer much more time to discuss all these measures because, given the opportunity, we could examine them in detail and show where they are wanting. That was evident in the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr Dewar). I used to sit through debates on the Scottish rate support grant and was constantly amazed by the way in which my hon. Friend mastered the intricate detail in a most fantastic way. He has been suddenly transformed to our Front Bench as the Opposition spokesman on social security, a subject that is even more complicated, if anything can be, than the Scottish rate support grant, and he has mastered it with equal facility. I look forward to the day when he and all other Opposition Members are on the other side of the Chamber and he is dealing with the matter substantively rather than as the shadow spokesman.

I think that the proposal was first leaked in June 1993 in a memorandum from the Secretary of State for Social Security to the Prime Minister. There were all sorts of denials at the time, but, of course, there always are. We were told, "Don't get worried, don't fear, the Government would never think of that kind of thing." But, inevitably, it materialised and here we are again.

There is genuine fear and alarm in my constituency. It is one of our most beautiful constituencies, but it has one of the highest levels of unemployment. Some 5,000 people who were in mining have lost their jobs and are desperately looking for alternative work, and it is a calumny, an insult, to suggest that they are not. They are, and many of them are severely handicapped.

It is strange that, again and again, Conservative Members, and especially Ministers, speak about a world recession causing everything. Exactly the same people used to tell us that Thatcherism was so successful that it was being exported all over the world. Perhaps that is why there is a world recession. Everybody has adopted Thatcherism and countries are following Britain down the stank. That is a good Scots word. The English version is down the drain, in purely economic terms.

It ill behoves the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) and other Conservative Members to talk about world recession as if it did not have its roots here in the Conservative Government. The hon. Member for Shoreham also spoke about saving money by preventing it from going to the wrong people and giving it to the right people. I note that he said, "right people". I cannot see any provision in the Bill for redistributing the money to anybody.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): We have heard much rhetoric from the Government about re-targeting resources, but on page 2 of the Bill under the heading "Financial effects of the Bill", it is made absolutely clear that the Bill will produce estimated gross savings of £550 million in 1995-96 and £1,450 million in 1996-97. The Bill has nothing to do with targeting.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but, to be fair, it also says that those will be offset by

> "additional expenditure on income support and unemployment benefit of around £135 million in 1995-96 and £265 million in 1996-97."

That tells us two things. First, there has been a cover-up on the level of unemployment: there is no doubt about that. Part of this is a consequence of the massaging of the unemployment figures by the Government. We heard from the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), a retired general practitioner, about the experience of GPs. GPs in my constituency have told me that people have been sent from the Benefits Agency to their doctors to get off unemployment and on to invalidity benefit, to keep the unemployment statistics down. Now they are facing the consequences of their actions.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): Does my Friend not agree that, as a result of Government measures, many people who possibly are in ill health may be made redundant? That will mean another general shake-out of industry as a result of the Bill, because employers will not foot the total bill for sick payment.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and the point that he makes was made in a speech in an earlier debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) made a point in relation to the money saved. More than £1 billion is to be saved off people who are currently on invalidity benefit. That means that they will be more than £1 billion less well off, or £1 billion poorer. That means that there will be greater poverty. That money will be no longer available for those people. They are not getting money from anywhere else. The theory is that they will be forced into some suitable kind of employment. Could Conservative Members tell me where in Cumnock,

[Mr. Foulkes]

Auchinleck, Muirkirk, Dalemellington and Rankinston are they going to find that kind of employment? What kind of jobs? There is no McDonald's.

Mr. Stephen: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is, if a person is fit for work and cannot find it, the proper place for him to be is on the unemployment register, not drawing invalidity benefit.

Mr. Foulkes: We have already taken account of that. We are talking about encouraging people who are invalids and are trying to get some work, who are interested in working. There are people who are interested in working, but where are they? Where can they find work? There is no possibility of employment whatever.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foulkes: No. The hon Lady is the last person I would want to give way to.

I shall quote, because I need to look at exactly why the number of claims has gone up. A very good study carried out by the Policy Studies Institute says:

> "29 per cent of the extra cases have been people over pensionable age, drawing IVB rather than their pension for tax reasons. This increase hardly matters for public expenditure, because they would instantly become pensioners if they lost their IVB.
>
> 16 per cent of the extra cases have been due to the increasing number of women in the labour market, paying national insurance contributions, who qualify for IVB if they have to give up work."

That is a sensible reason; new people properly qualify because of a demographic change or a qualitative change in the employment arrangements.

It continues:

> "13 per cent of the extra cases may have been due to a gradual increase over the years in the number of disabled people in the relevant age-groups."

That is a fact. There is a real increase in the number of disabled people in the relevant age groups. Are they going to be denied? Surely even Conservative Members would not suggest that.

> "42 per cent. of the extra cases arise from genuine growth in the rate of claiming invalidity benefit among a stable population of disabled people."

In other words, they have become more aware of the invalidity benefit and have taken advantage of that. I do not think that any of those people can be described as undeserving. I do not think that any of them deserves to be squeezed out by the actions of the Government and by the consequences of the Bill.

Invalidity benefit was introduced by a Tory Government in 1971, in the days when Tory Governments were a little more understanding, a little more realistic, a little less harsh, a little less bitter than the present Tory Government. It was brought in to provide income for people who were unable to continue working as a result of long-term sickness or disability. That is an entirely sensible and understandable purpose. We are now getting a new incapacity test that is wrong in principle and unworkable in practice. The principle of it is completely wrong. It does not relate to the reality of the situation and it will be unworkable.

There will be a cut-off point. My hon. Friends have seen cut-off points work in other areas and know the problems that arise when people come just below the level. The proposal is unrealistic and unworkable. It is being introduced for disabled people at a time when they are being hammered again and again by the Government.

I know that the Minister, for whom personally I have great respect, sometimes finds it embarrassing to be the Minister for the Disabled. He is forced by the Treasury to save £1 billion here and £1 billion there. It is being imposed at a time when vehicle excise duty exemption is being abolished for disabled passengers, we are getting VAT on fuel, or perhaps we are not. Perhaps tomorrow the eight Members of Parliament who have said that they oppose VAT, the four Members of Parliament——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are certainly not having it tonight.

Mr. Foulkes: I look forward to it tomorrow. If we get the rebels that we are promised, we will not have VAT on fuel. Let us see whether they have the courage of their convictions.

When one is making the test in relation to whether people are capable of work, other factors must enter into it, such as age, work history, educational ability and personal skills. After all, it is not a homogeneous group of people, but a varied group, as I know from my constituency, which has miners with chronic bronchitis and emphysema. All those disabilities come in a mining area, but not necessarily in other areas.

I think that I have made most of my points. I know that some of my hon. Friends want to get in. I find the Bill detestable. I hope that the House will reject it.

Mr. McMaster: Before my hon. Friend concludes, I congratulate him on his splendid speech. I shall be rushing back to the Whips Office to put a gold star on his jotter for it. Can he shed any light on why, in the preparation of the Bill, the Government have made particular provision to deal with councillors' allowances? Why have they singled out councillors? Is it, as we all suspect, another part of the attack on local democracy?

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is, of course, the Scottish Whip, so I have a particular respect for him. He is also an officer of the all-party disabled group and does an extremely good job, and I am grateful to him. He has made a good point. Like me, he used to be a councillor. Both of us are getting sick and fed up with the attacks on locally elected representatives. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) has raised, on a number of occasions, the issue of the growth of quangos as opposed to elected representatives. He has pointed to yet another way in which they are being disadvantaged.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Can the hon. Gentleman say why, over the past 15 years, the health of the nation has improved, yet the number of people claiming invalidity benefit has trebled?

Mr. Foulkes: I do not think that there is evidence that the health of the nation is improving. We have a much older population. I used to work for Age Concern Scotland. I know for a fact that there is a large increase in the number of old people, particularly the very old. There are many more disabled people. I do not think that the health of the population has improved substantially. If more people stopped smoking regularly, we might see a substantial increase.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I am sure that I do not need to remind my hon. Friend, but it was the policy of the Government to take people off the unemployment register and put them on invalidity benefit when they were fibbing the figures on unemployment. It is a little bit rich coming from them that they are now seeking to take from the poor, to punish the poor, the elderly and disabled.

Mr. Foulkes: I hope that at some time in this debate, in the debate on the money resolution, or on some other occasion, my hon. Friend catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He is a particular expert on Ways and Means resolutions. Those of us who were in on the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill will know that he made an excellent contribution to the Ways and Means resolution. I know that he is good on that as well as on money resolutions.

I am fed up with the way in which the Government treat sick and disabled people like embarrassing statistics. It is about time that they were treated individually, as people; it is about time that the Government dealt with them properly and sympathetically. The Bill does the opposite.

Only the other day, the Secretary of State for Employment said that Members of Parliament ought to be subject to market testing. I agree. The best kind of market testing, in this instance, is a general election. Let us have a general election now: we shall see how many Conservative Members are returned. I can guarantee that Conservative Members will be found wanting.

8.50 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): The debate began on a thoughtful note, and I am sorry that the speech of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) deviated from that path. If he cannot even face the fact that the health of the nation has improved dramatically over the past 14 years, there is not much point in his debating this important issue.

Since the general election, there has been a good deal of debate about social security—about the need for reform and the growth in expenditure. I was interested in the failure of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) to mention the Social Justice Commission, which his party set up but which seems to have been buried. That suggests that Labour recognised the need for a reform of the social security system; but, although the party may recognise the need in principle, in practice it will fight every sensible step towards reform of what has become a complex and costly arrangement.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on launching a review of the system, and on introducing the Bill. It did not come as a surprise; it was well trailed. One thing, however, did come as a surprise. When I listened to the Chancellor's autumn statement—his second Budget speech—I thought that we were finally tackling the enormous growth in social security spending, but when I turned to the Red Book I found that, despite the Bill and the other measures outlined in the Budget, the increase in spending would go on inexorably. I stress that I am not taking into account the cyclical side of social security.

In 1988-89, in real terms—excluding cyclical expenditure—social security accounted for £54·6 billion of public spending. Last year, the figure was £61·8 billion; in the current year, it will rise to £65·2 billion, and by 1996-97, when the measures in the Bill will have been implemented, it will be £66·7 billion. Those figures in themselves demonstrate the need for change.

I was surprised to hear Opposition Members complain that the Bill would save £1·5 billion. Would they prefer that money to be spent, with taxes becoming ever higher? No; I suspect that they want spending to increase, while pretending that taxes need not be raised to pay for that increased spending.

Mr. Dewar: I take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously. I accept that the figures require some study, and that the long-term trends must be taken into account. However, it is not a case of our objecting to the saving of £1·5 billion. Most of that money must come out of the pockets of those receiving incapacity benefit; these changes will almost inevitably result in a cut in those people's income. Does the hon. Gentleman approve of that? How would he feel if he were asked to accept a cut in his very low, almost subsistence wages, to save money for someone else?

Mr. Congdon: The hon. Gentleman should ask himself whether some of the people currently receiving invalidity benefit are strictly entitled to it.

Mr. Dewar: That is not the point.

Mr. Congdon: Yes, it is. What this means is that some people who have played the game fairly, and are unemployed, are receiving unemployment benefit, while others have manipulated the system to ensure that they receive a higher benefit. I can understand that, but I am not prepared to condone it. Labour Members know, from their surgeries and from letters that they have received, that some people have manipulated the system in the way that I have described.

Mr. Dewar: I made it clear that, if the system was being abused, that abuse should be tackled. I also made it clear that I did not think that invalidity benefit, or incapacity benefit, should become a substitute for unemployment benefit. That, however, is a different point from the one that I raised just now.

There is a second string to the Minister's bow: he is deliberately cutting the income of people who are not malingering—people who fully and genuinely pass the incapacity benefit test. They will receive at least £30 or £40 a week less than they would have received under the old system. Does the hon. Gentleman defend that?

Mr. Congdon: I defend the Secretary of State's proposals in the Bill. I do not accept all the figures that the hon. Gentleman has given. I entirely agree that the new benefit should be taxed: other benefits are taxed, after all. The challenge is presented by the need to ensure that resources are better targeted—I know that that is a much-abused word—on those who really need them. One of the ironies of the social security system is the fact that, for every one of the cases reported in the newspapers involving people who receive excessive state benefits, there are several other cases in which not enough help has been provided.

It is a bit rich for hon. Members to attack the Bill as an assault on the disabled and those in need, when the Government are spending well over £80 billion on the welfare state. If what has been done over the past 14 years constitutes an assault on the welfare state, it has been a

[Mr. Congdon]

pretty ineffective assault. Although I support the welfare state, I believe that it has become over-complicated and has begun to bring about a regrettable dependency culture. We need to attack that.

Let me deal specifically with invalidity benefit. I was very impressed by the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field): I listened to both carefully, and I appreciated what they said about the needs of the disabled. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to tread carefully, especially on the proposals in the consultation document about medical assessment for incapacity benefit.

It is terribly easy to get something like that wrong, and I am sure that none of us wants to be wondering in a few years what regulations we had passed. Although I understand some of the concerns expressed, I do not accept that the Bill is an attack on the disabled, or that the Government would ever attack the disabled. Indeed, we have a very good record of providing extra support for the disabled——

Mr. McMaster: Clearly, I would argue the contrary on political grounds, but let us leave politics aside for a moment. Why have not the Government asked voluntary organisations and charities such as the Spastics Society, the Disability Alliance and RADAR—the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation—which are adamant that the Government have cut benefits and taken no account of their wishes or of the need for a comprehensive strategy to deal with disability?

Mr. Congdon: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I find it very hard to equate it with the fact that, over the past 15 years, benefits to the disabled have increased threefold in real terms to just under £15 billion. I accept that there is always room for improvement, but it would be a little more helpful if some of the lobby groups which genuinely try to represent the interests of the disabled would give credit where credit is due—to the Government. We should then be able to view some of their submissions with greater sympathy.

It is an inescapable fact that there has been an enormous growth in invalidity benefit over the past 14 or 15 years. We have heard that spending has more than doubled in real terms to £6·1 billion in the past 10 years, and that the number receiving it has trebled.

Great play has been made of the Library document which analyses a report by the Policy Studies Institute on the cause of the growth. I can accept the part of the report's explanation which refers to those who have reached pensionable age but who are still claiming invalidity benefit. With all due respect, I should have thought that that fact alone was evidence of the need for reform. It is nonsense that people can carry on claiming invalidity benefit once they have reached pensionable age.

I accept what has been said about more women being in the labour market and therefore being able to claim invalidity benefit, but the report states that 42 per cent. of the cases

> "arise from genuine growth in the rate of claiming invalidity benefit among a stable population of disabled people."

I stress the second part of that sentence, because I do not fully understand what it means. It appears to be saying that there has been a growth in the numbers claiming invalidity benefit, but it does not provide a jusitification or a reason for that growth. Based on surgery cases and other evidence, I should have thought that there was at least a case to be made for saying that part of the growth must be due to people manipulating the system in the way I described earlier.

Some hon. Members have stressed the link with unemployment. I am not going to get into that argument, but Labour Members are surely not arguing that, because there might or might not have been a link in the past, it is wrong to break that link now and ensure that people get the appropriate benefit and do not receive invalidity benefit if unemployment benefit would be more appropriate. On those grounds alone, we should support the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) spoke of his experience. I always bow to a doctor's experience, especially when I am ill. He outlined the issues raised by doctors across the country.

The Bill is long overdue, and my only caution is that we ensure that we do not hit the genuinely disabled—that is the last thing I would want. I am sure that we can avoid that problem as the Bill passes through its various stages.

It is a pity that the Opposition have not been prepared to face the problems. We all thought that they were going to do so when they established the Commission for Social Justice but it seems that they are prepared to funk the issue. That is a great pity, because we need a debate about social security support. The debate is not about long-term trends in terms of the working population but about the trends in the growth of social security and to what extent a modern economy can legitimately support an ever increasing public expenditure burden. The Bill is a modest step in the right direction, and I am pleased to support it.

9.3 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I wish that we were discussing real measures to help people who receive invalidity benefit, people who have suffered for years under this miserable Government. The debate makes me think of tax avoidance and abuses in the City and the financial institutions, where people seem to get away with the prize.

The other evening, we discussed training. The Government are frightened to put money into creativity or something that could generate income for the country but, lo and behold, they have once again suggested proposals that attack people who can hardly defend themselves, people who live in the hope that they might just see out tomorrow.

Not that long ago, in the House I told Ministers about a man who was called by his doctor and so on to find out whether he was fit. The doctors came and met him. They said, "We now have to try to find out whether you are eligible to claim the money. We will do a wee test on you." The wee test consisted of his going outside his house and walking 100 yards. The man managed 100 yards. He was dead and buried within a month. His wife asks, "What type of inhuman society are we that we put our menfolk through tests such as that?"

I have suffered my period in invalidity, and I have had the indignity of going through the test. It is not a pleasant thing when one is being accused of being a malingerer, of not being ill when one is ill, and one sits there with doctors, academics and people who have been through university. One just sits there as a Joe Bloggs—just an ordinary punter

—and one wants to tell the truth and will not dodge with the lies that they think we will all tell. What an indignity we are placing on mankind in this country!

I remember that the Prime Minister said that it "beggars belief" that the increase in numbers is due entirely to health-related reasons.

I live in Linwood, which is not a beautiful town. It is a hard-working town, where, years ago, thousands of men and women worked in the car plant and made a living. If one goes to that town now, one will find an incredible increase in the number of people living on invalidity benefit. If one checks the reasons why, it will come through that the serious depression that confronts them, with under-employment—the lack of job opportunities and so on—destroys the morale. It lowers one's resistance to illness and diseases. It plays a major part in the deterioration of people's health. If there is no hope and we do not give folk hope, their health will suffer.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Is he arguing that there ought to be no tests whatever?

Mr. Graham: I wish that we could have a good system. In answer to the hon. Gentleman, I wish that the Government could have listened to some of the organisations that have put forward many ideas for schemes. If the Government had taken on board some of the ideas for a comprehensive benefit system, we might not be in the mud hole that we are in.

Mr. Evans *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Graham: In 1980, I was on Strathclyde regional council. I was a member of a group that was examining the problems of disabled people. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security at the time was Lady Chalker. We discussed with her the problems that people on low income suffered. The "low income" that we were talking about was the money that people received on sickness benefit and invalidity benefit.

Does the Minister honestly think that the folk are laughing all the way to the bank with the pittance that we give them to live on, with disability and invalidity benefit? Do the Government believe that they can drink a bottle of champagne a week? Do they think that those people are living on caviare and steak? There is no way that they are living on that.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the nub of the problem, which is that the Secretary of State, who conceived the Bill, has based it on an assumption that most people who are on invalidity benefit are malingerers. That has been half the problem, and that is the problem with the philosophy behind it. Did not the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) betray it when he asked the question about the tests?

The problem is that existing tests are pretty tough, as my hon. Friend has outlined, but the new test will be ten times tougher. Does that not point the finger at the Secretary of State? It is a malicious attempt to penalise people on benefit.

Mr. Graham: I am most grateful for that telling intervention. I do not have a lot of time, and I do not need notes. I can tell the Minister that I know of many doctors who issue sick lines in the sincere belief that their patient is ill and against their professional experience that they know when folk are not fit for work. They issue those notes with the care and maintenance of patients in mind. They offer that sick line because they sincerely believe that their patients are ill. Are we therefore accusing every doctor of getting it wrong? Are we saying that the system is wrong?

I question the system, but I also question the Government. They have one of the worst records imaginable in trying to help the sick, the poor, the disabled and the unemployed. We have seen their income savaged and reduced to barely nothing because of the Government's constant and unbelievable mismanagement of our economy. We are struggling because the Government cannot see a way in which to create revenue-raising power.

As they once again bail out their friends in the City, they take £1·5 billion from the ill and the disabled. It makes me disgusted to be a Member of Parliament. We are speaking to a Government who are not prepared to listen, but are only prepared to keep trundling along and taking everybody, like lemmings, over the cliff. I do not think that the people of Britain will accept that and, at the general election, they will show the Government the door so that we can take heart, look after the future of disabled people and give them the quality of life to which they are entitled, not the poverty-driven chaos created by Government.

9.12 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful to be given an opportunity to participate in the debate.

I find it amazing that in the time that I have been in the Chamber, and while I believe that everyone in the Chamber would agree that it is an important debate, not one Liberal Democrat Member has been present. At such an important time, when we are approaching the climax of the debate, I find that amazing. There is no doubt that, as we come towards elections of any kind, the Liberal Democrats will say how dreadful the Government's social security policy is.

Having listened to hon. Members on both sides of the House, I believe that we desperately need to improve the current system. I agree with my hon. Friends that we desperately need to protect the most vulnerable in our society. At the same time, having heard the comments of Opposition Members about helping the disabled, it is rich that they have not been able to come up with anything concrete that they would put in place of what the Government are suggesting. We have all heard about the Opposition's current commission, but we are yet to hear anything concrete from the Opposition Members about social security.

We need a system which will operate, which will protect the vulnerable and which will be sustainable.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Which will save money.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman may say "save money", but one should consider the present system and the way in which the number of claimants has trebled.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who said that the health of the nation has not improved. It has improved. At the same time, the number of people claiming benefit has trebled, so that the amount paid is £6·1 billion, which is projected to rise to more than £8 billion in the near future. Yet Opposition Members are not prepared to confront that fact. They criticise and chastise Conservative Members for

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trying to save money. With this Bill, the Government are trying to ensure that the money that is spent in vast sums will go to those people who need it and that those who are not eligible for invalidity benefit do not sign up to it.

I referred earlier to a survey of general practitioners in which two thirds of those questioned indicated that they had signed sickness benefit notes for people who simply were not sick. We must address that problem. Opposition Members have said, "If anyone is claiming invalidity benefit who is not entitled to it, something should be done about it." But yet again they have failed to suggest any concrete policies that would correct that imbalance. We need to hear something concrete——

Mr. Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: I will gladly give way to the hon. Gentleman if he will say how Labour proposes to clamp down on those who are claiming invalidity benefit when they ought not to be.

Mr. Flynn: We are all touched to hear the hon. Gentleman, in his deep-seated favour, explaining how people must not loot the public purse. Will he urge his hon. Friends the Members for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) to return to the public purse the money that they made out of buying council houses and the £200,000 that they had from the public purse——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that he should not make criticisms of other hon. Members unless he has given them notice. I greatly deplore that practice.

Mr. Evans: I held out the challenge to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), but I did not get an answer to my question—just a cheap attack on my hon. Friends.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend accept that, in this country, we live under the rule of law by which everyone is innocent until proved guilty?

Mr. Evans: Conservative Members are more than happy to accept that. Clearly, however, Opposition Members do not share our view.

We must accept that the health of the nation has been improving over the past 15 years. Moreover, expenditure on invalidity benefit represents one of the largest and most rapidly growing areas of expenditure in the whole system. If money is going where it is not supposed to go, it must be checked. If that flow is not checked, and if money is not targeted on those who really need it, either taxes will have to go up and up to ensure that the bill is met or those in real need will be denied access to proper benefits—[HON. MEMBERS: "Taxes are going up."]

It is amazing to hear Opposition Members say that taxation is going up anyway. They decry the Government for seeking to tackle a problem by reducing the amount of money going to people who should not be getting it. They tell the public that the Government are wrong to raise taxes, but they are not prepared to back the Government when they seek to do something about the problem of benefits going to people who are not entitled to them.

Opposition Members would prefer to see taxes increased. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor told David Frost on Sunday that, if the Labour party were in government, taxes would be far higher than they are. Opposition Members have proved that point admirably.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Evans: I have only three minutes left. Opposition Members have had a fine opportunity to answer the questions that we have put to them but have refused to do so. I have the hon. Member for Newport, West an opportunity to come back with an answer; instead he made a cheap attack on my hon. Friends. Given that sort of attitude, I am not prepared to give way to Opposition Members again.

Those who are capable of work should not be encouraged to sign on for invalidity benefit; they should be encouraged to go into the world of work. At the moment, as the GP survey showed, too few people are being encouraged to do that. The onus on GPs is unfair. In many ways, the guidelines were too loose and allowed too many people to sign on for invalidity benefit. The criteria for eligibility for incapacity benefit will be far stricter. That will ensure that those who receive the benefit are those in need of it and that those who are able to work are helped to get back into work. Funds will be focused on those who need benefit because of incapacity—something that ought to be welcomed by every hon. Gentleman.

I have not heard any hon. Member refer to the voluntary work sector. People who are claiming incapacity benefit will be able to do 16 hours' voluntary work a week. This is excellent news to anyone who, like myself and, I am sure, most other hon. Members, is involved with several constituency charities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) referred to the fact that the question of medical assessment is currently out to consultation. I hope that there will be widespread discussion with general practitioners, charities and anyone else who wants to make a contribution. We must get the system right, so we shall have to listen very carefully to comments about some of the possible pitfalls. In this regard, however, I am confident.

Having listened to Opposition Members, I am not sure that they agree with any type of testing whatsoever. I believe that we shall get the question of medical assessment right—that people who are incapable of working will be entitled to claim incapacity benefit and will receive it at the appropriate rates and that those who are able to work will be helped into employment.

This is the right system, and it is a great shame that Opposition Members are unable to support it. What I have heard today reveals the real Labour party—the tax-and-spend party that my constituents, having listened to its case, will recognise as the one that lost the last four general elections and will lose the next one.

9.20 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): In general, this has been a very thoughtful and well-ordered debate. We have heard important contributions from several hon. Members—in particular, my hon. Friends the Members for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), and my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) and for Croydon North-West (Mr. Wicks), as well as several of my hon Friends from Scottish constituencies. We have heard some interesting contributions from Conservative Members too. In particular, I welcome the remarks of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). Conservative Members brought several specific points to the Minister's attention.

The debate was enhanced considerably by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who clearly stated the Labour party's position on the Bill. It is very important that we should recognise the real purpose behind the measure, which constitutes a fundamental attack on the interests of disabled people. The Government are yet again looking for a way out of the economic mess caused by their mismanagement and their policies. Yet again, disabled people are being used as the scapegoat for Conservative incompetence. That is something of which we ought not to lose sight, however often we hear reference to Disraeli, the one-nation Tory. The country knows very well the current position of the Tory party. Bringing Disraeli back from the dead will not get the Government out of their mess.

The Minister of State shakes his head vigorously in denial of the claim that the disabled are being used as a scapegoat for economic incompetence. However, we have only to look at recent history to see how these people have been targeted. It gives me no pleasure to refer yet again to the question of the independent living fund. Exactly what we predicted during the passage of the legislation dealing with that fund has come to pass.

There has been a massive cut in the amount of money available for disabled people in the independent living fund. We said that very few people would benefit from the fund as a result of the way in which it was structured. It gives me no pleasure to see that in the 1993-94 budget of £4 million, to date only £500,000 has been allocated and £3·5 million remains to be spent. Although there have been 700 applicants, only 104 payments have been received.

Mr. Scott: When we introduced community care, and when the new arrangements for the independent living fund came into being, it was inevitable that it would take time for the caseload to build up. The cases that the ILF has taken on and which have incurred the £500,000 expenditure represent between £5 million and £6 million of full-year expenditure.

Mr. Bradley: I listened with interest to the Minister's defence. Unfortunately, the evidence does not bear that out. There has been criticism from the local authorities. The authorities confirm what we claimed during the passage of the legislation. They believe that it is ridiculous to have limits of £200 and £500. They also believe that it is ridiculous that no one over 65 can receive benefit from the fund. It is also ridiculous that the terminally ill cannot receive anything from the fund and that the provision was limited to people on income support and those with savings of less than £8,000. Those limitations have seriously curtailed the ability of disabled people to benefit in the way that they so desperately need to.

Even before today's Bill, there has been evidence of the way in which the Government are targeting disabled people. We have heard much about the way in which invalidity benefit has been administered. However, it is clear that there is a range of ways in which the Government are focusing on invalidity benefit and also making real cuts in the amount of money that will be available in future to disabled people.

We have already heard that the Government intend to make savings of £550 million in 1995-96 and a staggering saving of £1,450 million in 1996-97. I must stress that those savings will arise not from the introduction of a new benefit to deal with people with disabilities, but from the replacement of benefits such as sickness benefit and invalidity benefit. Those cuts, or savings as the Government call them, will be achieved through a series of measures.

We must be clear where those savings will be made. Crucially, the Government are changing the rates for the new incapacity benefit. Two new rates will be introduced for the first 28 weeks. In current circumstances, someone would receive £42·70 and then a higher rate for 29 to 52 weeks. That person would then move on to £52·50, the same rate as statutory sick pay. Only after 52 weeks would that person move on to current invalidity benefit rate of £56·10. Between 28 weeks and 52 weeks, there will be a real cut in the rate paid to disabled people even if they get through the hoop of the new test.

The Government cannot claim that they are not making a real cut in the amount of income available to people with disabilities as a result of the introduction of this new benefit. Not only are they making a cut, they are also introducing a greater delay before people with the same disabilities achieve the same rate as those who currently receive invalidity benefit of £56·10. There will be a cut in the rate and a delay before one receives the current full rate of invalidity benefit.

The new proposals also make crucial structural changes to the new benefit. That also applies to some of the changes that are to be made in respect of people who continue to receive invalidity benefit. The most crucial point is that, after the introduction of the new rules in April 1995, there will be no additional pension.

Much has been made of the increased payments to people on invalidity benefit. It has been said that, when they reach retirement age, they should go back on to the basic state retirement pension. Most of them receive an additional amount only because they have contributed to an additional pension. Under the new rules, that allowance will not be permitted, and, for those currently in receipt of it, the amount will be frozen.

That flies in the face of what the Government announced previously. It gives me no pleasure to quote the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. As many of my hon. Friends have said, we have great respect for the way in which he has championed the needs of disabled people. However, talking about the additional pension, he said:

> "The clause does not affect existing rights to additional pension. All the rights built up in the years up to and including the 1990-91 tax year will be preserved, whenever the claim for invalidity pension is made, however far in the future that may be. Moreover, such additional pension will continue to be subject to revaluation uprating in exactly the same way as at present."—[*Official Report*, 3 April 1990; Vol. 170, c. 1115.]

Under the new rules that he is introducing tonight, the Minister will renege on that promise. The additional pension will be frozen, it will not be uprated.

Mr. Scott *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bradley: The Minister shakes his head. If he wishes to refute what I am saying, I should be pleased to give way. He cannot refute the allegations.

In addition, there will be further cuts. There will be no age allowance for claimants between 45 and 55. There will

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be a lower benefit between the 28th and 52nd week, as I have said. Also, there will be no dependants' allowance for people under 60 without children. All that means cuts in payments for disabled people. For the no additional pension category, there will be cuts of £20 million in 1995-96 and £130 million in 1996-97, £5 million in respect of the no allowance for claimants between 45 and 55 in 1995-96, and £15 million in 1996-97. In the case of the dependants' allowance, that is a saving of £110 million in 1995-96 and £150 million in 1996-97.

That is the issue—cuts in basic rights to benefit and income for disabled people. That is why we oppose the Bill so strongly.

We must also consider the way in which the new medical assessment will be undertaken. Several points must be reinforced. It surprised me greatly that, when we asked to be consulted on the new medical test, we were eventually told by written answer to my question that a group of 80 experts had been brought together to comment on the medical assessment. I asked the Minister exactly who were representing the interests of disabled people and making an assessment. In his first answer, he just gave me a list of the groups that would be represented, so I asked again, because I believed the Prime Minister's words and those of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and I thought that we had open government. When asked who the 80 experts were, the Minister said:

> "We have asked that panel members respect confidentiality until the exercise is completed."

Opposition Members believe in open government. If Conservative Members want to list the 80 names, we shall be happy to publish them so that we know who is representing our interests in that medical test.

Our next major concern is that we will not know the details of the test before the Bill is considered in Committee—in fact, we will not know the details even after the Bill has been considered in Committee. I shall be surprised if we know the details of the medical test when we come to Third Reading or beyond.

Yet again, the Government are using regulations to prop up the Bill. Instead of having a proper consultation process, coming to decisions and bringing them to the Floor of the House at the appropriate time, the Government are hiding behind regulations and trying to slip the new test in through the back door. We will vigorously be opposing their method in Committee, and I can assure the House that there will be a full-blown debate when the regulations come back, to ensure that the interests of disabled people are properly represented.

We have heard much tonight about the medical test. Our greatest concern has also been stated by some Conservative Members—I welcome their comments as well as those of my hon. Friends—in relation to the difficulty in setting up an objective test. A number of illnesses and disabilities have various elements that cannot be assessed by one snapshot. The Secretary of State said that he was not looking for a snapshot, and that there would be scope for variation. What is not clear, and why it is so difficult to debate the measures, is how much discretion will be brought into the system.

Clearly, the way in which the document has been drawn up means that there will be a storing of points which will come to a threshold. On one side of that threshold, the person concerned is okay—on the other side, he is not. We have heard many cases of disabled people who would score heavily on the criteria as they are laid down who are holding down competent jobs. On those criteria, they would be eligible for incapacity benefit. Equally, people who would not score——

Mr. Lilley: Is the test not stringent enough?

Mr. Bradley: That is not the point that we are making. We are asking how there can be an objective, one-off test where people on either side of the divide may score totally differently in different situations.

We have had many representations from disabled groups throughout the country. The Secretary of State mentioned merely one organisation, but we have heard from the Disability Alliance, the Disablement Income Group, citizens advice bureaux, the Spastics Society, the National Association for Mental Health, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, Arthritis Care, and other organisations up and down the country. All of them say that they do not accept the criteria which have been laid down.

The problem with the Secretary of State saying that the criteria will be stretched to include moving targets is that those organisations have been asked to consult on the details. They have not had an opportunity—and, from what I understand, although I hope to be corrected, they will not have a new opportunity—to be re-consulted once the 80 experts have come up with a new assessment for medical conditions. There are conditions, such as arthritis and MS, which change over time and from day to day. Pain be managed on one day and people may be able to undertake tasks, but the mere fact that they have undertaken those tasks disables them again in the future.

For example, the MS Society has said that disability in general, and MS in particular, takes many different forms and levels of severity. Therefore, the society feels that it is impossible to set a cut-off point or a threshold between capacity and incapacity. That is supported by the fact that many people with relatively minor disabilities are unable to work, and yet some people can work even though they have a severe disability.

That sort of assessment and wide-ranging discretion are crucial when determining people's incapacity. They are also crucial in determining not only a person's incapacity for their occupation—we will return to that point on Committee—but a definition of all work. We have heard tonight that many people may be able to undertake work from their previous occupation, but certainly will not be able to take on any occupation that the Employment Service throws at them. Those jobs could include manual or clerical work, and administrative and technical tasks. That wide range of considerations, as well as the current economic and unemployment situation, must be taken into account when there is a proper assessment about people's incapacity.

The Government's sole motive is to save money. We have seen from the research, and the Government have said, that there are thousands of people on invalidity benefit now who should not be. Opposition Members do not defend people who illegitimately receive invalidity benefit. However, all the research that has been done, including research commissioned by the Department of Social Security such as "Why are there so many long-term sick in Britain?" by Disney and Webb's research in 1991 and "An analysis of the growth in invalidity benefit claims" by Holmos, Lynch and Molho in 1991 show that the cause of the extra claims is not limited to people who, in the Government's terms, are simply swinging the lead. There is a range of complicated factors which must be taken into consideration before draconian measures such as the Bill are introduced.

As we have heard, even the permanent secretary to the Department of Social Security, Sir Michael Partridge, said in evidence to the Public Accounts Committee:

"the theory of increased numbers due to fraud is not borne out by research."

He said that the principal reasons were prolonged unemployment and the move to community care. That was the reason that the Department's own permanent secretary gave for the increase in invalidity benefit. The reason is not the other factors that Conservative Members have used so dubiously without attaching figures to their arguments.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said that a survey of GPs had come up with a reason for opposing invalidity benefit. However, he could not tell us how many GPs were surveyed in that report. Would he like to give us that figure now? He cannot. We know that only 40 GPs were surveyed. They were probably all fundholding GPs too busy drawing up contracts to sign sickness certificates.

We are short of time and we must bring the debate to a conclusion. I assure the Secretary of State that, whatever he believes, the Labour party will oppose the Bill line by line vigorously in Parliament and throughout the country. We have the support of the people of Britain. They know that economic mismanagement has brought the measure before the House. They know and disability groups throughout the country know. The press knows. Today, we saw in *The Times* the headlines "Back-door benefit cuts for severely disabled" and "Benefits curb may create more jobless". We have heard tonight that that is the fact. There will be 200,000 extra people on the unemployment register as a result of the Bill alone.

I warn the Minister that an article in *The Times* today said that the measure was more controversial than the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill or the Finance Bill. We shall ensure that that controversy goes from the House back into the country. We will oppose the Bill vigorously every step of the way.

9.42 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): In concluding the debate, I shall endeavour to deal with some of the points raised by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley). I am sure that we shall have a few weeks of energetic activity in which we shall go into all the points in greater detail. I look forward with relish to that time.

I begin by reiterating the fundamental aims of the Bill. There has been a great deal of distortion and misrepresentation during our debate today. The Bill aims to ensure, and I believe that it will do so, that those who are not able to work through sickness or disability receive appropriate help through an affordable system, that those who are able to work are helped so to do and that resources are not squandered on those who are able to work but do not seek to work. I should have thought that few would challenge those principles. I am grateful to several of my hon. Friends who have expressed their strong support for those principles during the debate.

I dispute the assertion of the hon. Member for Withington that those principles do not have support in the country. As I have gone round the country discussing the Bill, I have found that few have challenged them. In essence, the Bill seeks to return the benefit presently called invalidity benefit, to be called incapacity benefit under the new system, to its original purpose.

It will ensure that those who are genuinely incapable of work due to long-term sickness or disability will be helped. Those who are unemployed or who are not working for other reasons will be able to turn to other benefits for support.

Given that the Government had witnessed the growth in the take-up of invalidity benefit over a number of years, it was right for us to consider the reasons behind that and to decide on the priorities that we should set for the future. I totally dispute the point made by the hon. Member for Withington about a gap between the approach of my right hon. Friend, myself and the permanent secretary to the Department of Social Security. The evidence that he gave before the Public Accounts Committee was exactly in accordance with the arguments that my right hon. Friend and I have put forward in support of the Bill.

The original purpose of the benefit has been altered, sometimes gradually and sometimes dramatically, by alterations over years in case law. Its purpose has been changed not by legislation passed by the House but by judgments in case law and commissioners' decisions. Those decisions have altered the background against which the benefit has existed and the way in which it has been administered.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It is a question not of changing over the years, but of changing over the weeks. A new trend and fashion of "back to basics" has meant back to basics for the most vulnerable in our society. The right hon. Gentleman's remarks are a gloss on a crude and unacceptable philosophy.

Mr. Scott: I suppose that there is safety in numbers for the members of the Opposition Front Bench if they can intervene, seriatim, on such matters. I do not accept for a single moment what the hon. Gentleman said. Any responsible Government, having seen the growth in take-up of invalidity benefit, would want to look back to the origins of the legislation and ensure that it was still doing the job for which it was designed. That benefit is the second largest and fastest growing benefit in the social security system. It is absolutely right that we should take a fresh look at it.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is something strange about an Opposition who one day say that the taxation is too high and then the next day say that public expenditure is too low?

Mr. Scott: I agree totally with my hon. Friend.

A number of points were raised in the debate about the structure and shape of the benefit and whether the way in which it is targeted—or focused, as I would prefer to call it—is being properly undertaken.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) said that any change in the benefit should be subject to further debate. We have had such a debate today and I am certain that we will have further debates in Committee. The Labour party has been very active in

[Mr. Scott]

criticising the existing social security system, but it is silent about any alternative that it is prepared to put forward. If we were to take every item of the Opposition's criticism and imagined that they would translate that into legislative action once they got back into office, the shadow Chancellor might be in need of receipt of the benefit himself.

Mr. Wigley: The right hon. Gentleman referred to people being fit for work. Can he confirm that the Government or the Benefits Agency sent out guidelines during 1993 to local officers defining the sort of work that might be appropriate for people currently receiving invalidity benefit, including categories such as artist's model? Was that the Government's intention? Will they now withdraw those guidelines if they issued them?

Mr. Scott: The guidance was given to local officers about the administration of the benefit. It has been suggested that individuals were advised to try for particular jobs. If someone is found fit for work, he is given a list of jobs that he might consider. No one tells him to take a specific job.

The agency is doing its best, rightly, I believe, to give guidance to individuals who are found fit for work about the sort of employment that they might seek. I believe that that guidance is absolutely right and in accordance with the agency's commitment to help those who come to it for help.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) spoke of a loss of benefit. Many people listening to our debate or reading about it in the newspapers may fear that current claimants will have their benefits undermined or altered. It is worth reiterating, therefore, that all existing invalidity benefit claimants will get the rate of pay that they are receiving at the time of the change.

The hon. Member for Worthington also referred to the additional pension. I have not identified the quotation that he read out, but since then I have made it explicitly clear that existing claimants would have their benefits uprated, except for the additional pension, which would be frozen at the rate applying when the change came.

We estimate that about 70 per cent. of claimants at the time of the changeover will not qualify in future for help from income support because they have other resources and help to which they will be able to turn.

Mr. McMaster: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: No. I was given only 20 minutes to wind up —or rather less than that—and I have already given way twice. It is only fair that I should be allowed to press on.

The hon. Member for Garscadden also mentioned the taxation of incapacity benefit. It is common knowledge in this House that the Government's policy for a number of years has been that invalidity benefit should be brought into tax. The principle is simple; it was the practice that frustrated the Government's intention. A benefit paid as a replacement for earnings, as invalidity benefit manifestly is, should be subject to tax in the same way as earned income. This will bring the tax treatment of the new benefit into line with retirement pensions and unemployment benefit—the two other main contributory benefits.

As I have already said, existing invalidity benefit will not be taxed. The few beneficiaries who pay tax at the moment will do so only because they have other taxable income, such as an occupational pension or permanent health insurance.

Mr. Alan Howarth *rose*——

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend made a long speech.

Mr. Howarth: I am therefore extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend. Although the principle of taxing invalidity benefit is likely to be right—after all, it replaces earnings—does my right hon. Friend accept that it is also worth considering that the vast majority of the recipients of incapacity benefits will be people on relatively low incomes who face additional costs because of their incapacity? Will he therefore be willing to argue the case for a disability tax allowance analogous to the elderly person's tax allowance or the blind person's tax allowance —and I welcome the fact that the Government have increased the latter? Such an allowance would provide an acceptable basis for the introduction of taxation of the benefit.

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend knows as well as I do that matters of taxation are for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor—so are allowances. It will be perfectly possible to ensure that tax of the new benefit is properly collected.

The hon. Member for Garscadden said that it was inequitable that a tax should apply only to the new benefit, not to current benefits. Ever since I became a Minister in the Department it has been a principle that people receiving a benefit should not in general have their expectations changed when new arrangements are introduced. That is to say that people receiving invalidity benefit have adjusted to that income, and I do not believe that it would be right to change that by making them pay tax. Of course, over the years an increasing percentage of those who are on the new benefit will come within the tax system.

With his usual commitment and interest in this matter, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) asked whether a claimant's general practitioner is the best placed person to decide whether a claimant is medically incapable of work. That issue was raised by other hon. Members, some of whom held the opposite view. It has been impressed on me that GPs have expressed increasing reluctance to act as gatekeepers for this benefit. They perceive it as inimical to the patient-doctor relationship. Expecting GPs to certify patients as sick, let alone to apply complex social security rules, has been a considerable and, many GPs believe, an unreasonable burden upon them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) said that some general practitioners might be the better people to make these decisions, but there is a danger that GPs, who develop a close relationship with many of their patients, could be under pressures quite distinct from the independence of judgment that is required to decide whether somebody is entitled to the benefit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) asked whether the test had enough personalised input from the GP who knows the patient. The GP will still be asked to provide the claimant's diagnosis and principal disabling conditions. In some cases, the GP may be asked to supply further information or an opinion, but he will not be asked for an opinion on the capacity for work. That relieves GPs from their gatekeeper role, and they greatly welcome that change.

I shall now deal with the medical test. I sometimes despair of Opposition arguments. If the Government had blithely presented a fixed medical test without any consultation or the involvement of outsiders or professionals, there would have been an outcry from the Opposition that we were not listening. Some 4,000 copies of the document have been circulated to organisations of and for disabled people, to experts of one sort or another and others who are properly interested in the matter. The Government should be given credit for that and not criticised.

The 80 experts on the committee were recruited not to sign up to the details of the test, but to give their expert opinion of the way in which the Government were tackling this matter.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister give way?

Hon. Members: Give way.

Madam Speaker: Order. Is the Minister giving way?

Mr. Scott: No, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Right. Hon. Members should sit down.

Mr. Scott: Already it has been possible to react to a number of suggestions by the experts and we shall seriously consider any further suggestions.

Some Opposition Members have derided the Bill as a narrow, cost-cutting exercise. I utterly refute that charge. As a Social Security Minister since 1987, I recognise a widespread acceptance by all Governments in the developed world that, if expenditure on social protection programmes is not controlled, we shall end up like the last Labour Government, unable to pay even a Christmas bonus or to uprate benefits as they promised. We have no intention of going down that road.

We must recognise the imperative of ensuring that our system focuses help on those who really need it, thus ensuring that social security costs are sustainable for future generations. We must plan for a modern, realistic system that is attuned to the concept of a society that cares for those who need help and can provide it in an affordable way. Such an approach needs nerve, vision and courage —qualities notably lacking on the Opposition Benches. But we are determined to carry this work forward. The Bill is an earnest of our intent to do just that. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes, 313, Noes 272.

Division No. 87] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga

Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stem, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thomton, Sir Malcolm
Thumham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bemie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(G^{t} Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot

Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Brian Redhead

10.13 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the number of comments in the House today following the death of Brian Redhead yesterday, would it be possible for you to give some thought to finding a way for the House to express its views about people who, in a way, become honorary Members although they are not honourable Members? I think that there are people out there who are, as it were, additions to the House of Parliament. I would ask you to give us some advice and perhaps to say something on our behalf that records how much we value those people outside the place who have served the political process as well as, if not better than, we do.

Madam Speaker: Of course, as the hon. Gentleman knows, it is not a point of order, but there is no one anywhere who had greater respect for Mr. Brian Redhead's professionalism than I have. I felt all day very sad about it. I made a resolution that when there is a memorial service I shall certainly attend it as Speaker. Quite apart from his professionalism, Mr. Redhead was a lovely man. I felt that he was a human being with sunshine in his voice.

Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

10.10 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled Persons (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses incurred by a Minister of the Crown in consequence of that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.

The resolution is in the form which will be familiar to the House. I do not propose to give an especially lengthy explanation of it as we have had a long and wide-ranging debate on the purpose of the Bill. Suffice to say that a money resolution is required for three reasons. The first is because of the abolition of the lower rate of statutory sick pay a single rate of SSP will increase the expenses of the Government as an employer. Secondly, the proposals widen access to disability working allowance and severe disablement allowance so that people undertaking training work after receiving incapacity benefit would be able to qualify for both benefits on completion of their training. That will increase expenditure on those two benefits. There will also be some increase in expenditure on the income-related benefits. Finally, the Bill will increase administrative expenses. The financial details are in the normal note on the financial effects of the Bill.

I commend the resolution to the House.

10.11 pm

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): That was a very brief explanation. Many contributions were made and questions asked on Second Reading which were not answered in the summing-up and have not been properly discussed in the Minister's short contribution. My hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) and other hon. Friends asked many interesting and probing questions. We had hoped that the Minister would respond to them.

It is useful to refer to the financial implications of the Bill. There are more people on the Government Benches at this stage of the deliberation of the Bill than there were during the debate. If they only cared to consider that aspect of the measure, they would see that it is proposed that the Bill will achieve gross savings of £550 million in the first year, increasing to £1,450 million in 1996-97.

Those are interesting figures if we take them in relation to their offset costs, which are also set out in the Bill. The offset costs are, as stated, £135 million in 1995-96 and £265 million in 1996-97. There are very significant differences between what the offset costs will be as opposed to the original savings. If one considers those figures in percentage terms, it is interesting to note that in the first year the offset costs are in the region of 25 per cent. of the savings, but in year two they drop to 18 per cent. I would be interested to know why there is a change in that relationship. What is changing in terms of those two years' costs against gross savings?

That also raises a question about the breakdown of those figures—the £135 million in year one and the £265 million in year two. To what do they relate? In the financial effects of the Bill, it tells us that those figures are because of additional expenditure on income support and unemployment benefit. It would be useful if the Minister could tell us the breakdown of income support and unemployment benefit in year one and in year two and it would be interesting to know how many people will be affected by those sums of money. It is important to consider not only those sums of money—£135 million and £265 million—but the fact that many claimants fall into each of those categories which make up the costs. I am sure that that would be of interest to the House and to the many people who are likely to be affected.

It would also be useful to consider the gross savings —£550 million in year one and £1·45 billion in year two. It would be useful if the Minister gave a breakdown of those savings. What is the make-up of those savings? How much will arise from the cut in benefit? I use that terminology because, undoubtedly, many people will see the new benefit as a cut, as opposed to existing benefits. What proportion of those savings will arise as a result of changes in eligibility?

As my hon. Friends said on Second Reading, there are many specialist organisations with an interest in the Bill. Of course, it is not appropriate to go over all the arguments again, but I am sure that those organisations would be interested in answers to those points, so that they are in a position to understand better what the Government are doing to the people who they represent.

More interestingly, why does the projection stop at year two? For instance, why has not the longer term projection been shown? Since 2000 is not that far away, why cannot the Government give a reasonable projection of what they have in mind for those categories at risk in our society? It would not be too difficullt to make that projection, at least I would not think so, because in June of the past year, a famous leaked document gave figures in a slightly different combination on the changes to the benefit and gross savings were projected into year 2000. If it was good enough at that time to speculate on legislation and to deal with proposals between the Departments of Social Security and the Treasury, it would be right to have that projection laid out now that we are discussing the Bill.

It is worth pointing out that the figures in that leaked document showed that there would be a projected saving of £180 million in year one and £495 million in year two, rising to savings of £1·3 billion in 2000. If one sets that against the current year two saving of £1·45 billion, something radical has happened in the meantime and even greater savings are being imposed as a consequence. If it was good enough and proper enough at that time to try to arrive at savings projections, in terms of discussions that I assume took place as a result of Treasury pressure on the Department of Social Security to come up with savings, why not tell us about the long-term projections of savings now?

I know that some of my hon. Friends want to raise other points as extensions of those questions and may want to comment on the financial effects of the Bill. Those are important issues which require answers and I hope that the Minister will be properly briefed by his Parliamentary Private Secretary so that he is able to answer them when the time comes.

10.24 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): The Bill is terribly important. There is something wrong somewhere. In 1953, the year in which she came to the throne, Her Majesty the Queen sent out 210 telegrams to 100-year-old people. Last year she sent out nearly 3,000. That is encouraging for us all because it means that we are all living longer. [HON. MEMBERS: "Your turn soon, Geoffrey."] I have a few years to go yet. How does that increase square with the increase in invalidity benefit? With people living very much longer, and with a national health service which we are all told—and which we believe—is the best in the world, how can it be right that so many people are claiming invalidity benefit?

The number of people in receipt of the benefit has almost trebled in the past 15 years. When it was first introduced, there were 550,000 claimants. Last year, 1·5 million people were claiming it. Given that this is a nation whose health is improving, something is wrong somewhere.

Expenditure on invalidity benefit has almost doubled in the past 10 years, even allowing for inflation. In cash terms, it has more than trebled—from £1·6 billion in 1982-83 to £6·1 billion in 1992-93. Those figures are astounding. Suppose that the benefit remained unreformed. Projections tell us that if the benefit were left as it is, spending on it would rise to £8 billion in 1995-96. That money has to be found. The Government do not have any money. I am sure that Opposition Members will be amazed to learn that it is all taxpayers' money and the money of those who pay contributions. It is because we have been so compassionate and have wanted to support people who are genuine invalids that invalidity benefit has been so attractive when compared with other benefits.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dickens: I will give way to the learned doctor.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. May I remind him that invalidity benefit is a contributory benefit and point out that all those of my constituents who I know to be in receipt of invalidity benefit are fine, decent and honourable people who in no way can be described as scroungers.

Mr. Dickens: The hon. Gentleman used the word "scroungers"; I did not, and I hope that those concerned remember who used the word. The Government seek to ensure that those in genuine need get the help that they richly deserve. That is what compassionate caring Governments are all about. We must bring home to the Opposition the fact that they do not have a monopoly on caring and compassion, although they like to tell the nation that they do. That is unfair. We care just as deeply as they do.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): But more intelligently.

Mr. Dickens: We are not all as intelligent, but some of us are.

Something is wrong when people tell me that someone they have seen walking past their house on a crutch all week has suddenly put his crutch under his arm and run for the bus. Those people would love to be on the benefit that he is on, but that cannot be. Take the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). He comes limping in on a stick. I myself have arrived on crutches on occasion. I have had a trapped nerve from time to time—*[Interruption.]* No, not between the ears. I am sure that my doctor would show great compassion for me and give me a certificate if I needed invalidity benefit. Ah, here is the hon. Member for Workington. I was giving him great praise. He is a man who has not claimed benefit but struggles on at work. There are a lot of people like him around the country.

It is so easy. But what are we doing? We are making it absolutely impossible for the GP to act as our gatekeeper and say who should receive that benefit, which is much higher than other benefits. General practitioners say that it is difficult because they have to put the patients' interests first and foremost. The GP sometimes knows that a patient is out of work or when he is going to retire. I understand that a GP can be placed in an impossible position when he or she has built up a relationship with a patient.

The system that we are to adopt will be much better. Patients can fill in the forms themselves. I am hoping that we shall produce a shopping list of afflictions that will almost automatically warrant the benefit. There must be many such afflictions about which there would be no dispute. The vast majority——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We are no longer on Second Reading, but on the money resolution, to which the hon. Gentleman must relate his comments.

Mr. Dickens: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. You always remind me of such matters. However, had you been in the Chair a little earlier you would have known that I was replying to some figures given by the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram). I felt entitled to do so, but, having done so and having received your guidance, I shall now move on.

I was talking about the person who walks by with a crutch and then suddenly tucks it under his arm and runs for the bus. Others have reported to me that they sometimes see people who receive invalidity benefit kicking a football with their children or grandchildren at weekends. Other people struggle with arthritis and various conditions, but do not claim invalidity benefit; even were they to do so, they probably would not receive it.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth). I agree with the hon. Gentleman that people should not cheat to obtain money. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in condemning companies such as Unicorn which, assisted by the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), received £200,000 from a Government organisation and was then completely forgiven and did not have to repay the money?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention was not relevant to the subject under discussion.

Mr. Dickens: I shall not respond to the hon. Gentleman's intervention, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you have ruled it out of order.

With the health service and the——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Money resolution.

Mr. Dickens: Yes, it is the money resolution—I am most obliged. We need the money to ensure that the Bill can be successfully drafted and we can deal with

[Mr. Dickens]

amendments. It is important to the nation—to the taxpayers and those who pay contributions. We cannot allow such people to be bled by others who are not genuine claimants. By the same token, it is important that those who are in genuine need of the support, receive it, which is what government is all about.

The vast majority of people on invalidity benefit have nothing to fear. If they are genuinely in need—they know whether they are—they have nothing to fear. We owe it to the nation—to those who pay contributions and tax—to ensure that the money goes where it is due. Therefore, we need a money resolution to complete the terms of the important legislation. We can no longer allow such extravagant expenditure; we must control waste, which includes giving benefits to those who are not entitled to them.

People can contribute by filling in a form listing all their ailments. If the Department's doctors wish to see such claimants, they will be seen. Most cases will involve genuine claimants whose ailments and diseases will be included on the shopping list so that they qualify for benefit virtually automatically. I am sure that the Minister can clarify that.

Other hon. Members are dying to contribute to the debate. I know the sparkling contributions that are made night after night, particularly at this time, to keep us all happy and up so late. Therefore, I shall now allow those other hon. Members to contribute.

10.34 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Following the series of prejudices that the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) has just advertised, I should like to direct the attention of the House back to the Bill's possible financial effects on communities such as mine. I refer not just to individuals but to whole communities. Putting aside the argument about the tests, I want to make the point that this measure envisages the withdrawal of the purchasing power of about £550 million in 1995-96 and the removal of £1·4 billion from communities such as mine. Collective purchasing power will be affected quite seriously.

That is a very important point. Most of the expenditure that is generated by a benefit of this kind is quickly recycled into the local community in one way or another. That is why I say that in constituencies such as mine the Bill will result in a considerable reduction in purchasing power.

I have been working on a study of Whitehall's reaction to the economic crisis that communities such as mine faced in the 1930s. There are some very interesting and eerie parallels between the 1930s and the 1980s. Let me mention one of the most interesting differences. The purchasing power of people in communities such as the one that I represent survived the recession of the 1980s, despite the fact that, in many ways, it was just as bad as that of the 1930s. In constituencies such as Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, 40 per cent. of men of working age are now economically inactive. More than 20 per cent. of them are unemployed, and the rest are otherwise economically inactive.

The difference between the recession of the 1930s and that of the 1980s is accounted for by the post-war pattern of regular employment, during which people accumulated contributory rights and benefits. Forty years of reasonably regular full employment, with occupational and contribution schemes, have rendered the recession of the 1980s recession far less disastrous than that of the 1930s. In the past decade, and more, some of the money deriving from those rights and benefits was drawn upon.

In the mid-1980s, many disabled people took the small copper handshake that was available to them, together with the benefits to which they were entitled—in particular, invalidity benefit. A combination of those benefits and occupational pensions sustained purchasing power that would otherwise have collapsed disastrously. That was the major difference between the 1930s and the 1980s.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the people to whom he has referred had to stop work early because of ill health? The nature of the work done by people in constituencies such as his and mine, as well as those of many other Opposition Members, renders them unfit to continue to work until the normal retirement age. Only the protection that they have at present has enabled them to get by.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend has just described the situation in my constituency. Many people suffering from some form of disability carried on while they were in long-standing employment. When that employment was broken, they accepted early retirement with modest redundancy compensation in addition to their invalidity benefit. My hon. Friend was right to remind people that we are talking about a contributory benefit. One qualifies for it only by working and building up contributions.

I am drawing attention to the qualitive difference between the recession of the 1980s and that of the 1930s. In my constituency, regular employment, as opposed to casual labour, enabled people to build up a series of benefits, which have been drawn upon in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Thus, people have been able to sustain a certain amount of purchasing power. We have not seen the collapse that was so evident and led to mass unemployment in the 1930s. People have somehow been able to sustain a reasonably decent standard of living—nothing great, but at least different from the position in the 1930s. Invalidity benefit has played a significant role in that, because it is not means-tested. It is a benefit as of right. In addition, it is a valuable benefit for so many people who have disabilities.

What will be the impact in communities such as mine of the large-scale and substantial withdrawal of potential purchasing power, as set out in the financial effects of the Bill? The removal of £550 million worth of purchasing power from a significant group of society will have a significant effect. In the Merthyr, Cynon and Rhymney valleys social security area, 28,000 people receive benefit. One must assume that a fair percentage of those people will not qualify for the new benefit. In addition, a large percentage of claimants who would normally have had justified claims, will not receive benefit. That would have to happen or the savings could not be made. What will happen to a significant element of the purchasing power in our societies as a result of the financial effects of the Bill? Has anyone thought the point through?

I would not call it connivance, but we are all aware that invalidity benefit played a major role in some people's decisions to retire early in the 1980s and not to fight for their jobs to the bitter end. That benefit was one of the reasons why the miners left their jobs voluntarily. They knew that they could carry with them their redundancy payments and, if they had the appropriate disabilities, they would also receive invalidity benefit.

Invalidity benefit has played a role in the restructuring of employment in many of our communities. It has led to the high inactivity rates of the kind to which I have referred. As I said, 40 per cent. of men of working age in my community are inactive. The notion that people in their mid-50s will be able to return suddenly to the labour market is wrong.

An absurd example was brought to my attention recently. A person appealed against the board's decision to remove invalidity benefit. It was accepted that he could scarcely walk or stand. However, it was suggested that he might find a job as a security officer in a masonic lodge. That is the kind of unbelievable and curious proposal that is already being made under the existing system to deny people from benefiting from rights of that kind.

Mr. Dickens: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rowlands: No, I will not give way as the hon. Gentleman has already had a fair crack of the whip.

I wanted to draw to the attention of the House the rather broader context in which the figures should be seen and express concern, which I hope the House shares, about the impact of the financial effects of the Bill on communities such as mine.

10.42 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): This money resolution is the consequence of the "back to basics" policy referred to at the Tory party conference. Let there be no mistake about that. The Secretary of State for Social Security has been accused by the Prime Minister of hijacking the Prime Minister's policy and we are now discussing the financial consequences of that theft of the Prime Minister's policy.

I should like to think that the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) did not mean some of the things that he said. He was truly insulting to the weakest, poorest and least advantaged in our country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) said earlier, in two years we will take £1·4 billion of purchasing power from the poorest and the people who can least afford to lose that money from their spending power. Those people and the local economies will suffer drastically.

The Minister said that part of the reason for the money resolution is to finance an increase in expenditure to implement the new formula for removing 400,000, 500,000, or 600,000 from invalidity benefit.

Conservative Members are attacking people whom they say are receiving the benefit when they should not be in receipt of it. They said, literally, that they are defrauding the state by claiming benefit to which they are not entitled.

Mr. Dickens: Did the hon. Gentleman listen to his hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who said that coal miners were made redundant and that they came out of the mines—fit to be coal miners—and claimed invalidity benefit? By the hon. Gentleman's own admission, there are people who are playing the system.

Mr. Rowlands: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Nothing that I said could be interpreted in that way, and I ask the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) to withdraw that comment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Chair is not responsible for the accuracy of what is said.

Mr. Hood: As a former miner and a former union secretary, I will explain just how that happened in the coal industry. When pits were being closed and people were being made redundant, a sizeable proportion of the work force were off work, sick and disabled. People were not on invalidity benefit just because they were working one day and not the next. That is nonsense and it proves that that is the Government's thinking. They do not understand how the system works. I do not see many people on invalidity benefit who are not entitled to be on it. Hon. Members will be receiving letters from constituents who are on low incomes through invalidity benefit and who will lose more than £30 a week. We are talking of perhaps as much as 30 to 40 per cent. of income. If Conservative Members lost 30 or 40 per cent. of their incomes, we would hear one or two noises.

There is nothing to be proud of when the Minister tells us that the money resolution allows extra expenditure to work out a system that deprives the sick and disabled from what they have been receiving, which at present is not a lot of money. We are not talking about massive amounts of money. All too often, we are talking about the difference between surviving and not surviving. We should be aware of what we are doing.

The Bill has nothing to do with providing better management of our social security system; it is about false savings. When we take from the least advantaged—the sick and the disabled—something else has to give. Something else has to provide for them. It might be hospitals or nursing homes. When we cannot sustain people in the community after cutting their incomes, they have to be institutionalised, which puts further burdens on the public purse.

The measure will prove not to be a saving in real terms. It is harsh and—dare I use the word in these times—truly immoral. There is nothing to be proud of in the money resolution. I ask Conservative Members not to mock those who are least able to defend themselves. I remind them that there is a duty on the Government to seek to improve the quality of life of their poorest citizen. Any Government who seek not to do that are immoral. Conservative Members should think of that as they walk through the Lobby tonight.

10.48 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Minister introduced the money resolution by suggesting that there are three aspects involved, two of which involved increased expenditure on benefits and one which he dismissed in a sentence—"increased costs of administration." That administration, which involves a staff increase of approximately 1,100, is designed to replace doctors who have been accepted as people of integrity and honesty. The administration will get people away from doctors, so that the hand of Whitehall can transfer people from benefits such as invalidity benefit and put them on reduced income support, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) has said.

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

There is a rich air of hypocrisy about the Government. Most Conservative Members receive their income as Members of Parliament and supplement it with outside earnings and speculation, and they talk about discipline. When anybody talks about discipline in this place, it is never meant for themselves. It is always about other people, and it is always about other people who are in a much inferior financial position. The Minister, for example, dismissed in a sentence the administration and the costs which will be incurred. That administration will bear down on ordinary people and will knock a few quid a week off their expenditure to get the Government out of the economic hole in which they have got themselves by their incompetence. The poor—yet again—will pay.

The system introduced by the Minister tonight is extremely unfair and incompetent in a parliamentary sense. Parliament has been told that there will be administrative costs estimated at £40 million, which will certainly involve the employment of 1,100 people. What would be the normal response of the Tories when they were told that 1,100 extra civil servants were to be taken on? They would look askance. However, they will not do so in this case because those 1,100 people will be applying regulations to oppress the poor, sick and needy.

The Minister has not included the outline of the way in which the legislation will be presented. It is not in the Bill, and it will be brought before the House by regulations and by statutory instruments. In some cases, they will be affirmative statutory instruments and we will have a chance to debate the issue in a debate just twice the length of tonight's debate—an hour and a half instead of 45 minutes. We will have no chance of making amendments. All Government Members who troop through the Lobby tonight will have no chance to amend the legislation which will be brought forward by the Minister and his civil servants and by nobody else. It will be a fait accompli.

Some of the legislation will be put forward under the negative procedure, so unless there is a prayer there will be no debate at all. That is how £40 million and 1,100 people will be administered—they will be simply handed over to a ministerial fiat. The Tories will go on accepting that, and then they will go outside and talk about democracy. Their actions will in effect hand over important powers to a Minister who will then administer enormous sums of money.

My hon. Friends have made it clear that the Minister will exercise significant powers through the negative procedure, as the Leader of the House rarely concedes time for the Opposition to debate prayers. The Minister's powers may also wreck the recovery in several areas, particularly in industrial areas, where many people on invalidity benefit are concentrated by virtue of the work that they have undertaken.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will my hon. Friend consider the points which were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) about the consequences for my area? I estimate that, in west Cumbria, we receive £16 million per annum in invalidity benefit. If the Government were to cut benefits on the scale that they proposed today and tightened the criteria, as much as half of that money, depending on how heavy the cuts were, would no longer go into west Cumbria. That would take £8 million out of the local economy. It would have a major impact on small businesses, retailers and shopkeepers.

It one takes the turnover of a good shop to be about £100,000, simply reducing a single benefit on which a community has become reliant might affect 40, 50, 60, 70 or 80 shops. That is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney was making. The reductions will have a considerable impact on many of our areas.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is right. The impact is not in question. The financial effects of the Bill are outlined in the introductory paragaphs, which say that the Bill is designed to save £550 million in 1995-96 and one and a half billion pounds the following year. That is £2 billion in two years. Those are significant sums of money. The money resolution is designed to authorise expenditure on the Whitehall bureaucrats who will oppress the poor and sick on invalidity benefit to produce those savings. There are other savings elsewhere, but by and large that is a reasonable example to use.

The proposed changes to invalidity benefit, together with the taxes that the Tory Government have increased more than any Labour Government ever did, will mean that the so-called recovery, which Tory Members—*[Interruption.]*—including the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who is babbling on at the moment—proclaimed will certainly not move much further. Indeed, we shall move back into recession. I see that the Minister is getting slightly restless; he is raising his eyebrows. His usual attitude to oppressing the poor is one of studied indifference.

I shall complete my remarks by saying that the money resolution is not needed and not wanted. We want to employ more people, we do not want them to oppress people on benefit. We do not want to attack doctors, as the Bill does. Conservative Members have given hints, nods and winks that there are people on invalidity benefit who are dodging the column: no names, no doctor has been mentioned. There has been a general smear of people in the worst position of all—those on low incomes, and invalids to boot. We should vote against the money resolution, thus demonstrating our protest against a wicked, evil, uncaring Government.

10.57 pm

Mr. Scott: I recognise the point made by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and reinforced by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). It was overstated because one must remember that all existing beneficiaries of invalidity benefit will continue to receive it. Everything apart from the additional pension will be uprated year by year. So the purchasing power only of those who failed the new test for one reason or another would be removed. If they failed the test, they would go back into work or on to other benefits. The impact on purchasing power in local areas has been overstated.

I promise the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney that I understand the impact that invalidity benefit had when large-scale redundancies took place.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: With the greatest respect, I do not have time.

I understand that invalidity benefit helped to massage the process of redundancies and probably did a good job. But it was not the purpose for which invalidity benefit was established. Nor should we retain that approach to the new incapacity benefit. It is worth reminding ourselves that existing beneficiaries will not be affected by the change.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) asked why no long-term projections, beyond the next two years, had been offered. The figures given in the money resolution relate to the remainder of the public expenditure survey period, which is up to and including 1996-97. The hon. Gentleman also asked about the split between total savings and the savings that would result from the application of the new medical test in 1995-96. I estimate that savings of £200 million will be made.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about ratio costs and the savings changes to be made in the next two years. That interaction is a complex one, and to try to explain it in the remaining moments of the debate would be a mistake. I will write to the hon. Gentleman to make the position clear.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 139.

Division No. 88] **[11 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David

Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses incurred by a Minister of the Crown in consequence of that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.

SUNDAY TRADING BILL

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the Order [29th November] relating to committal, Standing Committee A be discharged from considering any new Clause or new Schedule relating to the employment of shop workers in respect of the Sunday Trading Bill and that any such new Clause or new Schedule be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

HEALTH

Ordered,

That Mr. James Clappison be discharged from the Health Committee and Mr. Iain Duncan Smith be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Ambulance Service (Staffordshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

11.13 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I welcome and am grateful for this opportunity to raise a most pressing matter for the people of north Staffordshire. It is the issue of why the non-emergency patient transport services contract has been let unfairly and in such a way that not only will the current level of provision for the people of north Staffordshire be cut, but the entire ambulance service in Staffordshire will be undermined, including accident and emergency, and our excellent trauma centre.

It is a bit like a "Casualty" script. I first learned of the position just before Christmas, when a constituent wrote to me:

> "It not only degrades our jobs—which we do with pride and dignity—but also degrades the National Health Service for which our fathers and forefathers fought hard and long."

Along with other hon. Members representing north Staffordshire, who are present this evening, I have gone into the matter in considerable detail. We have met ambulance workers in Kidsgrove and Stoke; we have tabled an early-day motion; we have raised the matter in business questions; we have met the leader of Stoke-on-Trent city council, and members of the community health council; we have met representatives of North Staffordshire district health authority and the West Midlands ambulance trust.

We have met Staffordshire people who are worried about the future of our ambulance service. Last Thursday, we accompanied ambulance workers who had come down —in their ambulance—to present the Prime Minister with a petition bearing thousands of signatures. I raised the matter in a debate on waste and bureaucracy in the national health service, while eight workers lobbied Parliament in an attempt to retain the present level of ambulance work in Staffordshire.

So far, however, all that has been to no avail. That is why I particularly welcome this opportunity to put the details of the case to the Minister, together with my colleagues from north Staffordshire.

Last week, Parliament was lobbied by eight of the lowest-paid workers. They simply want to continue providing the level of service that they currently provide, and to keep their jobs without having their wages cut from £4·86 an hour to £3·26. That says it all. They care—not just about their jobs, but about the people who depend on their service. They do not want that service to be cut.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Does not the crazy system of tendering on which the Government insist have one inevitable result? It drives down pay and conditions, and in this instance it will lead to a reduction in the excellent service that Staffordshire ambulance people have provided until now.

Ms Walley: Absolutely: my hon. Friend has put it in a nutshell.

I hope that the Minister will take full account of what has been said. It has been pointed out that the ambulance workers could end up earning nothing at all, because pay rates will be cut more and more. Why on earth, for the sake of market forces dogma, should any Government in their right mind risk dismantling a quality ambulance service like ours in Staffordshire, which has been built up over the years by local people?

Has the Minister taken the trouble to visit Staffordshire and see the high standard of work for himself—and, equally important, the current level of service? Who was invited by the Secretary of State to advise the Department of Health on quality service? Why did the Department turn to Staffordshire for advice if it does not recognise Staffordshire's excellent standards?

Is the Minister aware that the Staffordshire ambulance trust prides itself on its training, its progressive career structure for both men and women and the interrelationship between non-emergency and accident and emergency services, which complement each other? When we met the chairman of North Staffordshire district health authority, he expressed his concern about the possible implications for Staffordshire's accident and emergency services.

Why is not just the non-emergency but the accident and emergency service now under threat? Is it now deliberate Government policy to subject every part of the national health service to compulsory competitive tendering, or are there certain aspects, such as clinical services, which the Government can guarantee will not be privatised? Will the Minister give me an undertaking that in Staffordshire the accident and emergency contracts will not be put out to tender?

Where does the Minister draw the line? There is a very thin dividing line between accident and emergency work and non-emergency work, and we need to be aware of where that line is. That is why what is being done to the Staffordshire ambulance service is so important for the rest of the country, not just for people in Staffordshire.

I deal now with the details of the decision taken by the North Staffordshire hospital trust and the North Staffordshire district health authority, as the shadow combined health care trust was when the tendering process first began, to award the patient transport services contract to the West Midlands ambulance trust.

The decision means that the Staffordshire ambulance trust, which provides the service now and which also competed for the tender, is having to make redundant 72 of the most dedicated, hard-working and loyal staff anywhere in the country. I and my constituents know that. There is a sense of farce about every non-emergency worker being made redundant and 42 of the 72 being re-employed on reduced pay.

It could be said that the issue is entirely a matter for the trade unions, and that that which relates to employment legislation is a matter for Unison. I agree, and I hope that Unison, in which I have a declared interest, will be able to proceed with a legal challenge so that the transfer of undertakings safeguards, so reluctantly incorporated in last year's employment legislation, would apply. That, however, is not my concern now. My concern now is one of accountability and the way in which the specification for the patient contract service has been drawn up, handled and upheld by what I can only call bungling bureaucrats.

We should at least let the Minister satisfy himself that the patient transfer service contract has been market-tested fairly. Let him give us an assurance—later, if necessary, and at a separate meeting in Richmond house, if necessary —that what has been done was not in breach of NHS guidance, his own NHS guidance, which was modified only as recently as last November.

[Ms Walley]

I believe that, once the Minister has had the opportunity to examine in detail exactly what has happened, he will not come to any conclusion other than that the contract will have to be drawn up again.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Does my hon. Friend share my concern, which I hope the Minister will share, that, as the new trust is getting rid of the ambulance stations, ambulance staff will be required to take home their ambulances and park them outside their houses at night? They will have to take personal responsibility for their safety and care. If the ambulances are damaged, the staff will be personally responsible for any excess on the insurance policies. It seems an extraordinary element of a contract. I hope that the Minister will agree with my hon. Friend, our colleagues and me that it is not standard practice in the national health service, and is in breach of various staff conditions and assurances.

Ms Walley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. In our discussions with ambulance workers, it has been clear that it is expected that, on certain days, it will be necessary for workers to take their ambulances home with them after 8 pm.

When that was mentioned on BBC Radio Stoke, it caused an uproar among people listening to the radio. Like us, our constituents understand that, if an ambulance is parked outside someone's home at the moment, when there is an awful lot of car theft, there may be ambulance theft. What will happen on cold mornings or cold nights when it is not possible to start the ambulance because it has not been properly kept and maintained in a depot?

When we saw the new contract of employment, and when we had discussed it with the West Midlands ambulance trust, we were not satisfied with it. I do not think that the Minister can have any confidence that the new contract that has been drawn up will satisfactorily provide the patient services contract in north Staffordshire.

What has happened is lengthy, complex and technical. I know that the Minister comes from Bolton; like us, Bolton has a very good football team, although in Stoke-on-Trent we have two very good football teams. I am sure that he knows all about fair play, because he is a football supporter. I would like to ask him this evening about fair play.

Will the hon. Gentleman tell us why the EC services directive, which came into force on 1 July, does not apply in our case? Why do the Treasury guidance notes to that directive suggest otherwise? Does the Minister agree or disagree with the Treasury? Not everyone can get away with not following Treasury guidelines. Why does the regional health authority appear to be at odds with the Treasury? Why is it that the guidance notes updating those of June 1993, "Competing for Quality", endorsed by the Management Executive, have not been applied? How can there be any accountability when the Minister approves rules and regulations but they are not followed by the west midlands region and then the regional health authority and management outpost, acting as arbiter, say that the rules did not apply anyway?

There are many players in this casualty farce, which is fast becoming a tragedy in north Staffordshire. I see that the Minister is listening attentively, and I hope that he will reply to my arguments.

Just as my constituents and the constituents of my hon. Friends had no opportunity to voice their views to the national health service locally, so the Staffordshire ambulance trust has not been provided with an opportunity for a real hearing with real independent arbitration at the false arbitration which was organised recently.

There has not even been any natural justice as far as I can see, but we are asking for it through this debate. There is no way that Staffordshire ambulance trust would have been beaten by West Midlands in a fair match. Why was there insufficient detail in the original specification drawn up by the North Staffordshire hospital trust and the district health authority, subsequently to have been taken over by the shadow combined health care trust? That is bound to lead to cuts in service and quality.

Why, when Staffordshire ambulance trust offered to provide the relevant information, was that offer rejected? As a result, the Staffordshire ambulance trust had to cost its bid on the basis of actual activity levels, whereas the competing tenderers were free to make their own assumptions about the requirements. Why did a major player in the contract—Combined Health Care—appear to play no part at all?

I have recently had a letter from the chief executive of the North Staffordshire district health authority, telling me that I can expect a reply by the end of the month, but by the end of the month it will be too late to do anything about the quality of service and the jobs that we are talking about. The result, as I understand it, is that the contract will be varied to take into account mistakes made earlier. That is of no use to the Staffordshire ambulance trust, because it has lost the contract and been kicked out of play.

The result is that the hospital trust will be able to show a paper saving, a result of market testing, of about £250,000 when is comes to filling in the balance sheets on 1 April, but we say that that excludes the cost of redundancies. How can the Minister justify those redundancies? How much will the redundancies cost—about £100,000?

Nor does that clean balance sheet take any account whatever of the cost of setting up a new contract, which I guess will be about £75,000. Nor does that balance sheet take any account of the disposal of 37 good ambulances. How much will that cost? Will it cost about £500,000? How can we throw 37 good ambulances, which have been properly maintained in north Staffordshire, on the scrap heap? What kind of a health policy is that?

All those points do not even consider the demoralisation of staff, who are required to work longer hours for less money and to take their vehicles home, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) has already said, and to provide their own insurance cover. What kind of a contract is that?

What about women and equal opportunities? We have heard a lot from the Minister and from the Prime Minister about Opportunity 2000 and women in the national health service. Indeed, a campaign was launched by the Prime Minister himself in October 1991. He was clearly talking about football again when he said:

> "The NHS goal is to realise the potential of the female workforce within the Health Service so that we might effectively meet the healthcare needs of the population".

We have a working party in north Staffordshire, of which I am proud, which considers that undertaking to bring more women into the health service and how that can be achieved. In that Opportunity 2000 document, there is even a commitment to flexible working practice. How does the Minister square that with the women who currently work part-time for the ambulance service trust in Staffordshire? Those jobs fit in with their child care responsibilities, but they are being told that, under the new contract, there will no longer be any part-time work or further flexibility.

There is a sense of deep outrage in Staffordshire, as the quick collection of thousands of names on the petition so readily showed, and especially because our community has no means of challenging the bureaucrats who have made the decision. There does not seem to be any local accountability in the national health service any more and it is time that the Minister listened to the views and wishes of local people.

I have a feeling that, somehow, the people in the NHS think that the issue of the Staffordshire ambulance service will go away. I offer the Minister an opportunity to tell us, not necessarily in the remainder of the Adjournment debate, but through a subsequent meeting, how he can work with us, understand the sense of outrage and do something about it.

11.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I am pleased to have the opportunity to reply to some of the points that have been made by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley). First, I shall recap on precisely what has happened. The hon. Lady is aware that there is a system in the health service of purchasers and providers under which purchasers—health authorities—have to make their own judgments of what services they can contract for the good of patients. They make judgments based on what they perceive to be the best value for patients.

For many years now, hospitals have been able to market-test services that are provided to them. They are required to market-test certain services, such as cleaning, catering and laundry, and they can, if they so wish, put out other services to tender to see whether there are providers other than their own staff, or whoever is already providing that service, who may be able to provide a better service. That has happened in the case to which the hon. Lady has referred.

As the hon. Lady rightly said, North Staffordshire hospital's NHS trust and North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare saw an advantage in looking for better value and quality of service by putting the passenger transport service out to tender. As she has rightly said, they have awarded the contract to West Midlands. That is a perfectly normal procedure in the health service.

The hon. Lady may remember that Staffordshire won an ambulance contract from West Midlands and now operates the service in Wolverhampton. That is because a decision was taken that the service worked better in that way. I repeat that that is a perfectly normal procedure. Every hospital has to decide who should provide the various services for it, and it must decide on the basis of how it perceives the value of that service to patients.

Ms Walley: Can the Minister tell us why there was no lesser quality of service in Wolverhampton but we will have a lesser quality of service in Staffordshire?

Mr. Sackville: I would certainly dispute that. I have looked into the matter. As the hon. Lady is aware, officials of the region and of my Department have looked into the question whether the contract was properly let, and have concluded that both ambulance services were bidding on the same basis and against the same specification. There is no evidence that I have found—if I had found any evidence, I should be most concerned—that there was some inequity of specification in the basis on which they were bidding.

Clearly there are points to be made about wage structure. The hon. Lady has told the House that the wages offered are a quarter less than those currently being offered. She should be aware, however, that, although the basic wage is lower, there are allowances that make up the total remuneration to a figure above what is now being paid. *[Interruption.]* I am assured of that, and I have no reason to think otherwise.

If the hon. Lady cares to investigate the wages under the Wolverhampton contract, she will find that that is exactly the difference between the wage structure of Staffordshire and the wage structure of the West Midlands ambulance service. The hon. Lady will also be aware that, as of now, some 49 of the Staffordshire employees have applied for jobs with West Midlands in relation to the contract.

The hon. Lady asked me certain specific questions, some of which I shall try to deal with now, and others of which I shall deal with in writing or at a subsequent meeting if she wishes. She asked whether I have visited to find out what an excellent service is being offered. The Staffordshire service is one of the very few ambulance services that I have not visited in the past 18 months. I am sure that I shall have an opportunity to do so soon. I have no reason to believe that the service was defective. I am well aware that there is an excellent accident and emergency service in Staffordshire, and I have no reason to suppose that that is undermined or threatened by the arrangements. I certainly have no evidence of that.

The hon. Lady asked me whether I could draw a line under what is capable of being put out to tender. The answer is that there is no line of which I am aware. If, in the opinion of any hospital, a service would be better provided for the benefit of patients by some other provider, the hospital has the opportunity to explore that possibility. It is also possible for emergency services to be put out to tender.

The hon. Lady may be aware that the contract for the Coventry accident and emergency service is now out to tender, and I am told that Warwickshire is bidding for it. I do not know whether it will be successful, but the local authorities have decided that they think that it may be possible for someone else to do a better job. That is the reason why they are there. The Secretary of State appoints chairmen of health authorities precisely to make such decisions.

The hon. Lady asked whether I was satisfied that the contract had been properly let—whether it breached any guidelines or rules. I am assured that it does not breach EC directives. It does not breach other rules. I am told that the proposal is that it should come into force a month later,

[Mr. Sackville]

subject to the arbitration that took place at the region because there was a technical breach of the six-month rule in the original arrangements.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) asked me about insurance and responsibility for vehicles. I cannot answer his question now, but shall do so in writing. Clearly, it is important that, if there are such changes, they should be separately negotiated. I am afraid that I have no knowledge of that at present.

Staffordshire ambulance service provides an excellent accident and emergency service. The figures suggest that it has a high Orcon response level. I have no reason to suppose that the service is being undermined by the arrangements. Such a change obviously produces unwelcome disruption. I hope that everyone involved will take the trouble to ensure that as many staff as possible can be redeployed, and disruption and problems are kept to a minimum.

I am afraid that, after investigation, I am unable to say that the contract is in breach of the rules.

Ms Walley: What sort of inquiry has the Minister carried out? On what basis has he said what he has just said to the House?

Mr. Sackville: As always in such cases, following the hon. Lady's intervention, I asked the officials in my Department to look carefully at the arbitration to find out exactly what was said and agreed, and to look into the allegations that the contract was breached. The answer that I have come up with is that it was not. Therefore, I have no reason to accede to the hon. Lady's request to intervene.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 25 January 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Community Care Grant

1. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to monitor the adequacy of the special transitional community care grant during the current financial year; and if she will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): We have in place a wide-ranging and continuing programme of monitoring.

Mr. Parry: Does the Minister recognise the problems that have arisen because of the ill-thought-out formula used to calculate community care grants in the first year? Will he look at the suggestion contained in the Select Committee on Health's report for a contingency fund to help those authorities that have lost badly in the current financial year?

Mr. Bowis: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the settlement for community care was one of the most generous that we have made for public sector spending this year. It is noticeable that not only was the total more than was expected, but it included in particular £20 million extra this year for respite and day care, and another £30 million for next year.

The hon. Gentleman would do well to recall that this year the community care special transitional grant for Liverpool has increased on that of last year. He should take back to Liverpool the message that what we look for from the authority is efficient use of resources and efficiency savings. If it stopped putting people into council-owned homes, at twice the cost of the price of care in the private and voluntary sectors, the hon. Gentleman would have a good message for the people of Liverpool.

Mrs. Roe: Will my hon. Friend confirm that all the independent monitoring of the community care reforms shows that they have got off to a good start in their first year? Does that not show that although others have long supported that policy in theory, it is this Government who are putting it into practice and making it work?

Mr. Bowis: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. All the independent, impartial evidence on the monitoring of community care, which has been in place since 1 April, shows that the start has been encouraging. That is the word used by the social services inspectorate and the Audit Commission, and it is the message of the Association of Directors of Social Services.

It is an encouraging start, because a partnership is being built up not just between national and local government but between local government and the health authorities and the voluntary and private sectors. After all, social services did ask to be given the challenge of implementing community care. We gave them the opportunity to meet that challenge, and we now expect them to deliver.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Has the Minister had the opportunity to study the details of a written answer that he gave me on 14 December, which showed that, according to the Government's own assessment of individual local authority need, numerous local authorities have lost millions of pounds during the operation of the current year's special transitional grant? Sheffield has lost more than £2 million, my own authority has lost £1 million and London boroughs have lost nearly £25 million. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the Government need to compensate those local authorities for the problems they face as a result of the bizarre formula the Government use to calculate the grant?

Will the Minister listen to the demand by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry), that a contingency fund should be established to help those councils, as suggested by the Select Committee on Health? Will he further reflect on the fact that numerous authorities are encountering difficulties in developing genuine community care because of the Government's continued insistence on their spending 85 per cent. of grant in the so-called independent sector?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman may have noticed that the messages that we have received in the first year of the distribution mechanism have been brought into play, and we have transferred towards the standard spending assessment. The reasons for that are partly that there was a faster than expected shift of some 10 per cent. towards domiciliary care and partly that, to some extent, this year's SSA changes go to meet the balance.

I wish that the hon. Gentleman would bear in mind the fact that we are talking about a budget in the first year of £565 million. That will go up to £1·2 billion in the coming year, to £1·8 billion the following year and to £2·2 billion in the year after that. There is no way in which the Government could be said to be selling community care short. We want to see a partnership, and we want to make sure that local authorities that might have other things in mind, encourage, permit and facilitate the independent sector, and that the voluntary and private providers to play their part, too.

Social Work Council

2. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes she intends to make to the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): Under its recently appointed chairman, Jeffrey Greenwood, the CCETSW is undergoing substantial reform, both in its internal management structure and in the education and training for social workers for which it is responsible. The underlying intention of these changes is to ensure that social workers are equipped for the difficult job that they do with knowledge, practical skills and common sense.

Mr. Riddick: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the reform will extend to the CCETSW document, which states:

> "CCETSW believes that racism is endemic in the values, attitudes and structures of British society"?

Is my right hon. Friend aware of the job advertisement for a lecturer in social work at the then Leeds polytechnic, which sought someone with a commitment to "anti-oppressive practice"? Is it not that sort of left-wing, politically correct nonsense that makes some people believe that social workers do not live in the real world?

Mrs. Bottomley: There can be no place in the training of social workers for politically correct notions, for the domination of ideology and textbook theories over practical skills for children. Social workers have an important job to do, and their decisions should not be informed by fashionable theories, but by sensible, time-honoured principles and values.

Ms Jowell: As a former social worker, does the Secretary of State not recognise the complex job they do on behalf of society with people whose lives are often marked by discrimination on grounds of race or disability? Does she not recognise the importance of social workers being properly trained to meet those challenges?

Mrs. Bottomley: As a qualified social worker, I have all the more reason to feel impatient at the way in which good social workers have their work contaminated by some of the more ludicrous theories and extreme ideas. There is no place for playgroups that ban Christmas, or for parents being turned down for fostering or adoption simply because they are the wrong age or have not had sufficiently acute experience of racism.

There are too many examples of that, and training is the way forward. Over 90 per cent. of social workers are now qualified, whereas, in the mid-1970s, about 34 per cent. were qualified. It is vital that the substantial sums spent on social work training are spent delivering people who have to undertake precisely the complex and difficult tasks that the hon. Lady describes.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the job of training social workers might be made easier if it were easier to discern who is and who is not properly so described? What progress is being made towards establishing a social work council?

Mrs. Bottomley: There is a debate about the establishment of a social work council. So far, it is not entirely clear whether selection to the council should be based on qualification or simply on occupation. That needs to be carefully studied before further progress can be made.

Withington Hospital

3. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met the chairman of South Manchester health authority to discuss the future of Withington Hospital.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): No such discussions have taken place.

Mr. Bradley: Is the Minister aware of the chronic shortage of hospital beds in Manchester? General practitioners find it increasingly difficult to get their patients into hospital. A local GP in Withington had to ring 999 to get my constituent, who had a suspected heart attack, into hospital, having failed to find a bed at Manchester royal infirmary, Wythenshawe hospital and Withington hospital. In the light of that appalling situation, will the Minister reject proposals to close Withington as a district general hospital with a loss of another 300 beds in Manchester, and undertake a complete review of the real hospital needs of the people of Withington and Manchester?

Mr. Sackville: I am certainly aware of the pressure on emergency admissions in recent months, but that does not change the overall underlying picture in Manchester. The population is declining, there are enormous advances in day care, with a dramatic effect on bed use, and many facilities and excellent hospitals, such as that in Bolton where I come from, are being built outside Manchester. All that will affect the demand for beds in the future. In several years' time, there will be over-capacity of acute beds in Manchester, despite overspending according to capitation. That needs to be addressed: hence the proposals to rationalise services between Wythenshawe and Withington.

Mr. McCartney: The Minister's reply is one of the most complacent I have heard about closures. There are 97,000 people on waiting lists in the north-west, hundreds of beds in Manchester have been taken out of the system, children have been refused access to intensive care units, patients are being bussed as far away as Blackpool, and some patients have died before treatment could be given. When will the Minister make a commitment to meet the Members of Parliament for Greater Manchester about the crisis in health care in the area?

Mr. Sackville: My door is open to the hon. Gentleman at any time, and he knows it. Given his obsession with beds, he must be aware that the numbers of beds has gone down in recent years, but, despite that, activity has gone up. That is a trend he cannot deny, and one which will continue.

Accident and Emergency Admissions

4. **Ms Estelle Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the West Midlands regional health authority about the increase in accident and emergency admissions in the last 12 months.

Mr. Sackville: No representations have been received on that specific topic.

Ms Morris: Is the Minister aware that the West Midlands regional health authority has just announced plans to close 1,500 beds in the city of Birmingham? Given the massive increase in accident and emergency admissions over the past few months, and the effect of that in terms of patients having to lie for up to 21 hours on trolleys in corridors and the constant and regular cancellation of elective surgery, does the Minister agree that further bed closures will exacerbate the situation? What action will the Minister take to stop the planned bed closures going ahead?

Mr. Sackville: If I may correct the hon. Lady, the report said that, over a period of years, between 1,000 and 1,500 acute beds may be surplus to requirements, depending on an increase in day surgery and various other factors, as she well knows. She also knows that, thanks to the establishment of an emergency bed co-ordinator for Birmingham, there are very many fewer incidents involving difficulties with emergency admissions.

She will also know that, only last week, the chief executive of the national health service circulated all the hospitals and health authorities with a document stating their responsibility to make flexible arrangements, so that, when there is a sudden increase in emergency admissions —for example, when there is an outbreak of influenza—the hosptials can cope.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend confirm that £404,000 in extra funding has been made available to the Birmingham Heartlands hospital for accident and emergency use? Is he further aware that, only the weekend before last, I had the privilege of opening a new wing in the Lichfield Victoria hospital?

Mr. Sackville: I am aware of a great many excellent developments in the health service.

Mr. Terry Davis: Is it not a fact that, although the number of emergency admissions in Birmingham has gone up year after year for several years, the health service, managers in Birmingham base their plans for this year on the totally unreasonable assumption that there will be a reduction in the number of emergency admissions? When will the Minister do something about health service managers who behave in such a totally irrational way?

Mr. Sackville: The House well knows that, in many parts of the country, there has been an unprecedented increase in emergency admissions during the past few months. Hospital managers must make their arrangements against that background. The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed the Heartlands hospital more than once. The emergency bed co-ordinator in Birmingham has been able to make dispositions so that there has not been a serious alert more than perhaps twice in recent months. That is against the underlying background of a rapid increase in emergency admissions. The hon. Gentleman should congratulate that hospital.

Family Doctors' Lists

5. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of patients on each family doctor's list *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At 1 October 1979, the average number of patients on family doctors' lists in England was 2,286; the figure for 1 April 1993 is 1,915, a reduction of 16 per cent.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my right hon. Friend for those excellent figures. Does she agree that the family doctor service is the backbone of our national health system? Will she confirm that today there are more GPs, they are better paid, there are more practice nurses and there is far more effective treatment? Will she join me in urging the Labour party to look at the family doctor system to see how it is working so effectively for the benefit of all the patients in the national health system?

Mrs. Bottomley: Indeed. My hon. Friend rightly identifies the family doctor service as the basic building block of our NHS. One of its distinguishing features is as gatekeeper to the NHS. The average person goes to his or her GP five times a year. That is why it is important that there are an extra 4,759 GPs. That is why it is so important that the number of practice nurses has increased by 819 per cent. since the Government came to power, and that family doctor service spending has increased by 151 per cent. Those are substantial figures, resulting in very much better care for patients.

Ms Primarolo: Has the Secretary of State had time to study the parliamentary answer she gave me about the decline in the number of GPs in London over the past three years? Does she share my surprise and anger that that should have occurred at a time when GP services in London are under such massive stress and demand? Does she agree that the increased use of accident and emergency units is partly a by-product of that decline, and immediately agree to investigate the reports from those departments that 8 to 14 per cent. of patients attending accident and emergency units are not registered with a GP in London?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am beginning to see a glimmer of hope that the hon. Lady might be supporting "Making London Better" and the strategy that we set out. It is precisely that distortion of resources in London, which has gone back over many years, that means that urgent action is necessary. There have been far more older GPs in London. There have been far more single-handed practitioners in London. Although, over the past 10 years, there has been a substantial improvement in GP services in London, there is still room for manoeuvre. That is why we are spending an extra £43 million in primary care in London this year, investing it in more than 100 primary care initiatives.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my right hon. Friend cast her mind back to when the GPs' contract was being introduced? At that time, were not the sick and the vulnerable unnecessarily frightened by a campaign that stated that GPs' lists would dramatically increase and that doctors would not have enough time to look after their patients? As that scare campaign has proved totally untrue, how seriously can we take any pronouncements on the NHS from the Labour party, which was prepared to use the sick and the vulnerable as pawns and puppets in its own sick political campaign?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend rightly identifies the Labour party's history of making scaremongering statements, having no policy and denying the results, which have been extremely impressive. For example, the latest immunisation figures, part of the new GP contract, show that 95 per cent. of children are now being immunised against diphtheria, compared with 80 per cent. when the Labour party was in power; 93 per cent. for measles compared with 51 per cent. when the Labour party was in power, and 93 per cent. of whooping cough compared with 35 per cent. when the Labour party was in power. Those are the results of the changes, quite apart from the introduction of deprivation payments which mean that GPs in the most deprived inner-city areas receive additional resources.

Social Care

6. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to carry out a review of regulation and inspection in social care.

Mr. Bowis: As part of the Government's deregulation initiative, we are already looking at a number of areas of regulation in social services. There will be a review of the independence and effectiveness of inspection next year.

Mr. Austin-Walker: The Government recognise the need to protect individuals through registration and inspection in some forms of social care, but does the Minister share my concern that no such protection is afforded to those people receiving domiciliary care in their own homes? Does he recognise that an increasing number of people will receive domiciliary care, and that that is increasingly being provided by private organisations and agencies? Will the Minister now give detailed consideration to the Licensing of Domiciliary Care Agencies Bill which was introduced in the other place by my noble Friend Lord Ashley and previously in this House by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe)?

Mr. Bowis: I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that domiciliary day services should increasingly be provided by the voluntary and private sectors, and I share his view that we must do whatever we can to ensure that high standards are maintained. The question is how quickly we can find and monitor the evidence of good practice that is necessary in order to set out a proper programme of high standards.

The Department has issued guidelines and advice to independent sector firms that might be considering setting up domiciliary day services which we shall follow up. In the meantime, as my noble Friend Baroness Cumberlege said in the other place, local authorities that provide such services have an absolute right and duty to define within the terms of the contracts the standards of service that they expect to be provided. That is the first step. The second step is to continue to monitor such services, and the third step is to keep an open mind, as I shall do, on whether further protection will be needed in future.

Mr. Wilshire: Whatever my hon. Friend decides on the general issues of inspection, will he set up a special inspection of Surrey county council's social services department. [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Is he aware of his inspectorate's report on six child deaths in Surrey which apparently arose from child abuse? [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Is he further aware of the non-accidental injuries and severe brain damage caused to my constituent, Thomas Harris, at the hands of a registered child minder? In the light of the judge's criticisms last Thursday of the county council's team adviser, whom he described—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]

I know that I am reading Madam Speaker. I wish to quote the judge's comments correctly.

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman knows that he is reading, he must know that he is out of order.

Mr. Wilshire: In the light of the judge's criticism of the team adviser, who he described as showing "bumbling inactivity"; in view of his criticism of the case conference which, he said, "chose to ignore the risks"; and in view of the general approach, which the judge described as showing a "lack of urgency", does not my hon. Friend consider that an immediate inspection of Surrey county council is required?

Mr. Bowis: I am sorry that Opposition Members reacted as they did to this case. The House and the nation will have watched with horror the effects of that small child's injuries as we saw him crawling around his living room. The first thing that the House should do is to send its sympathy to that child and his mother and to wish them well for the future.

Secondly, whenever instances of this kind occur, of course there should be investigations and inquiries, and I am glad to hear that Surrey county council has instituted an internal inquiry and has also brought in the area child protection committee to ensure that there is an independent element in that investigation.

We will always keep the quality of inspection and social services under review, regardless of the area concerned. It should be pointed out that all the cases mentioned by my hon. Friend occurred before implementation under the Children Act 1989 of the circular about shaking, in particular, which we distributed to all county council social services departments, as they regulated child minders. I hope and pray that the case to which my hon. Friend referred is never repeated.

Mrs. Mahon: Why does not the Secretary of State set up a statutory register for domiciliary workers in the private sector? Surely the Minister is aware that the elderly and the sick are very vulnerable in their own homes. Common sense dictates that, if tragedies are to be avoided, there should be a formal register.

Mr. Bowis: As I have said, we are keeping an open mind on the question of monitoring local services in the domiciliary sector. We will continue to consider the standards of good practice that we should be setting and disseminating throughout the country.

There is nothing to stop local social services departments from setting their own standards and discussing them with the voluntary and private sectors. I hope that all social services departments are not simply consulting the independent sector but involving it in the provision of services. That will enable us to agree standards, to set up local registers of approved firms and —through contracts and, ultimately, by whatever means prove necessary—to secure the national standards that we want.

Waiting Lists

7. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the change in the number of NHS patients waiting *(a)* over one year and *(b)* over two years since March 1991; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of patients waiting over one year for hospital treatment has fallen by 58 per cent. since March 1991—from 169,761 to 71,022. There were more than 51,000 patients waiting over two years in March 1991; two-year "waiters" have now all but been eliminated.

Mr. Hunter: Does my right hon. Friend agree that waiting lists reflect the ever-growing demand for services, that what matters to the waiting patient is how long he or she must wait, not how many other people are on the list, and that her answer shows that the health reforms—especially those involving the internal market—are having a positive impact on waiting lists?

Mrs. Bottomley: Indeed. Waiting lists are almost inherent in a health service that is free at the point of use. The number of people on the list as a percentage of those who are treated has remained fairly steady for the past 20 years. What matters to an individual patient, however, is how long he or she must wait. In that regard, our achievements have been dramatic, enabling everyone to benefit from the NHS reforms. Those reforms will continue and develop, and patients will benefit further.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Secretary of State give us the complete waiting list figures, not just those relating to one year or two years? If doctors and nurses are doing such a wonderful job—which they are—will the Secretary of State give a guarantee that she will tell the Treasury that the pay review recommendations for doctors and nurses should be met in full? If they are not met in full, will she resign?

Mrs. Bottomley: Doctors and nurses are, indeed, doing a magnificent job in reducing waiting times. Before the reforms, the average waiting time was about nine months; now, it is about five months, and there will be further improvements. Doctors and nurses should note what the Government have already achieved. Doctors' pay has increased by 34 per cent., while nurses' pay has increased by 52 per cent. That contrasts sharply with Labour's record.

The review bodies have undertaken their work in the normal way this year, and the Government will consider their recommendations in the normal way.

Mr. Day: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the way to reduce waiting lists is to increase the number of patients who are treated? That is precisely what has happened when trust hospitals have worked in conjunction with fundholding general practices. Is it not strange that the Opposition wish to abolish the most successful part of the NHS? Far from abolishing trusts and GP fundholders, should we not extend the benefits of those institutions throughout the health service?

Mrs. Bottomley: Most certainly we should. GP fundholders have been able to innovate and to pioneer new forms of treatment, and all family doctors are benefiting from their new procedures. The trusts are going from strength to strength and I shall shortly announce the full number of the fourth wave, which will be the largest wave yet. That is the programme of reform that we have set in hand. During the 1980s, there was a 2·5 per cent. increase in the number of patients treated, but, since the reforms have been in place, the figure has risen to an average of 5 per cent. When the Labour Government were in power, they were struggling along at annual rates of 1 per cent.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Secretary of State aware that in my area we are sick to death of the con trick, of being told that the Government have dealt with the waiting lists while at the same time cutting the money allowed for the running of the general hospital? The Government have cut £3 million from the budget of a district general hospital while pretending that they have dealt with the waiting list—it is an insult to the community's intelligence.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Lady comes from a part of the country which has seen a magnificent achievement in terms of the quality and quantity of patient treatment and it reflects the sharp contrast to the attitude of the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), who asked the first question about social services in that part of the world. If other public services were run with the skill of the health service in that area, there would be many improvements. Progress is being made in the number of in-patients and out-patients treated, but there is more to do.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the work of the Royal Free hospital trust, which serves many patients in my constituency? Since it became a trust hospital, it has substantially reduced waiting lists and increased the number of patients that it serves. Should not that be commended instead of criticised, as it often is by the Opposition?

Mrs. Bottomley: The Royal Free is an excellent example of the opportunities to be had in becoming a trust hospital. It was one of the first wave. As we move to the fourth wave, we hope that ever-greater numbers of hospitals will develop the same skills. Last year, trust hospitals increased the number of patients treated by an average of 5·3 per cent., whereas other hospitals increased the number by 4·3 per cent.

Ms Lynne: Following the Government's continual claims that more patients than ever are being treated, will the Secretary of State explain why waiting lists are higher than ever? Could it be because the Government count finished consultant episodes instead of patients treated?

Mrs. Bottomley: The Liberal Democrats seek to undermine the figures produced by the national health service in any way that they can. The figures are an accurate reflection of the work undertaken by the service. There was one change when we moved from the Korner figures to finished consultant episodes, but since then the proportions have remained steady and stable. The hon. Lady is seeking any excuse not to pay tribute not only to the managers who have established the reforms but to the doctors and nurses who are reducing the time that patients have to wait.

Mr. Streeter: I welcome the excellent figures that my right hon. Friend gave at the beginning of her reply. None the less, does she agree that the people of Devon and Cornwall would have to wait an even shorter time for their operations if some of the resources currently locked away in the London specialist hospitals were released for the benefit of the country as a whole? When will the unfair imbalance cease?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will know that we are seeking an end to the imbalance which has bedevilled the national health service for many decades. We spend 20 per cent. of the money on 15 per cent. of the people, but we have to proceed with care and full consultation. We must consider not only the questions of service but the important elements of research and education. I hope soon to be able to make further announcements which will ensure a more balanced health service and ensure that London releases resources to other parts of the country which are supporting London to the tune of £100 million this year.

Mr. Blunkett: Is it a fact that the number of people on waiting lists has risen by a third since the Government took office, while the number of beds available has dropped by a third, that the number of people waiting for more than a year rose by 25 per cent. in the first half of this financial year and that those waiting for the first crucial out-patient appointment to see a consultant are not counted at all?

Is the right hon. Lady aware that in the Mersey region, about which the fact is paraded that no one waits for more than a year, the Royal Liverpool hospital had just sent out a notice, saying that the waiting list for out-patient appointments for the spinal clinic now exceeds 18 months? Are not there lies, damned lies and Department of Health statistics?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is hard for the Labour party to speak of waiting lists, as every Labour Government have left office, with longer waiting lists than when they took office. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman study the Audit Commission report on the use of beds, which suggests that if all did as well as the top 25 per cent., the health service could do with fewer beds than we have now. We have to ensure that we make balanced progress.

Once again, Labour Members seek to pour scorn on the Mersey region. They may be interested to know that not only has Mersey tackled the subject of all its one-year waiters but it is now setting a target time of six months maximum for out-patient appointments and hopes to ensure that 90 per cent. of out-patients are seen within three months. It is such a shame that the Labour party cannot listen and watch and observe those regions that have made outstanding progress. Together, we should seek to apply those lessons to other parts of the country that are not yet doing so well.

Trust Hospitals

8. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to ensure that overall NHS trust hospitals are able to continue the greatly increased equipment expenditure of recent years.

The Minister for Health (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): Trusts now have freedom to spend more than a third of the capital allocated to them according to their own capital investment priorities and we are increasing that amount year by year. Many trusts choose to make equipment a priority and that policy makes more money available for that purpose.

Mr. Amess: Is my right hon. Friend aware that since Basildon hospital achieved trust status, 7 per cent. more patients have been treated and expenditure has been reduced by 7 per cent? Is he further aware that more than £425,000 has been spent on new medical equipment, including £200,000 on a new gamma camera? That is an improvement of 100 per cent. on what the hospital did before it became a trust. Finally, will my right hon. Friend vigorously continue to defend our wonderful national health service against the scurrilous attacks from socialist Opposition Members?

Dr. Mawhinney: No one could have put it better than my hon. Friend. His commitment to his constituents, which is well known, also extends to health. Indeed, the trust has done even better in terms of capital equipment. In the year before it became a trust, the hospital was spending only £150,000; now, as my hon. Friend says, it is spending £425,000. The most important thing, however, is the increase in the number of patients treated. That is what Conservative Members consider the national health service to be about. Unfortunately, that view is not shared by the Opposition.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister realise that high spending does not always mean good value? Of the 60 different hip replacement implants that are available to the health service, the ones that are most expensive are often the least reliable, requiring new operations. Has the Minister noticed that in Sweden 5,000 Christiansen hips were put into people and none of them lasted four years? In Britain, we are spending huge sums without a proper examination of the quality of the replacements that are put in. Will the Minister require and ensure that there is a system properly to evaluate the reliability of hips that are put into patients?

Dr. Mawhinney: The first part of the hon. Gentleman's question was certainly right. Every year, we observe Labour-controlled authorities throughout the country spending lots of money and getting poor value for it. The Government have done more to improve the quality of care in the health service than any of our predecessors, and we shall continue to pursue that end.

Mr. Jenkin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that since the Essex Rivers healthcare trust gained trust status on 1 April 1992 it has substantially expanded its facilities, with a new day surgery centre and a new ward, and that it has further plans for expansion? Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to pay tribute to the hardworking staff of the hospital and will he give an undertaking that North Essex health authority will continue to benefit from the increase in its share of resources, which is rightly due to it under the capitation funding system, so as to enable that expansion to continue?

Dr. Mawhinney: I agree with my hon. Friend's latter point, and I am happy to join him in paying tribute to the nurses, doctors and staff—including the management and administrative staff so denigrated by the Labour party—for combining to improve patient care in the trust. The difference between the average number of patients treated under the Labour Government and the number treated under the reformed national health service amounts to no fewer than 360,000 each year. That is the sort of record to which my hon. Friend's hospital trust contributes, and I congratulate it on its achievements.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Beith: Will the Prime Minister confirm that at the time of the general election, when he promised tax cuts, he knew that the Government were forecasting a public sector borrowing requirement of £28 billion and that tax increases would be a likely part of the Conservative strategy to deal with that? Surely he is not asking us to accept that the important fact escaped his notice and was not drawn to his attention.

The Prime Minister: If I had expected to have to raise taxes after the election, I would not have expressed the contrary view. The right hon. Gentleman fails to take into account two prospects—first, the length of the recession and, secondly, demand-driven expenditure. It is an oddity for the right hon. Gentleman to say what he has said, because the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) recently said:

> "We are going to have to find a new language which expresses taxation, not as a burden, but as an opportunity."

Q2. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Lait: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming yesterday's CBI survey, which shows that orders and output are growing at the strongest rate since 1989? Is that fact not exemplified by Long Products, a company in my constituency, which now exports 85 per cent. of its output and has recently won orders from countries as diverse as Indonesia and Kuwait? Does not that company's success and the CBI survey show that, thanks to the Government's sound economic policy, the United Kingdom economy is the motor leading to European recovery? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to hear such a welcome for our recovery on both sides of the House. As my hon. Friend says, there is a remarkably encouraging set of results across the board. Those results tend to support the figures previously released, which show manufacturing output up by about 2 per cent. on a year earlier. Critically, the survey also sets out the expectation of a growth in output and orders in the months immediately ahead. Car output and retail sales are already rising quite sharply, and the EC, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund all expect this country to have the fastest growth of any of the EC countries in 1993 and 1994.

Mrs. Beckett: Will the Prime Minister now admit that all the promises that he made on taxation at the time of the last election were a total deception and that he should apologise to the British people?

The Prime Minister: No. There was no deception in what I said at the time of the election. Events have forced us to raise taxes, and I regret that, but it has been necessary to raise taxes to ensure that we cut the borrowing requirement and provide the opportunity for sustained growth with low inflation over the medium term. I believe that we have to take the decisions that will safeguard the future of the British economy in the years immediately ahead. It was not an easy decision, not one which we would have wished to take, but it was the right decision and Governments cannot duck the right decision.

Mrs. Beckett: But why should people take the Prime Minister's word for any of those reasons, when the Conservatives claim to be the party of low crime and it is the party of high crime? They claim to be the party of low tax, when everybody now knows that it is the party of high tax. Why should the Prime Minister be believed when he makes excuses?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Lady will have some difficulty in persuading the nation that, in any given circumstances, the Labour party, or indeed the Liberal Democrats, would have lower taxation than a Conservative Government. I invite the House to recall what has occurred in recent years to prove that point.

We cut the basic rate of income tax from 33p to 25p, and the Labour party voted against it. We cut the top rate from 83p to 40p, and the Labour party voted against it. We lowered the starting rate to 20p, and the Labour party voted against it. We cut corporation tax, and the Labour party —[HON. MEMBERS: "Voted against it."] It voted against it.

Mrs. Beckett: The fact is that, after all those lines from the Prime Minister, people are still paying more tax. Everyone is paying more tax. What is the point of all that wriggling, when the figures that we have forced the Government to reveal tell the truth? The country now faces the biggest tax hike in British history and it is time for the Prime Minister to own up that, from April, the Government will squeeze every British family until the pips squeak.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady disinters a few old cliches, but if she thinks that she can resurrect the tax record of that old rogue who was Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time she has a tough job. The right hon. Lady misses an essential point which is vital to the British taxpayer. Despite the tax increases, which I acknowledged a few moments ago, net take-home pay at all levels of income has risen substantially and the spending pattern and the living standards of everyone in the nation indicate that fact.

Of course, we might, I suppose, have been able to keep taxes lower if there had been further reductions in expenditure. I would just like to know which reductions in expenditure that we have imposed have had support from a single Opposition Member in recent years.

Mr. Lamont: Will the Prime Minister treat the posturing of the Labour party on taxes with the absolute contempt that it deserves? Is not it the case that taxes had to be increased to reduce borrowing, and that was responsible, whereas the Labour party wanted much higher taxes to finance much higher spending, which would have left borrowing at the same level and would have simply meant higher interest rates, more unemployment and no recovery?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Interruptions are very time consuming.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is entirely right and I agree with every word he said.

Q3. **Ms Walley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Ms Walley: What has the Prime Minister to say to one of my constituents in Stoke-on-Trent, North a woman of 71? She wrote to me saying that she has a heart condition and that her husband has had a colostomy. They are unable to go out and unable to afford to heat their home. As the Prime Minister thinks that he has a question about VAT on fuel and as he is raising these taxes at the moment, will he tell us why there is so much incompetence and bungling in his Government that he has failed to raise £1·5 billion from uncollected taxes? Why is he making my constituents pay in fuel bills for uncollected taxes? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must be heard; she must not be shouted down. Has the hon. Lady completed her question?

Ms Walley: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Did you hear the question, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: I believe that I did hear the question, Madam Speaker. It was quite clear.

On the hon. Lady's first point on value added tax on fuel, as she knows, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has introduced a very generous package to help people who are in particular need. I strongly suspect, although I cannot be sure of all the details of the hon. Lady's constituent without further information, that she would be a beneficiary of that. I certainly hope that that will prove to be the case. As for the collection of taxation, it is our policy to make sure that taxes right across the board are fully collected. I wish, in terms of taxes and rents, that that was also the position of some local authorities on which the hon. Lady has served.

Mr. Barry Porter: When will my right hon. Friend be able to report to the House on his recent conversations with the President of the Republic of Lebanon? Is it not appropriate to congratulate the President on the period of peace and stability after years of difficulty? Will he also emphasise to British industry and commerce that there are now enormous opportunities in the Lebanon?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right about the record of President Hariri. I had the opportunity to have a conversation with him yesterday. I have no doubt from our conversation that there are significant business interests for this country in the Lebanon. In view of my hon. Friend's remarks, I will arrange for a written answer to be tabled, setting out the details of our discussion.

Q4. **Mr. Byers:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Byers: Does the Prime Minister recall the 1992 Conservative election manifesto, which stated, "We are pledged to cut tax rates"? How does the right hon. Gentleman reconcile that promise to the electors with the freezing of personal allowances, the increase in national insurance contributions and the extension of VAT to domestic fuel? Does he accept that it is now becoming increasingly clear that the Conservative election victory was founded on deceit, distortion and misrepresentation?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is quite mistaken about that. The fundamental responsibility of any Government is to maintain sound money and the right conditions for a growing economy. That sometimes means that one has to raise taxes when one would prefer not to. We have had to do that, as I indicated to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) some moments ago. I do not suppose that we wished to raise taxes in 1981, but it led to years of sustained growth and improvement for the British economy, and I strongly suspect that the Budgets of 1993 will do precisely the same.

Mrs. Browning: Given the encouraging signs from industry this week about recovery, particularly in manufacturing, will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will not seek an EC agreement for an energy tax to be imposed on industry, as advocated this morning on Radio 4 by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on behalf of the Liberal Democrats?

The Prime Minister: I can see that there is some purpose in listening to Radio 4. I am interested in that information. I find it extraordinary that the Liberal Democrats should have advocated VAT on fuel, opposed VAT on fuel, claimed to be environmentalists and claimed not to be dealing with the environment, and now this morning we apparently have the latest example of utter double-dealing from them. On doorstep after doorstep we are used to it, and clearly it is becoming more and more apparent to people across the country.

Q5. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wigley: May I ask the Prime Minister to look again at the impact of the imposition of VAT on fuel on the disabled, the chronically sick and many pensioners? Is he aware that, for many of those people, the bill for fuel each week may be £20 or £30 and that the effect of VAT may be an increase of £3, £4 or even £5? Is he further aware that the £1 compensation announced by the Chancellor does not go anywhere near towards meeting that? In those circumstances, will he please introduce a compensation package specifically for those people by way of a heating allowance?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman, who is a tireless campaigner on behalf of the disabled, and has been for many years, will know that heating allowances in their original form were introduced by the Conservative Government to help people who were in difficulties. I agree with him about the need to help the most vulnerable people over higher fuel bills. That is why 5 million disabled people will get extra help with VAT on fuel and that extra help will arrive before their fuel bills arrive. I believe that that is a substantial amount of help which will be of great assistance.

Environmental Policy

3.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have given your office notice of a substantial point of order which concerns not so much the self-importance of the House of Commons or our amour propre, but the fact that the House is being bypassed and neglected, perhaps on purpose.

It has always been the tradition for major statements by Ministers to be made in the House. This morning, many of us heard on Radio 4 a trailer for what was billed as an environmental policy for two decades. It was apparently important enough to have a major press conference for which the Banqueting house was hired, so it was not just a minor matter. It now transpires that, not only is the announcement not being made first to the House of Commons; it is not being made at all to the House of Commons. We must consider the accountability effect that that has on people outside the House.

Thinking automatically that there would be a statement, I rang the director of Kew about a possible supplementary question. He asked in a surprised way, "Have you not been invited to the launch?" No, I was not invited to the launch and, more to the point, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who is the Opposition spokesman on the environment, was not invited either. However, 300 or more other people were.

The question arises about what is the attitude to the House, and there may be a reason. A huge amount of documents were involved, but a cursory look at those documents shows that the promises given at Rio by the Prime Minister do not amount to very much. The fact is that the numbers of words and documents are not a substitute for action in relation to biodiversity and the environment.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I put it—I must not stray from order—that there is a point for you about whether this House asserts its rights. Parliament at least should have the right to question, particularly when there are real doubts about the money aspects of a Government fanfare of trumpets which has been made outside this House.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you make it clear to the Government once and for all that the first place which should hear about what in theory could have been a major statement on the future direction of this country, its economy and its environment is the House of Commons and that we, Members of Parliament elected to represent the people, should have the opportunity to question Ministers about it? May I also prevail on the Government to ensure that, while they have sinned today, there will be in the very near future a full parliamentary debate on the documents that have been issued this morning?

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you advise us whether it is usual for Ministers to make a statement pursuant to policies already declared, well known and in the public domain?

Madam Speaker: The whole House is well aware of what the matter is about and of the importance that I attach to Parliament being the place where important Government announcements are made in the first instance. I cannot, however, be the judge of whether every development in the application of an existing policy—we are talking about existing policy—justifies an oral statement in the House. That is a matter for Ministers in the first instance. No doubt, if hon. Members want to pursue matters arising from today's announcements—I assume that they do—they will seek ways to do so and will convey their wishes to the occupants of the Front Bench in clear terms, for example, by tabling parliamentary questions on the documents to which the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has just referred. Can we now move on——

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. May we have a ruling that in future what is good enough for the Banqueting house is good enough for the House of Commons?

Madam Speaker: It is not my concern where Ministers wish to make statements outside the House. I have made it clear that when there is a change of policy it should be announced to the House in the first instance.

Employment Protection (Government Communications Headquarters)

3.36 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for persons employed at the Government Communications Headquarters to have the right to belong to an independent trade union of their choice; and for connected purposes.

It [illegible] 10 years to the day since the Government announced that those employed at GCHQ would be banned from belonging to a trade union. It was a shameful decision. It was a decision taken without any justification. Employees were told to sign a form which stated that, if they wished to continue to be employed at the Government communications headquarters, they had to resign at once from membership of any union to which they belonged. The form added that they could join a departmental staff association approved by the director of GCHQ.

I pay tribute to the 14 people who decided that such was the principle at stake that they could not possibly sign the form. They were sacked. They were victimised. They have not given up the struggle because they understand what is at stake and the principle involved. I pay tribute to them from the Labour Benches in the House of Commons.

The justification for banning trade unions at GCHQ was that industrial action had disrupted work there. However, when the then Foreign Secretary announced the ban 10 years ago almost to the minute, he conceded that no threat to national security had resulted from industrial action. That was confirmed by Sir John Nott, who was Secretary of State for Defence when some of the action occurred.

Limited industrial action occurred in 1979 and 1981. In the following year, 1982, the Falklands war occurred. I wish to quote what the director general, Sir Brian Tovey, wrote to every employee at GCHQ when that war was over —when it had been won. He sent a message to every employee at GCHQ. He said:

> "High level praise. There can be no doubt that this praise has been well deserved. It has been earned by hard and dedicated work by you as individuals."

A large number of those individuals were long-standing members of the appropriate trade union.

On 25 January 1984 Ministers showed their appreciation of such dedicated work by taking away the right of the employees at GCHQ to belong to a trade union.

We are told that no one need worry too much because there is a staff federation, but that is a company union. It has no independence: it is dependent on the good will of the director at GCHQ.

It is interesting to note that, when the officers of the staff federation—foolishly, in my view—made an application to the certification officer asking that the federation be considered an independent trade union, that application was, not surprisingly, refused. The federation appealed, again rather foolishly, to a higher organisation, the employment appeals tribunal, which turned down its appeal on 10 December 1992. The certification officer and the tribunal came to the obvious conclusion that the staff federation could not be considered in any way to be a genuine trade union.

Of course, it is not only Opposition Members and those in the wider labour and trade union movement who are concerned. The International Labour Organisation has also expressed deep concern about the ban on union membership at GCHQ. It has repeatedly said that the ban is a breach of convention 87 on freedom of association and protection of the right to organise. It has repeatedly called on the British Government to try to reach a settlement with trade unions over trade union membership at GCHQ. It has been right to do that.

As hon. Members know, the unions met the Prime Minister last December. They were willing to give various guarantees and to compromise on a number of points. They were not willing to compromise, however, on the vital principle that employees at GCHQ had the right to belong to an independent trade union. The Prime Minister's response was the same as that of his predecessor. He was not willing to compromise and was totally negative. That meeting, therefore, ended after a short while and without success.

It now appears that the International Labour Organisation may decide formally to censure the Government because they are clearly in breach of convention 87. No western Government have ever been so reprimanded by the ILO. If that occurs, this British Tory Government will join the company of regimes such as those in Sudan, Brazil and El Salvador whose practices have been condemned by the ILO.

I started by saying that it is 10 years to the day since the Government announced that they were to introduce the ban. Clearly the issue will not go away. The Ministers of the time may have believed that the fuss and uproar might last a year or two, but that there was no need to worry because it would go away. We have shown that that is not the case and we have kept the issue alive.

We are raising the issue again today. Demonstrations are being held this week. There will be a large one in Cheltenham this weekend, which I am pleased to say that my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition will attend. It cannot be emphasised enough that what is at issue is a basic principle. There are those on the Government Benches who find this difficult to understand, but throughout the centuries in this country struggles have taken place for democratic and trade union rights. People have been victimised, sacked and in some cases even deported, but the issues on which they fought did not go away. This issue is not likely to go away either because it is too important. It is a basic democratic right to be able to belong to a union at the place of employment. That right was taken away 10 years ago by the Government, and it must be restored.

Employees at GCHQ need no lessons about patriotism and duty from a Government who sent political signals to the junta in Argentina and made it believe that, if it invaded the Falklands, there would be no repercussions from this country. They need no lessons from a Government who continued to sell arms to one of the most criminal, murderous regimes, the Iraqi regime, right up until the invasion of Kuwait.

If there are Conservative Members who believe that what I am saying is wrong, not only should one of them oppose the Bill; they should do what we have always done in the House when we have opposed a measure—go through the Division Lobby.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): They do not have the guts.

Mr. Winnick: If they do not have the guts, let us compare their lack of courage with the courage of the 14 people at GCHQ willing to sacrifice their jobs because of the principle involved.

Let us conclude this matter today in the usual democratic manner. If there is a Division, my hon. Friends and I will vote in favour of the Bill. If there are any hon. Members who believe that what I have been saying is wrong, let them have the courage to vote against it.

If the Government refuse to restore the rights of employees at GCHQ, a Labour Government will restore them, as my party has promised to do. That day cannot come soon enough.

3.45 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): GCHQ is an unusual organisation. Unlike any other branch of the civil service, it not only is at the heart of the British intelligence-collection system but also saves lives. It is quite true that the 1984 ban on external trade union membership curtailed the rights of individuals to join a trade union of their choice, as opposed to the staff association that now deals with the pay, conditions and grievances of GCHQ employees.

However, the ban to which the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has referred is not an example of Mrs. Thatcher's alleged spite or some manifestation of the Government's anti-union crusade. It can be explained and justified only in the context of the very sensitive work being carried out at GCHQ, which acquired that title in 1940.

Quite apart from the construction and development of secure cipher systems for British use, the organisation is concerned, among other responsibilities, with the interception and decryption of foreign communications. Good intelligence, particularly from what are termed technical sources, can prevent bloodshed and deter aggression. By the timely deployment of troops, or by diplomatic initiatives or other suitable counter-measures, the ill-disposed despot can be prevented from launching an invasion. Pearl Harbour, the Falklands war, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Yom Kippur are all classic, textbook examples of how failure to collect, analyse and disseminate intelligence can lead to war. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman is opposing the motion, he must be heard. In this respect, he has an equal right with the hon. Gentleman who moved the motion.

Mr. Allason: Any interference with GCHQ's operations—even the slightest disruption—can prove terribly damaging to the British intelligence-collection system. Let me give an example, which I hope Opposition Members will understand. The loss of just one radio-intercept shift can mean the loss of an enormous amount of collection effort. Just one word or one group of ciphers—even one letter—lost can mean the nullification of months, perhaps even years, of cryptographic work. Great skill is required to ensure tremendous accuracy, and the loss of any of that constitutes an enormous waste of time and taxpayers' money. More to the point, however, it puts lives at risk.

This is precisely what happened when, in December 1981, martial law was imposed in Warsaw and General Jaruzelski's tanks surrounded the city. On that occasion the trade union movement called out its members at GCHQ. When martial law was imposed in Warsaw, we were blind, in intelligence terms, to the signals traffic and the interception that was going on. That was the reason for the ban. Senior GCHQ personnel considered the disruption sufficiently damaging to request the ban on external interference.

In addition to the deliberate disruption, considerable anxiety was felt about the kinds of people who were attending GCHQ trade union meetings. They were not GCHQ officials or officers, but so-called full-time trade union researchers who seemed to take a great deal of interest in the workings of GCHQ, the location of the intercept sites and the strength of personnel at particular locations.

It must be emphasised that the ban was not an American demand. In all honesty, the United Kingdom has little to offer its allies any more—we are no longer a super-power. GCHQ is the jewel in the British intelligence crown, however, and it is a tremendous asset. As well as offering services to the Americans, GCHQ achieves unrivalled access to any other part of the American intelligence system. It would be folly to jeopardise that.

Nearly half of the GCHQ staff did not want to join a trade union and they did not. Thousands of staff opted to receive compensation in return for their agreement not to join a trade union; only a handful resisted that agreement. Alternative employment was offered in every case and, after five years of negotiation and court action, just 14 staff were dismissed. That was not victimisation. It was regrettable, but GCHQ now enjoys the full confidence of its staff and our allies.

Any attempt to support this misconceived Bill would severely damage GCHQ's credibility and its capacity to deal with and anticipate emergencies. It would also mean that GCHQ was unable to anticipate threats to Britain's national security. I accordingly urge the House to reject the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 222, Noes 69.

Division No. 89] **[3.51 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian

Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz

McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John

Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N

Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Alan Meale.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Aitken?

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

[Relevant document: Second Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on The November 1993 Budget (House of Commons Paper No. 87)]

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.4 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Finance Bill begins its passage through the House today. The House will know that managing the Bill each year requires co-operation between the parties. In the interests of good government, we must ensure that each of the inevitably complicated matters in the Bill is given time for discussion and that outside interests are given plenty of time to comment. We have always been able to do that in the House on the basis of sensible arrangements between the parties for orderly debate, but this year the Labour party will not co-operate. I have written to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman)—my opposite number—setting out a sensible scheme for consideration of the Bill and proposing the clauses to be taken on the Floor of the House and a reasonable timetable to which we can all work to ensure that the Bill can be given full consideration by the Easter recess.

That the hon. Lady has refused to enter into any understanding with me I regard as most unreasonable. The matters in the Bill are very important, and people outside the House expect us to give them careful consideration. It is extraordinary of the Labour party to block the most common-sense arrangements for doing our business. Today, I once again reiterate my appeal to the hon. Lady to reconsider her position and to make an arrangement in the interests of orderly business in the House.

The Government bring their Bill to the House because we are committed to align what the Government spend with what they receive in tax. The Bill is crucial if we are to have sound public finances. Sound public finances are essential to our national prosperity. What is more, the Government believe that it would be ethically indefensible for the Government to plan consistently to live beyond their means when every family and business in the country has had to make the sacrifices necessary to bring income and expenditure into line.

The Government have therefore set out their economic policies with great care. Over the past 18 months, we have set out our monetary policy, we have put in place the transparent arrangements that determine the considerations that lead to our decisions on interest rates; the markets can be confident about what they are. We have set out a medium-term spending strategy. We did that first in the autumn statement 1992 with the new top-down approach. We produced figures then. We followed that up in the Budget introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in November with new figures that came in below the public spending ceilings that we had set the year before.

People know the limits of what the Government will spend. They know that the Government will stick within those limits. In the most recent spending round, we demonstrated our determination not only to hold down public spending but to reduce the plans for public spending that we had made. For 1994-95, we have made, in successive autumn statements, two reductions totalling more than £8 billion off the plans for the coming year. We have a medium-term spending strategy, and a medium-term taxation strategy. The markets know exactly how the Government will raise the revenue that is needed. They know that they can have confidence that the Government's borrowing will be reduced sharply. That confidence is reflected in today's low level of interest—the lowest since 1977.

I now want to make a statement which will, I believe, deeply shock the Labour party, as most statements of the obvious do. There is an unbreakable link between what Governments spend and what they must raise in taxes. At the last election, the contest was between a Conservative party whose every instinct is to control spending and reduce taxation and a Labour party that is dedicated to extending the role of the state through increased public spending and, therefore, to raising taxes in order to pay for that. Nothing that has happened since the last election has changed the validity of the choice that was put before the British people then, or the validity of the decision that the British people made on that point.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): The Chief Secretary has just been telling the House about ethics. Will he admit to the House that he misled the country on taxes at the last general election?

Mr. Portillo: The Government gave a pledge that they would uphold sound public finances, and we have responded in the difficult circumstances that we have faced since then in order to fulfil that pledge. I do not believe that Chancellor Kohl promised the German people that there would be a 9 per cent. reduction in industrial production. I do not believe that Mr. Gonzales promised that there would be a 22 per cent. rate of unemployment in Spain.

Governments have to cope with the circumstances that they find, and if they are good Governments they do so in accordance with their principles. The principle of this Government is that we will have sound public finances. What the Government raise and what the Government spend will be brought into line with one another.

Ms Harman: What this Government did was promise to cut taxes. Will the Chief Secretary admit that he misled the country in the last general election because he promised to cut taxes?

Mr. Portillo: We gave the most solemn pledge to the country that we would deliver sound public finances. That is what we stand by today. The hon. Lady knows perfectly well that the Conservative party's every instinct is to cut taxation, but our principle to establish sound public finances comes first. We have principles. We have priorities. We know what those priorities are and that is why we deliver policies in which people can have confidence.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Does the Chief Secretary remember that in the Budget debate he said that he and his colleagues did not say at the time of the election that taxes would go up because

[Mr. Clive Betts]

"We thought that the recession was coming to an end in early 1992."—*[Official Report,* 1 December 1993; Vol. 233, c. 1072.]

How does the right hon. Gentleman square that statement with the statement made by the Chancellor in the same Budget debate? He said:

"It is now clear that the recovery started in the first half of 1992".—*[Official Report,* 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c.1 919.]

If the recovery started in the first half of 1992, why did he not manage to anticipate that during the general election and make the clear commitments on taxation that obviously he did not make at that time?

Mr. Portillo: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman. He has had a couple of months to think out that question. There is the small matter of the pace at which the recovery was taking place, and the hon. Gentleman was as wrong as anybody else in thinking that the recovery had begun at a rapid pace during the early part of 1992. Alas, we were disappointed, but the Government have not been afraid to take the action that is necessary.

Nothing has changed about the Labour party. Nothing has changed in the series of promises that it will spend more money, which it gives day after day. In recent times, we have heard promises from the Labour party that local councils will spend another £6 billion from the money that is rightly set aside against their indebtedness. We have heard that it will increase overseas aid by £2·5 billion. We have heared that it will increase health spending, which it wants to take up to 7 per cent. of national income. That would mean another £6 billion. We have heard that it wants to equalise the state pension age at 60 instead of 65, and the additional cost of that would be £12 billion.

There is no accounting from the Labour party to show how all those promises will be paid for, and no Labour spokesman has the self control to get up in a debate in the House or to give a radio interview and last the five minutes necessary without making some new promise about public spending. On Friday evening, I took part in "Any Questions" with the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). We had not got five minutes into the programme before he was promising us a new and highly expensive house building programme. Even the shadow Chief Secretary suffers from that marked lack of public expenditure control. One searches in vain through the wilderness of her speeches for any sign that she urges restraint on her colleagues, any sign of the cuts that she believes will be necessary. No such promises are to be found from the hon. Lady.

From top to bottom, the Labour party is characterised by its public-spending incontinence. If spending today, as a proportion of national income, is higher than we would wish, and it is, we can rely on this: it would be much higher under Labour. If the taxes that we require today, at the end of a recession, to balance the books are higher than we would like them to be, and they are, we can count on this: they would be higher still under Labour.

Let me put it plainly. Labour spends more; Labour borrows more; Labour would tax more. Come rain or come shine, Labour would tax, borrow and spend more than we do. The House need not take my word for it. In "On the Record", the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said:

"The Budget decisions that the Conservatives made in the 1980s were completely unacceptable."

What does that mean? It means that the hon. Gentleman disagrees with the reduction in income tax from 33p to 25p in the pound; it means that he disagrees with the reduction in corporation tax from 52 per cent. to 33 per cent. Those were changes that we introduced in the 1980s, and the hon. Gentleman disagrees with both of them.

There is one honest man on the Labour Benches, although he is too honest to be on the Front Bench. I refer to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who, in that same programme, said:

"I think the Labour party ought to accept that we will always be likely to have a higher tax burden than our opponents, because we believe in public spending."

Bravo! The hon. Gentleman spoke the simple truth. Here is a man who is not afraid of the truth—a man with whom it is a joy to have lunch.

The Labour party has changed in only one respect. In the good old days of the Labour party—the days when it was led by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock)—it used to produce a shadow Budget that showed that it would need to raise higher taxes to pay for all its promises of higher spending. Where is that old Welsh honesty that we all miss so much? It has gone out of the window.

In this Bill, the Government recognise that business cannot prosper and jobs cannot be created if public finances are under strain. That is why we have taken decisive steps to bring our finances into balance, tackling both spending and taxing: spending levels determine tax levels, so spending must be tackled.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: As my hon. Friends know, part of our deficit results from the large increases in what we have spent on health, education and social security. In each of the three years preceding 1992-93, we were spending an extra 5·5 per cent. in real terms on the health service. Did the Labour party ever say that that was too much? No: Labour, disgracefully, used individual cases to lead the public to believe that we were spending too little. Conservative Members well remember the party's scandalous, shameful behaviour over Jennifer's ear.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: Given that the Government have spent so much on health, would Labour spend more? Labour Members say that they would. Over the past five years, we have increased our spending on education by 25 per cent. in real terms. Did Labour tell us that that was too much? Did they tell us to cut back? No; they were too busy promising the earth and more. Would they now wish to spend more on education? They tell us that they would.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Portillo: So the question for the hon. Member for Peckham to answer in her speech is this: what would Labour cut?

Mr. Howarth: Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Portillo: What would Labour—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I think that you would endorse my view, and the view of many hon. Members who are present, that it is most unusual for a senior Minister, having given us this prepared gibberish, not to yield to hon. Member after hon. Member when there are valid points to be made. Would you occasionally reprimand the Chief Secretary, Madam Speaker, or ask him kindly to observe the parliamentary courtesy of giving way when an hon. Member wishes to intervene?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a long-standing Member of the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Too long."] That may be the opinion of some people but it is not mine. He happens to be my constituency neighbour so I have to be very careful. As he knows, it is up to the hon. Member who had the floor to decide whether to give way. I am sure that the Minister has taken that into consideration.

Mr. Portillo: Indeed, I choose to give way often and have done so several times in this debate. I gave way twice to the hon. Member for Peckham and once to another hon. Member.

I want to ask the hon. Member for Peckham where the Labour party is to make the cuts. Her party says that taxes and borrowing are too high but it has promised extra spending on education, health and overseas aid, so where are the cuts to be made? I want to know. Are they to be made in social security? The hon. Lady and her friends are opposing the Bills that would reduce social security spending. Will the cuts be in transport, in housing, in defence or in training? The hon. Lady must tell us, and if she wants to, I should be happy to give way to her. She does not want to tell us. I genuinely thought that she would get up and make her usual, fatuous commitment that the Labour party will cut unemployment.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Why is it fatuous?

Mr. Portillo: How will the Labour party cut unemployment? It is committed to the social chapter, which we know destroys jobs. Employers across Europe want to locate their businesses in Britain because we have the lowest non-wage costs in Europe. The Labour party wants the social chapter and wants to destroy jobs.

The Labour party says that it wants to stimulate investment but what plans does it have to do so? It wants to levy a special penal rate of tax on the utilities, which are some of the biggest investors in the British economy, and that would also destroy employment. Labour says that it will put more people into work, but how? By spending more on job creation schemes, I suppose—and how would they be financed? By more taxes? The Labour party tells us that taxation is already too high, so is it going to borrow? It tells us that borrowing is also too high. If it borrowed more, it would lose the confidence of the financial markets and we should have higher interest rates, slower recovery and fewer jobs, which is why I say that the Labour party's claim is fatuous. It is not only fatuous; it is misleading, it is dishonest and it is basically ignorant.

The Liberals——

Mr. George Howarth: Perhaps the Chief Secretary could throw some light on a subject that is worrying many hon. Members and people outside. During the general election campaign, either the Government knew what lay ahead in terms of public finance and they therefore misled the electorate or they did not know what was to happen, in which case how can we believe the figures that they are using now?

Mr. Portillo: We believed, as investment analysts, banks, other Governments, commentators and politicians in the Labour party believed, that the recovery was well under way around the time of the election. If we were wrong, the analysts, the banks, other Governments and people in the hon. Gentleman's party were wrong. If we made an error, it was an error and not a matter of dishonesty. The Labour party is presenting a dishonest policy and the Liberals are not much better——

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I am sorry, but the Government did not make an error; they forecast a public sector borrowing requirement of £28 billion. It surely followed that they must already have had an idea that some tax increases would be necessary for a Government whose first priority, as the Chief Secretary has said, was to bring their taxes into line with their spending.

Mr. Portillo: The PSBR that we forecast at £28 billion turned out to be £37 billion. We did not foresee a PSBR of £50 billion.

The measures that the Government have had to take are accounted for by the differences between those figures. The hon. Gentleman knows well that the Government's policy has been to balance spending and income over time. We have recognised that we have run a PSBR when we were in recession, in the same way as we ran a surplus when we were at the peak of the recovery. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, therefore, that it was consistent to run a policy of sound public finances and to tolerate a PSBR at the very trough of the recession. That trough turned out to be deeper than we thought and we are taking the corrective action that is in the Bill.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The Chief Secretary is obviously suffering from repetitive taxing strain. Does he recall telling the country that he promised to provide —his words—an ultra-low-tax economy? Having now presided over the highest tax hike in our history, will he now resign?

Mr. Portillo: My aim is an ultra-low-tax economy and I believe that the British people will believe that the Conservatives are directed towards that. What should worry the hon. Gentleman is that the British people will never believe that that is the ambition of the Labour party. Members of the Labour party think that they are very clever whipping up this tax row. They think that they will make people disaffected with the Conservative Government. Well, perhaps they will, but when the Labour party has succeeded in convincing the British people that they are paying too much tax, and then the Labour party goes to the electorate and puts before the British people its plan to spend more and to tax more, I wonder whether its members will feel so clever then. I very much doubt it.

The Liberal party is not very much better. It does at least admit that it is its policy to spend more and borrow more. It gets some marks from me for frankness for that. At a time when the Government are already borrowing £1,000 million a week, however, what serious political party can propose that the solution to our problem is to borrow more money? The way to establish the low-tax economy that I and my hon. Friends want is to underpin the recovery with prudent fiscal policies. Our recovery will depend on clear, sustained determination to take difficult decisions now to

[Mr. Portillo]

provide a basis for longer-term prosperity. No one will look to the Labour party for that type of determination or that type of responsibility.

Mr. Mandelson: If the newspaper is not too undeferential for his tastes, has the Chief Secretary read *The Sun* today? Very properly, it asks why borrowing is so high. Is not the answer that borrowing is so high because unemployment is costing the country £26 billion a year? Is not the reason why we have such high taxation in Britain that we have such a low level of economic success as a result of the Government's policies?

Mr. Portillo: We had the highest growth in the European Community in 1993 and in 1994. I gave the explanation about unemployment. The hon. Gentleman was too busy squawking, "fatuous" from a sedentary position to listen to what I was saying. I did read the leader in *The Sun* this morning, which made it perfectly clear that it would be worse under a Labour Government That has been the thesis throughout my speech.

The Government have received the extremely interesting report from the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. We shall want to respond to it in due course, but I express my gratitude to the Select Committee. I welcome its conclusion that the Chancellor was right to tighten the fiscal position further, and that not to have done so would have had adverse economic consequences—that, remember, from an all-party Committee. I am pleased, too, that the Select Committee expects expenditure restraint. I know that my hon. Friends will be interested that the Committee expects expenditure restraint to contribute significantly towards the Government's objective of reducing public spending as a proportion of national income. That is the objective of Conservative Members. That has been underlined by the Select Committee. It is not, I believe, the objective of the Labour party. Without our determination to control state spending, the tax rises that we would need would be much higher than those in the Bill.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I am sure that the Minister is aware that two amendments, supported by all the Opposition Members in the Committee, were tabled, expressing concern about the scale of the tax hikes and saying that they could put our recovery at risk. In view of his new worries about the institutions of the House, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would not wish to mislead the House.

Mr. Portillo: My interest in the institutions of the House is not new found. As I said, we shall give a considered reply to the Committee's report. It is the judgment of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and my judgment too, that the recovery is strong enough. It is broadening and sustainable, and it will be proof against the increases in taxation this year. Both our forecasts and the independent forecasts for the coming year take into account the tax increases in the Bill, and those in the previous Finance Act.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Presumably the Chief Secretary acknowledges that in colder areas of the country vulnerable groups in the community have to pay more for their fuel, and will therefore be forced to pay more VAT. Why is that fact of life for those vulnerable groups not reflected in the compensation scheme?

Mr. Portillo: It is not reflected because there are variations in what people spend on all sorts of goods, depending upon where they live. Some people in city areas have more expensive lives to lead than people in country areas, and so on. It is simply not possible to adjust social security arrangements to take account of each and every different factor, many of which tend to cancel each other out.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has led me on to the subject of VAT on fuel and power. That has been the most difficult decision for my right hon. and hon. Friends, yet they have supported the Government, and I thank them very much for that. I believe that our announcement that we would extend VAT to fuel and power, unpopular though it was, clearly underlines our determination to deal with the borrowing problem.

We were under no illusions about the unpopularity of the measure. It is not the Conservative party that needs convincing that increasing taxes is unpopular, and is to be avoided whenever possible. The fact that, none the less, we decided to extend the scope of VAT made it clear beyond doubt that we were absolutely serious, and that we would take the necessary action to bring the public finances under control. As a result of that confidence, both short-term and long-term interest rates fell in 1993, and the recovery gained pace, because the markets were convinced that we were in earnest about dealing with public spending and borrowing.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I shall make a little more progress.

The amendment that has been tabled on VAT surprises me. I had assumed that by now the Labour party had given up its opposition to the extension of VAT to fuel and power. If Labour Members were concerned about that, surely the natural time to introduce an amendment was at the end of the Budget debate. That would have been a timely occasion on which to debate the issue. I cannot understand why the Labour party did not table such an amendment then. Of course, I assume that whatever the reason was, it was not just plain incompetence on the part of the Labour party.

Because of the prudent decisions that we have taken, and because of the measures in the Bill, we shall not build up such a large burden of debt to pass to our children. Without that action, the interest rate burden would have mounted inexorably, and high debt interest would have required a permanently higher rate of taxation to pay for it. We have arrested that process in time. By taking steps now to bring our public finances into balance, we have created the prospect of lower taxes in years to come. Without the firm action we have taken, and the action that we propose today, we would have been increasing taxes every year, just to pay the interest on the Government's overdraft.

Any sensible Chancellor of the Exchequer would take action to avoid that. Only one has acted otherwise—a Labour Chancellor, Lord Healey. When he was faced with a mounting debt and a mounting burden of interest, he chose to cut taxes and to leave public spending and borrowing increasing inexorably. That was irresponsible in the extreme. That action by Lord Healey—cynical and irresponsible as it was—taken in 1978-79 as the general election approached, was the starting point for all the comparisons that the Labour party makes about the burden of taxation under its Government and under the Conservative Government. It was a year of shame and the Labour party ought to be happy to forget all about it.

The essential difference between the Labour party and the Conservative party is highlighted by our different attitudes to what has been described as the growth dividend. As the economy grows, the Labour party commits itself to squander that dividend on higher public spending. On the other hand, our commitment is to control spending and to pass that dividend to those who earned the money in the first place—the taxpayers. There remains today a huge gulf between the two parties in that respect. It is the same divide that faced the nation at the last general election. It is the same choice between the Labour party, which believes that the state should do more, spend more, tax more, and the Conservatives, who believe in sound public finance, the control of public spending and the shrinking of the state. My right hon. and hon. Friends——

Mr. Faulds: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there, in "Erskine May", any restraint of solo recitation?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman realises that that is not a point of order. I have no doubt that if there is such a restraint, he will go and find it.

Mr. Portillo: The Labour party has raised the stakes on taxation. It has convinced the people of the country that high taxation is something that it does not want. Labour Members think that they are sitting pretty today. I predict that they will rue the day. Come the next general election, no one will believe that the Labour party will reduce taxes. People will vote for the party that stands for the reduction of taxation, and the Conservative party believes in that.

The Budget and the Finance Bill provide the means of controlling public spending and setting our public finances on a sound footing. The Bill gives effect to the measures in the Budget, and I commend it to the House.

4.36 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I welcome the Chief Secretary to the debate about taxes, because, while the whole country has been talking about taxes over the weekend and since then, the Chief——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I draw it to the attention of the hon. Lady that she should move the amendment?

Ms Harman: I beg to move,

That this House believes that the Finance Bill is not an acceptable and effective measure because it fails to make any proposal to repeal section 42 of the Finance Act 1993, which imposed value added tax on domestic fuel.

[Interruption.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is not much point in asking the hon. Lady to move the amendment if I cannot hear her.

Ms Harman: I welcome the Chief Secretary to the debate about taxes, because, while the whole country has been talking about taxes over the weekend and since then, the right hon. Gentleman has been noticeably absent. While the Chancellor and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury have been running around television studios trying, unsuccessfully, to rescue the tattered reputation of the Government, the Chief Secretary, uncharacteristically, has been nowhere to be seen. It seems that he is ever available to make speeches to right-wing groups of Conservatives.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understood that the hon. Lady was going to move the amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already pointed out to the hon. Lady that she should move the amendment and I would be obliged if she would.

Ms Harman: May I point out to the right hon. Member for Horsham that the amendment—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We shall have order, whether I take points of order or not. The Chair will decide whether or not the hon. Lady is in order or out of order. That decision can safely be left to the Chair.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will know that, of course, it is perfectly in order to move the amendment at any time during the speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is quite right.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not in order that you remind the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) to move the amendment, because she forgot to table it last time? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We will have less frivolity, and get down to serious business.

Ms Harman: People outside the House of Commons are not interested in procedural points to disrupt debate; they are interested in the increases in taxes that they will face from this lying, hypocritical Government, and they are interested in the VAT which the Government have insisted on. The hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) will have an opportunity to vote with his constituents against VAT on gas and electricity.

Although the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is ever available to make speeches to right-wing groups, he has been available nowhere, it seems, to talk about the Finance Bill. He could hardly bring himself to discuss the contents of the Bill today. While his colleagues prepare for the next day's battering from a now furious Tory press, he has been watching his back in preparation for the next leadership election. That is why he has been so silent. It is no wonder he has not wanted to be seen talking about the Finance Bill: the Bill destroys once and for all the Conservatives' central claim that theirs is the party of low tax.

That is the claim that was presented to the British people as the principal reason for voting Tory at the previous election. That claim is now dead, for now the very same party has imposed 12 major tax increases in just one Bill, 20 tax rises in 20 months, and the largest tax demand in peacetime history. It is no wonder Tory Back-Bench Members are worried—taxes to the left of them, taxes to the right of them, into the valley of taxes Ministers are leading them.

Within two hours of the supposedly tax-cutting Chancellor making his Budget speech on 30 November,

[Ms Harman]

taxes began to rise—this year, next year, the year after, the year after that and the year after that as well. The Tories' five-year plan is tax upon tax, year after year.

As the claim to be the party of low tax is destroyed, so too is any claim to the trust of the British people. The Conservative manifesto invited the electorate to trust the Tories as

> "the only party that understands the need for low taxation".

But now the Government have been forced to admit that, whether it is tax on what one earns or tax on what one spends, one will pay more.

The Prime Minister promised the British people that he could be trusted not to increase VAT, but the Government have been forced to admit that people are already paying twice as much VAT as they paid in 1979. He promised not to put VAT on gas and electricity, and now he intends to do just that. The Prime Minister promised that he could be trusted to make reductions in the rate of tax, year on year. But, in a parliamentary answer that the Financial Secretary gave me, the Government have been forced to admit that taxes on income have not only been raised but are now higher than they were in 1979.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Does the hon. Lady accept that it is quite extraordinary to many people both in the House and outside that she should be lecturing on credibility and trust, given the economies with the truth and the innuendos and smears that she practised as shadow health spokesperson in the previous Parliament?

Ms Harman: That is a disgraceful diversion, and an attempt to distract attention from what the Government are doing to the hon. Gentleman's constituents on taxation. The hon. Gentleman is too cowardly to stand up and protect them against what the Government are doing.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I am trying to follow the hon. Lady's argument on tax matters, which is central to her speech. If she really is sincerely complaining about rates of tax under the Government, which rates of tax would her party cut if it were in office?

Ms Harman: I am complaining about tax increases from a Government who promised to cut tax, tax increases to pay for high unemployment, and tax which hits hardest those who can least afford it.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) should be reminded of what he said in his election address to his constituents, and perhaps he will vote with us against the Finance Bill. He said:

> "The burden of income tax has been reduced and only the Conservatives promise further reductions"——

[HON. MEMBERS: "Which taxes would you cut?"] We would stop VAT on gas and electricity.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Ms Harman: I shall not give way for a while.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has made it quite clear that she is not giving way. These are not the football terraces.

Ms Harman: The Chief Secretary claimed last year—the right hon. Gentleman could confirm the point:

> "Over time, we have shifted the tax burden away from direct taxes".—[*Official Report*, 26 April 1993; Vol. 223, c. 734.]

But that is not what they have done. They have put up direct as well as indirect tax. The tax bill on the earnings of a typical family will be higher from April than it was in 1979. The Chief Secretary still refuses to own up to that deceit. Instead, he lectures us about morality and ethics. Perhaps we should not be surprised.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I will not give way.

The Chief Secretary has a history of brazening out extravagant claims, for it is he who promised the British people that he was committed not just to a low-tax economy—that was not good enough—not even to a very low-tax economy, but to an ultra-low-tax economy. With an unbridgeable gap between what he says and what he is doing—that is the real gap at issue—perhaps you should turn off the television cameras, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that the country cannot see what is going on.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): As the hon. Lady now wishes to present herself as a champion of low taxes, does she regret that the Labour party opposed all the reductions in direct tax rates, income tax and corporation tax which we have brought about over the past 15 years? Will she apologise for the Labour party opposing those reductions?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman should remember that we did not vote against widening the 20 per cent. ban when we considered the previous Finance Bill, but I am grateful for his intervention, because it allows me the opportunity to remind his constituents and his colleagues of what he said in his own election address. It was a good one. He said:

> "We are absolutely committed to continuing to bring down taxes."

What garbage. It is no wonder Conservative Members want to end the televising of Parliament. Having been exposed for putting up VAT and putting up national insurance, the Government continue to claim—one last claim—that theirs is the party of low income tax.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I am going to press on. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is on the list".] As my hon. Friends say, the hon. Gentleman is on the list.

In his new year message, after the Budget, the Prime Minister said:

> "The Conservative party remains . . . the party of low income tax."

Last Tuesday, in the House of Commons, he contradicted my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and said:

> "standard rates of tax under the Conservative party have dropped dramatically since the Opposition were in government".—[*Official Report*, 18 January, 1994; Vol. 235, c. 703.]

But the Treasury's own figures, which were given to me in a parliamentary answer from the Financial Secretary—the hon. Gentleman will agree with me—show that the income tax bill for a family with a mortgage will be higher from April than it was in 1979. We know what the Government have done. They have reduced headline income tax rates, but they have cut tax allowances, and that is how they have put up tax bills. So their claim to be the party of low income tax is now exposed as being as fraudulent as all the other claims.

After all the broken promises and the betrayal of trust, the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary offer not a word of apology to the people of this country. What they offer is only evasion and excuses—the same kind of evasion and excuses which they have been dishing out since the election: "The recession went on longer than we expected," or, "Well, it depends what you call a political promise," or, "It is all outside our control." When confronted with the Treasury's own figures on tax increases, the Chancellor brazens it out and calls it "piffle".

With that record, the Chief Secretary's speech 10 days ago when he was whingeing about cynicism was a disgrace. Despite that record of betrayal, he demands respect from the British people. He believes that he and his colleagues are blameless victims of that terrible cynicism. The Chief Secretary tells us that it is all the fault of the British people—the new enemy within. It is all of them —all the British people. The public, he says, lack moral fibre. The Government do not lack moral fibre—not this honourable Government!

Mr. Riddick: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman on moral fibre. I do not think that he has anything to tell the House about that.

The Chief Secretary says that leaders should be afforded respect whatever they do. Otherwise, he tells us, the country will not work so well. He wants us to turn off the television cameras so that the ignorant electorate cannot jump to so many wrong conclusions. The discredited and dishonest electorate have betrayed a decent and upstanding Government. The Tory party is not the party of low tax —it is the party of low excuses.

Mr. Portillo *rose*——

Ms Harman: Here comes another excuse.

Mr. Portillo: No, not at all. I have listened to what the hon. Lady has said about my speech. Not a single comment that she made was accurate, and every one was a distortion. I do not want to get into a great discussion with her now, but the hon. Lady would be on stronger ground if she quoted what I said and argued against that, rather than parodying what I said. It shows her to be on weak ground, not strong ground.

Ms Harman: I must apoligise, as clearly I have been very hurtful to the Chief Secretary.

The Tory party is not the party of low tax—it is just the party of low excuses. In the case of the Chief Secretary, the excuses are not just low, but ultra-low. As the Government run out of excuses, all they can say—the Chief Secretary said it again this afternoon—is that they did not intend to put up taxes.

The Prime Minister says, "I very much regret that we had to put up taxes," and, "It was not our intention," and, "I did not wish to do it." The Chancelloor tells us about his instincts, but I am not sure that I want to know about them. He tells us that his instincts are for low taxes. The Chief Secretary tells us that the Conservative party believes in low taxes.

Those people who hold the great offices of state can offer nothing but their instincts and their aspirations. Ministers of the Crown have opened their hearts and told us of their hopes. This is truly, as the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) said, a Government in office but not in power. A party which has been in government for 14 years begs to be judged not on its record but on its instincts. However, no one will take those instincts seriously and they count for nothing, because the Tories cannot deliver on their promises. They cannot deliver on their pledge of low tax, because they have failed on the economy.

After 14 years, the Tory economics of leaving everything to the markets have failed. Their economic failure has torpedoed their tax plans. They have presided over 14 years of our economy falling behind and of low growth. They have allowed our economy to sink into the deepest and longest recession since the war. They have presided over the destruction of one third of this country's manufacturing employment. They have landed Britain with a deficit in manufacturing trade for the first time in history. The party which says it stands for sound finance —whatever that means from this Government; the Chief Secretary has said it again today—is borrowing more than any other Government since the war.

It is in the face of that failure that the Government are putting up taxes in the Finance Bill. The higher taxes are not for better hospitals—they are cutting capital investment in the health service. The higher taxes are not for better railways—they are cutting investment in British Rail. The higher taxes are not for better training—they are cutting employment programmes.

The higher taxes are to pay the price of economic failure, and they are to deal with the cost of nearly 3 million unemployed people. With £9,000 being spent for every one person who is unemployed, that means that this country is spending £25 billion of public money a year on unemployment—two and a half times more than it was under Labour in 1979. That is where the money goes.

Mr. Portillo: What would the Opposition cut?

Ms Harman: The Chief Secretary asks what we would cut. We would cut unemployment. We want a nation at work, not a nation on benefits.

The higher taxes are to deal with the problems of high unemployment and low growth that the Government have created. The taxes are the price that the country is paying for a Government who believe that unemployment is a "price worth paying". The tax rises will not solve Britain's economic problems—they will just take the Government's economic failure one step further The Government have raised taxes because of their economic failure, but the tax rises threaten to make the problem worse.

Even Ministers are admitting that the tax rises will slow the recovery, and that the recovery will be checked. Instead of a panic Budget which put up taxes, there should have been a Budget which took immediate action to address the real causes of the deficit that the Government have created. The Budget should have taken action to promote growth and cut unemployment, and to encourage investment in our industry, our infrastructure and our people.

The Chief Secretary thinks that cutting unemployment would be "fatuous". We wanted a Budget which would have released the £4 billion of capital receipts from council house sales. It is not fatuous to put building workers back to work and to take them off the dole. We wanted a Budget which gave an incentive to firms to hire the long-term

[Ms Harman]

unemployed. It is not fatuous to put the long-term unemployed back to work. We wanted an extended capital allowance to help industry with investment, and we wanted genuine action to modernise our infrastructure. We did not get that, and in consequence we will continue to have a weak economy.

Having been driven off its claim to be the party of low tax, the Conservative party cannot resist one further fundamental Tory instinct. Government Members have not been talking about that instinct tonight, but it is the real Tory instinct—the instinct for unfairness. Tonight, we ask the House to vote against VAT on gas and electricity because it breaks a clear election promise and because it hits hardest those who can least afford it.

The compensation scheme is wholly inadequate. All Government Members will find that even their poorest pensioners will have to pay some of this new tax. Is that what they want? Is that what they promised their constituents? Is that fair?

The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) wrote in a letter to one of his constituents that he would vote against VAT on gas and electricity if only he had the chance. Tonight he has that chance. His constituents will notice that he is not in the Chamber. But he has the chance to vote tonight.

The choice for Conservative Members is this: they can vote with these discredited Ministers or they can vote to honour the promises that they made to their constituents and the pledges that their Prime Minister made to the country. If they do not take the chance tonight to get rid of VAT on gas and electricity, their constituents will never forgive them.

To add to the unfairness of VAT on gas and electricity, the new taxes on spending are grossly unfair. The tax on insurance hits hardest people who live in poor, high-crime areas. They will have to pay up to seven times more of this tax than people in affluent areas.

Let us take the airport tax—the tax on holidays. It is neat, is it not, that the Conservatives have made an exemption for small aircraft? The Chancellor presented it as an exemption for the Scottish islands, yet 90 per cent. of those who go to, from and between the Scottish islands do not travel on planes which qualify for the exemption. Only 10 per cent. of them will escape the tax. It is a badly targeted exemption if it fails to help 90 per cent. of those who travel to the Scottish islands.

My hon. Friends suspect that there is another group who can expect not to pay the airport tax. It is not Scottish farmers or crofters, but millionaires with private jets. Who are the people who will be exempted? They are people such as John Latsis, Li Ka Shing and Asil Nadir—if he ever flew back to this country: all Tory donors, all private jet owners, all exempt from the tax.

The truth is that the Chancellor's exemption is not protection for crofters but protection for Tory donors. There is one thing that demoralised Conservative Members of Parliament can still hold to. There is one thing that we can rely on Tory Chancellors for. We can rely on them, when they put up taxes, always to ensure that there are loopholes for their friends.

The Tories have also increased direct taxes in the most unfair way possible. A family on half average earnings will pay more tax after April. They will spend more than they would have done in 1979. A family on average earnings will pay more tax after April than now and more than they paid in 1979, but a family on £100,000 will pay £1,000 a week less tax than in 1979.

Even as the Finance Bill imposes new unfair tax increases, it fails to end tax abuses by the wealthiest. The truth is that this is a Government who look to the most wealthy when they want to give away tax cuts but turn to ordinary people and their families when they put taxes up.

We shall oppose the Finance Bill, not only because it breaks election promises but because it is deeply unfair. The Chief Secretary complains about the cynicism that he says bedevils Britain. That cynicism has not arrived from nowhere. It has not arrived from outer space. It is not some virus or some new British disease, as the Chief Secretary calls it. It is the Tory Government who have made people cynical about politics. It is the Prime Minister who has brought shame on No. 10 Downing street. It is Tory Chancellors who have brought contempt on No. 11 Downing street.

No wonder that a Tory activist confided to *The Daily Telegraph:*

> "When you go out and canvass you are hampered by the fact that everyone thinks the Prime Minister is . . . slippery".

The Sun described the Prime Minister as

> "weak and mediocre, surrounded by unprincipled spivs and chancers."

I agree with the Chief Secretary on one thing. The deceit and duplicity of the Tories have taken their toll. People are demoralised. They have lost confidence. It is not that the Chief Secretary has discovered it: his Government have created it.

As the events of the past few days have shown, the Finance Bill marks an historic moment in British politics. Let us make no mistake about it: it is a decisive turning point against the Conservative party. The pledge of tax cuts has been betrayed. The promises of low taxes have been broken. The integrity of the Conservative party lies in tatters. It has nothing left. No one will believe it if it ever says again that it is a party of low tax. No one will ever trust the Tories on tax again.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). [HON. MEMBERS: "He was not here."] I have been here throughout. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. How can I be expected to deal with a point of order if I cannot hear it?

Mr. Stern: I deliberately refrained from intervening in the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham so that I could hear her speech more clearly. Despite your invitation at the beginning of her speech, and despite Madam Speaker's selection of the Opposition amendment, I genuinely believe that at no point was that amendment moved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for the Chair. The Chair was satisfied.

5.6 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) formidably indicted practically every clause in the Finance Bill. She made it clear that in her experience it was one of the most unacceptable pieces of legislation that she had ever encountered. If that it true—I take her words—the prospect of the Bill being fiercely debated in Committee is assured. It is a Bill of massive proportions. My right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government owe it to the public outside and to the parliamentary process, if it seems that the Bill will be filibustered or impeded so that it will not receive proper consideration from beginning to end, to table an early timetable motion. That is the only way in which there can be proper consideration of the Bill in circumstances which are not of the making of my right hon. Friends, but which are certainly detrimental to the public interest in our affairs.

Finance Bill debates are always occasions for going down memory lane. Today has been no exception. Practically all the debate has concentrated on what has happened in the past. Not much has been said about what will happen in the period between now and the next election. The Bill marks the beginning of a phase of consideration of the economy that will dominate the next two or three years and will be central to what will be debated and resolved at the next general election.

I should like to share with the House a passing thought inspired by the speech of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. He talked about the Denis Healey Budget of 1974, which cut taxes in a situation in which that was clearly damaging—[HON. MEMBERS: "1978."] I am sorry, 1978.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): It was just before the election.

Mr. Biffen: That is right. I remember it well. Whatever the year, it was before an election.

The events are clearer in my imagination than the pedantry of dates. The Budget came after a narrow Labour victory and portended a somewhat enhanced Labour victory. I remember it well because it bore all the hallmarks of the measures against which my right hon. Friend has reacted. But the Opposition of the time did not oppose it; they thought that it was not the time to be seen to oppose tax cuts. It was left to my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) and to me—like two rednecks below the Gangway—to divide the House, earning ourselves the irritation of the Whips and an approving editorial in *The Times*. It was a sort of morning star of Maastricht to come. I say that to emphasise that we would be unwise to assume that there is a puritanical attachment to truth and analysis in connection with Budgets during the heady days leading up to elections.

Having said that, I hope that we have learnt something from the events of the past two or three years. It is now clear that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has presented a Budget that includes massive increases in taxation. Nobody disputes that. Those increases are wholly merited, and I would have gone even further. The increases are wholly merited because they mark a very substantial reduction in the borrowing requirement, which I believe is my right hon. and learned Friend's utmost priority. From now on, as we begin to take advantage of the recovery—which of course will be affected by the tax increases, but which is reasonably well established and which my instinct tells me will continue—one question will increasingly characterise the political situation: how should the political world use the resources that are created by the recovery? Without doubt, our first priority should be to continue to reduce borrowing. Thereafter, we shall have to make the tantalising choice between reducing taxation and accommodating further public expenditure increases.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will not become too enthusiastic about any one of the courses that are available to him. Although we are discussing a combined spending and revenue-raising arrangement in a new form of debate, it [illegible]ending that determines taxation rather than vice versa. Of course, there is an interplay between the two, but hon. Members would be profoundly foolish if they though that they could walk away from dealing with the prime importance of accepted and legitimate public expenditure and the undertaking of collective responsibilities that are accepted by the Conservative party and many of its opponents. One always looks for an opportunity to reduce spending, but between now and the next election the underlying thrust of expenditure, certainly in health and education, is likely to be sustained and to intensify rather than to diminish.

I make that point as a check on rhetoric about what is available for tax cuts. Of course, one would like tax cuts, but my experience of them over many years is that they are tax redistributions. Revenue has increased in almost every sector except income tax, where it has been reduced. That has become the flagship of fiscal policy. I can understand the political attraction of that, but it seems to me that, when it came to the point of increasing the poll tax so that it would yield more than the local government taxes that it replaced—again, as part of the master strategy to reduce income tax—a certain amount of political misjudgment was involved; I put it no higher than that. Such realities will control us over the next two or three years.

Welfare spending is of enormous significance in our total budget. I believe that, sooner or later, changes in welfare spending will be forced on the House by the Borrie report or some other mechanism. Those changes will have to be made on the basis of the private sector being able to take over the running of a substantial part of a service which would otherwise and historically have been the responsibility of public expenditure. We have achieved that with retirement pensions and there are other sectors where it can be achieved. In my view, however, we are talking about a developing, almost Fabian-style policy, not one of substantial cuts delivered in a short time.

We should take pride in the fact that we have been successful in eliminating great sectors of expenditure on industry from the Budget. The most important part of that policy has been the privatisation of various public utilities so that their programmes are privately, and not Exchequer, financed. If expenditure on those programmes were superimposed on today's levels of public spending, that would present a formidable challenge.

I say to my hon. Friends and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in particular that we need to be very careful to ensure that the idea of public sector involvement in industrial activity does not return via an unexpected route—Brussels. I have no hesitation in, and feel no shame about, putting the proposition that the growth in our European Union budget sits ill alongside the constraints that we try to place on our domestic economy. That creates new centres of fiscal patronage, which are then tapped, usually by local authorities, outside what ought to be the overriding determination of a national Treasury. I see that on the horizon as something that could become a factor in adding to the difficulty of ensuring prudent financial control in the years to come.

[Mr. Biffen]

As we come to the next general election, I have no doubt that we are now moving back into a position from which a Conservative Government can move forward by encouraging a relationship between spending, revenue and borrowing that is defensible and can be properly understood by the public. When the parties are compared, the issue will be not about the promises of the past but about the promises for the future and the extent to which the Opposition parties will try to cap spending, make other alterations or relate the consequences of their policy on the known national budget.

Above all, the comparison of the parties will revolve around the extent to which politicians preach easy options. The easiest option is economic growth. That is the option that is reminiscent of the 1960s. The election of 1964 was fought on the belief that, through the national plan and the centralised allocation of resources, we could claim a much higher performance than would otherwise be the case. The events of the 1960s showed the shortcomings of that policy.

I feel, and live with, great charity towards the Opposition, especially the shadow Treasury team. I am sad that they are still trapped in the time warp of the 1960s. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is a great proponent of economic growth, saying that we would be able to do away with unemployment that is created by a Tory Government—by which he means, created by a low level of economic activity. That is reminiscent of the past. The hon. Gentleman has much charm, but being a child of flower power and the 1960s is no guarantee of effectiveness at No. 11.

5.18 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Of course the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) views the 1960s differently from me. He lost an election in the 1960s and I won one. I think that that has coloured his attitude to that time.

I find it rather surprising that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury hardly mentioned the Bill, even though it is the largest Finance Bill that I have ever seen, running to two volumes. There seems to be an inverse relationship between the size of the Finance Bill and the amount of time that the Chief Secretary spends in explaining it.

The Bill includes two new taxes—on air passengers and on insurance premiums—but they did not get a mention. It is rare that a Chancellor of the Exchequer or Chief Secretary comes to the House with two new taxes but fails to mention them. When I was a Treasury Minister, I made it a principle that new taxes should be introduced at a low rate. That was a sensible policy. One ought to get the structure right and then jack it up. If a rate is low now, we must not be under the misapprehension that what we have is some minor tax about which we do not need to bother too much. In fact, it will be fertile ground for future Chancellors of the Exchequer seeking to raise money for the Treasury.

What we have been discussing repeatedly is tax rates —a very limited issue. In 1991 and 1992 the Conservative party captured the agenda. The issue at the last election should have been—indeed, the issue at any election should be—the future development of the country, a society caring for its weaker members and the prosperity of the people. At the last election the issue was no such thing. It was not even the economy, not even general taxation. It was the small difference in income tax as applied to certain people. We were talking about pence or, sometimes, a very few pounds, and 90 per cent. of people were not going to be affected very much.

What we are seeing now is the nemesis. It has come late, but it has come certain. The views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and of the Conservative party are now being explained away because of their problems.

We ought not to be talking about expenditure against tax. That is not the only way of looking at the situation. Even less should we be concerned with tax rates against expenditure. What we ought to be talking about is revenue against expenditure. It is true, of course, that expenditure has to be covered by revenue. But revenue includes a multitude of things. It involves growth, investment and the cost of unemployment as well as tax rates. These are the matters that ought to have concerned the Chancellor in his preparation of the Budget, and ought to have concerned us all at the time of the last election and thereafter.

I hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not satisfied with the increasing value of the pound against the deutschmark. He ought to be concerned not just about exporters but about the whole of manufacturing industry. I believe that he manifests some slight movement away from the hostility towards manufacturing industry that clearly existed throughout the 1980s. The right hon. and learned Gentleman seems to have a slightly more open mind, and I congratulate him on that.

Manufacturing industry must be given a chance. I can hardly ever make a speech without mentioning the 30 per cent. of middle-sized manufacturing firms that were lost to my constituency as a result of the problems that arose between 1979 and 1981. What we have lost can never be recovered, but the Chancellor could deal with some of the problems by doing more for manufacturing industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), whose speech hon. Members—at least, Opposition Members—enjoyed, dealt very adequately with this matter.

In the 19th century, income tax—this single aspect of the taxation system—was regarded as the great engine of revenue. Historically, however, income tax was a tax on the middle classes. It was based on taxable capacity and was raised on income after the exclusion of certain expenditures. The most important of those expenditures was the cost of maintaining a wife. Until the 1930s, women gave up their jobs when they got married. Their reliance on their husbands' support was acknowledged through the married woman's allowance. The children's tax allowance was in exactly the same category. It acknowledged that the family's expenditure had changed seriously upon marriage. The justification was that it applied to the middle classes. A working-class woman in my constituency left her child with her mother and went to the mill. In the case of the middle classes, the birth of a child resulted in a distinct drop in income as the woman ceased working.

In the case of family allowance, Beveridge excluded the first child. Why? Because the first child does not cost very much: it does not eat very much, and it does not need extra housing. But that was a middle-class concept. The working-class concept now, as it was shortly after Beveridge, is that the first child results in an enormous drop in the family's income. This is the reason for the children's tax allowance, and it is the reason for child benefit. These benefits are crucial to people whose income has undergone such change. It has always been accepted that expenditure such as that to which I have been referring is part of the cost of running a family.

As people are given personal allowances, so they should receive allowances for essential expenditure. In addition to the cost of keeping a wife and a child, there is the cost of earning a living. Here we have seen fundamental changes. Earning a living now involves costs that people did not have to meet in the past. There was a time when people in my constituency and elsewhere earned their living in the mill down the road or in the pit down the street. A man would dress up in his muffler and take a butty with him. The cost was either zero or negligible.

Things are different now. Making a living now costs a great deal of money. Many people live 20 or 30 miles from their places of work and have to meet the cost of transport. People in my constituency often travel on the motorway in order to earn their living. Many must have motor cars. Of course, sensible people try to modify their expenditure, but their costs are still very high. They can no longer turn up in a muffler and looking dirty; they must look presentable. They may work in dirty situations, but they clean up before going home. Also, extra expenditure is involved in the provision of clothing and meals.

The tax system makes no provision for such costs. As someone who has dealt with these matters, I understand why. The Inland Revenue's fear is that if the dam were to burst, the flood could not be stopped. However, these matters can be dealt with, and this is something that we need to think about.

There is no doubt that the Exchequer could not go into too much detail in this respect, but something could be done. For the best part of 100 years we had the earned-income allowance—a concept rather different from what we know today. Anyone with unearned income has capital, providing security. It is very comforting for a person to know that there will always be income derived from that capital. Thus it was that unearned income resulted in higher tax than was paid by a person in danger of losing his job next week. This was a very reasonable arrangement.

After the second world war, people had the benefit of knowing that their jobs would be secure for a very long time. But, parallel to that, there were high levels of inflation, and capital security was not as great as it had been. It was in those circumstances and with that justification that the Government removed the earned-income allowance. However, the time has come to restore it in some way, as capital has enormous advantages again. The security of income arising from capital is very great indeed, as is the insecurity of earning a living—quite apart from all the costs.

The restoration of the earned-income allowance in some form would also be a great advantage to the Department of Social Security as earning a living is so expensive. It costs a person so much to be in a job 30 miles away that it is better for that person to draw whatever benefits are available. This is why I suggest the provision of some allowance against working expenses.

There is no doubt that most of this country's taxes are regressive. We have flat-rate duties on petrol, tobacco, and so on. People pay the same amount of tax regardless of their earnings. There have been two main exceptions. One is value added tax, which, generally, has been neutral as a result of zero rating but has probably been slightly regressive. The other is income tax. There is no question but that was the true, great, progressive tax. One does not need to believe, as I happen to believe, in greater levels of social equality to appreciate that there are certain reasons for that tax. The people with the broadest shoulders should carry the broader burden. That was accepted not just by Labour, Conservative and Liberal Governments, but by the people, who understood that theory. Now the Government are trying to reduce that one progressive tax—the fair tax. Their policy is a disgraceful error and it is shameful. The rate of the income tax will always be politically divisive, but the principle behind that progressive tax should not be subject to party-political argument.

When it was introduced, VAT was something near to a neutral tax, but it will become a regressive one. That, too, is wrong. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham was right to launch her attack on that tax. It is the most important aspect of the changes introduced in the Bill, and I hope that it will be reconsidered.

Under the Government, the incentive effects of reductions in the higher rate of income tax have been held sacrosanct. I happen to believe that those effects are nonsense. If one goes to extremes, I accept that such an effect might result, but within the limits of 40 per cent. or 60 per cent. rates, it is hard to tell whether there is any incentive effect.

If one offers someone an incentive to work, he will work for a year or two, but he will then get used to the incentive offered. It is hard to prove that incentive effects go on and on working. We have had a number of trial runs at producing such an effect. In 1962, the higher income tax rate was reduced precisely to bring about those incentive effects, but none were forthcoming. I remember Tony Barber telling us in 1972 about the great incentive effects that would result from his decision. Another recent Chancellor of the Exchequer, now Lord Lawson, also told us about the enormous advantages that would be gained from the incentive effects. We saw none. If there had been any, we would not be discussing the Bill.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Surely it is not so much the incentive effect but the disincentive effect and disclosure effect that are important. The right hon. Gentleman will remember that the problem in the 1970s, given the high rates of marginal tax that were paid at the top end, was that many people found attractive schemes to avoid paying any taxes. Since the tax rate has come down, people have disclosed their income and therefore the take from the top level of taxpayers has risen.

Mr. Sheldon: I do not disagree that more people will declare their income for tax purposes when the rate is lower, but I am talking about incentive effects. Academics and others argue that when people are subject to a higher level of tax, they must work harder in order to obtain the same take-home pay. There is some validity in that argument as well as in the incentive argument. The jury has never come to any conclusion. To base a political philosophy, let alone an economic one, on such an argument is of little use.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman's argument that marginal rates of taxation have no effect on investment, risk taking or incentives to work will carry no conviction with any hon. Member who has any experience of business or the way in which investment decisions are taken. Has he noticed that in the past 15 years 1 million more businesses

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

have been created, a net gain above those businesses that have disappeared, than were created in 1979 or 1980? Does he not appreciate that tax reform is a major element of that considerable achievement?

Mr. Sheldon: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman for falling for that one. Surely he knows that the companies that go under tend to be rather bigger than those that are created. That important factor is slid over by many people. The hon. Gentleman must know that the effects of taxation will work both ways. If one is not succesful, the tax relief on losses are equal to the profits that will be made.

I have been responsible for substantial investments in my time and I do not know of anyone who was put off from making an investment because of the taxation involved. We now have low levels of taxation, but what is the level of investment today? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will think about that. I had hoped that the Chancellor would do something about investment allowances.

The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North is right in believing that we all have an aversion to taxes, and quite right too. That is natural, basic, right and proper. At the same time as we are thinking about the problems involved in taxing people, however, we should also understand that if we want to carry the people with us, the essential thing is to decide to opt for fair taxes. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham was right to highlight that.

Anyone who has served in the Treasury will know that hypothecation is an unmentioned word. The Treasury does not like hypothecation because, once it gets the money in, it cannot spend it as it would wish. We all know the lesson of the road fund licence. It was supposed to be spent on building roads, but when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer finally got hold of it he said, "Look here, this is nonsense. Roads are only one item that we need to spend on." I agreed with that argument then and I agree with it now.

There is one difference today, however, because the financing of the national health service will inevitably continue to rise. That expenditure will increase in the next century and, who knows, beyond that. We will spend more and more of our resources on it. On that basis, there is a case for arguing that if one makes an exception for a service as important as the NHS, perhaps hypothecation would be the best way to finance it. That argument should be considered. Although I was strongly against hypothecation, in the current circumstances and for as far as one can see, it must be looked at afresh. I look forward to that being done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham was right to draw attention to the important issues. I hope that we will be treated to a better consideration of the details than has been offered hitherto. The Chief Secretary spoke about the way in which the Finance Bill would proceed, and I hope that he will not proceed with it in the manner that he adopted in his speech. He should deal with the details in the manner to which we have been accustomed over the years.

5.37 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Given that the Opposition failed to table an amendment on VAT on fuel in the earlier Budget debates, it is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) resolutely refused to move the Opposition amendment on VAT today. Despite being prompted by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, several times, she failed——

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): The right hon. Gentleman is challenging the Chair.

Sir Terence Higgins: No, I am not. I accepted your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the amendment had been moved.

The fact is that the hon. Lady could not bring herself to utter the words, "I beg to move the amendment in the name of my right hon. and learned Friend" and so on. There is a good reason why she might not wish to move that amendment, because linked to VAT on fuel are the compensatory arrangements that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has made. The reality is that the tax will fall across the population, but nearly half of the revenue will be redistributed to just 15 million people. It is, to a great extent, what one might fairly describe as a socialist measure.

If the Opposition amendment was carried this evening, many of my constituents, particularly pensioners, would find that they suffered considerably, because those compensatory payments would be lost. That is an interesting point.

In one sense, the Bill can be described literally as a monster. We have never had a two-volume Finance Bill. It is twice the size of the average Finance Bill and, in terms of the number of pages, three times the size of many previous ones. That gives considerable cause for concern. Whatever the Opposition's attitude, it will be difficult for the Bill's many clauses to be properly considered in Committee.

A Procedure Committee that I chaired about 12 years ago made a recommendation that has been repeated by successive Procedure Committees—that there is an overwhelming case for isolating the main political measures in the Budget, and then presenting a separate taxes management Bill.

When the Procedure Committee suggested that to the Leader of the House, he had three objections. First, he said that it was not a simple matter to separate the technical details from substantive tax changes. But it would not be difficult to remove from this massive document a large percentage of purely technical items that could reasonably be included in a separate Bill that would not be subject to timetable restraints.

Secondly, the Leader of the House said that two Bills would need extra time for Second Reading and consideration. But that is not a great time constraint. Thirdly, he said that a taxes management Bill might not be given sufficient priority. If sufficient priority could not be given to it, there is a good case for not having it anyway. The Leader's three objections were not valid, and there is a strong case for splitting future Finance Bills. There might even be a case for dividing the present Bill, even at this late stage. I shall say more about procedure later.

It is clear that the recovery is under way. I congratulate the all-party Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, which analysed the Budget in considerable detail. I have great doubts about the timing of the Budget measures. The recovery is at an early stage, and we cannot yet say that demand should be reined back by tax increases.

There are two worrying matters. First, the previous Chancellor and the present one have developed a tendency to announce tax changes in advance anticipating tax increases at some time in the future. We all know perfectly well that forecasting in the Treasury and elsewhere is so bad that no one can tell what the situation will be at the point in the future for which we are now seeking to legislate tax changes.

While the changes may be good in themselves, the timing is certainly doubtful. It is also true that the Chancellor would have been much better placed next spring to judge the situation and decide what needed to be done than he was at the time of the unified Budget at the end of last year.

The tax increases will inevitably put some brake on the recovery, although they may not stop it. Perhaps it will accelerate again, but it is difficult to see the case for a recovery, slow-down, recovery scenario. The problems arising from that should be considered.

However, some factors will be stimulating the recovery as the tax increases are being introduced. The fact that the Government are not fully funding the borrowing requirement should stimulate the recovery, although the passage in paragraph 10 in the report from the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service on the issue of funding is obscure.

Perhaps the Financial Secretary will tell us whether, on the true definition of funding—that is to say, the deficit that is being financed from the non-bank public—the Government are proposing to overfund or underfund, because that is not at all clear. I hope that at this stage we are somewhat underfunding, and producing an additional stimulus.

All forecasters, Government or otherwise, tend to underestimate turning points in the economy—whether it is going up or down. At every successive cycle, the error has been greater. Therefore, as we have now passed a turning point, there is every reason to suppose that the recovery will be stronger than expectations. That has happened even since the Budget. There is now a general feeling that the recovery is faster than it was then. In view of those two factors, I am hopeful that the recovery will accelerate.

As the recovery proceeds, pay restraint will come to the fore. It was in the headlines this morning and on the 1 o'clock news. In "The World at One", Mr. James Naughtie came up with the old question, "Why aren't Members of Parliament setting an example?" The press grossly misrepresented what happened after the debate on Members' pay a short time ago. Over the period 1992-95, our pay has not gone up faster than inflation, although the press have represented the increase at about three times the rate of inflation.

It is said that we should set an example, but an interesting statistic arises from the long-term view. I have been in the House for a long time, for about 30 years, and throughout that time, in real terms, Members' pay has been below what it was when I first came here. It is now approaching that level, following the recent decision of the House.

In real terms, we are now in almost exactly the position that we were in 30 years ago. Meanwhile, average earnings for the population as a whole have gone up 19 times in cash terms and 90 per cent. in real terms. That gives some idea of the extent to which Members of Parliament have set an example. I hope that, when Mr. Naughtie and others in the media deal with this matter, they will remember that, although I do not expect the example that we have set to be followed.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I am anxious that we do not appear to be engaged in special pleading. One of the best examples that we could set would be for more than 55 of the 651 hon. Members to join the charity payroll giving scheme that is operated by the Fees Office.

Sir Terence Higgins: Hon. Members may join that scheme, but the hon. Gentleman's intervention does not in any way undermine my main point about the relative rates of pay of the population as a whole and of hon. Members. Increasingly, that issue will become relevant as the recovery proceeds, despite the considerable changes in the structure of the economy over the past 12 years.

As the recovery proceeds, British industry should have a fair deal in relation to its competitors. I am increasingly worried by our tendency to set an example with EC directives. We are proud of the fact that Britain is the first country to implement this or that directive, hoping that everybody else will immediately follow, but we know that that does not happen and that there is often such time lags. There is a strong case for a mechanism by which directives are implemented simultaneously. British industry is often placed at a disadvantage by that time lag.

Last year, we debated at length, on two specific amendments, the British shipping industry. One amendment was about 100 per cent. capital allowances, and the other was about roll-over relief. Most hon. Members recognise that this is a difficult and special issue that could be ring-fenced. I hope that the Government will pay more attention to that in Committee and on Report.

It was said last year that, if we took action, we would not be setting an example to the other European countries, and that we must try to get them to get rid of their subsidies. In the meantime, those countries have either greatly extended their subsidies or introduced new ones. The competitive position of British industry must be taken into account in international negotiations. Let us have a level playing field. I have no doubt that, if we had a level playing field, the British shipping industry would be competitive. We must take a broader view of such issues.

Finally, I want to say a few more words about procedure. Before the last election, it was clear from a number of Committee reports that there should be great consultation before moving to a unified Budget. We then had the election and everyone forgot about it. The next thing we knew was that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), the former Chancellor, announced, with no consultation whatsoever, that we were to have a unified Budget.

It is important that both sides of the House should clearly agree what the financial programme of the House should be in future. We used to have financial debates on three occasions during the year: the autumn statement, the public expenditure White Paper and the Budget. We are now down to just the Budget and a Second Reading debate on taxation issues.

We are told that there may be a two-day debate on public expenditure in the summer, but we still have no discussion on public expenditure as part of the unified Budget. In many respects, it would be better to have a

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debate on specific public expenditure items in addition to the usual estimates days, which fulfil a useful function in the parliamentary process.

A unified Budget should cover public expenditure as well as tax. Such debates on the Floor of the House might be more helpful than further debates on taxation, which gets extensive scrutiny.

I hope that, despite the present breakdown in communications, the Opposition will realise that this is not simply an opportunity for sorting out our financial programme during the year; it is the responsibility of both sides of the House. We do not want the extent of parliamentary debate on such matters to be restricted as a result of moving to a unified Budget. It is an important matter for the House, and we need to sort out the procedures.

Having said that, the Bill is extremely complex. We have not yet had a chance to go into detail, and when we do, we shall find a number of aspects which need careful consideration or reconsideration. The Bill contains a series of proposals which need to be put into proper context, and the present procedures for analysing, discussing and amending them cannot be regarded as satisfactory.

5.52 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): We have heard two interesting speeches from the Government Back Benches. I agree with the wise words of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) on matters of procedure, on the British shipping industry and on the uncertainties of the projections from either side of the House about the speed of recovery and the difficulty of making judgments on the effect of tax measures so far ahead.

The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) brought to the debate his usual candour to such an extent that I began to realise why he had not been used more prominently in the election campaign in which the tax promises figured. I am sure that he would have wanted to qualify them as appropriately as he qualfied much of what he said today.

For the most part, it is hon. Members who have served on Finance Bill Committees who have commented on the enormous size of the Finance Bill. It is a two-volume edition or serial publication. When the Chief Secretary referred to the need to give it orderly consideration, he failed to recognise that the Bill is scarcely capable of orderly consideration by the normal procedures of the House. That is why its division into a taxes management Bill and a Bill dealing with more controversial items would have been appropriate. I have often felt that some aspects of Select Committee procedure, as used in Special Standing Committees, would be appropriate to some of the detail of a taxes management Bill.

I have often watched or participated in exchanges where neither the Minister nor the hon. Member knew what they were talking about and each had to be refreshed by notes from elsewhere before replying to questions. That is such a frequent occurrence with the more technical parts of Bills in Standing Committee that I would wish to see it replaced by technical questions being answered by someone who actually knew the answers. That is a procedural development which would be widely welcomed.

In the current climate, the Chief Secretary has made it clear that he proposes to guillotine the Finance Bill. We need to see that guillotine. Now, partly as a result of the current climate, we are getting "Jopling minus"—the proposals of the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) without some of the safeguards and qualifications which the right hon. Gentleman and other members of the Committee on which I served considered to be necessary and appropriate. It is time that we had the whole package instead of automatic timetabling. We should consider any proposals from the Chief Secretary against that background.

Mr. Stern: As a member of the Jopling Committee, may I say that my understanding is that we are not getting the Jopling proposals, which I still support, because the two or three Front Benches have been totally unable to agree on their implementation.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman is partly correct. There are objections from two Front Benches but certainly not from three. We were, and are, in favour of the Jopling proposals. I understand that Labour Front-Bench Members have become more critical than they were initially. Whether that is in any way related to perceptions that they will be in opposition for longer and that government is not beckoning is not for me to say. The atmosphere appears to have changed from initial welcome to increasing hostility.

As a result of how the Labour party legitimately chooses to exercise its tactics in the House, we may end up with one side of the Jopling proposals without their important safeguards. There is no reason why that should be so; if the Government wish to proceed they should proceed with the safeguards. We shall test that when we see the Chief Secretary's proposals. That is the procedural and political background to the Bill.

The economic background is the deficit of which the Prime Minister did not seem fully aware when he said how readily he could achieve tax cuts when the Conservatives won the election. That was the phraseology he was using.

The deficit was created by the Government because of the boom-bust sequence which produced the length and depth of the recession. That is the background to the measure. What has made the recession so damaging to public finances and made the gap between what the Government spend and what they raise so large? It is of course the scale of unemployment, the number of people who are receiving benefits instead of paying tax and the lower levels of tax paid by people and companies because of the effects of the recession.

Throughout the recession we have argued that it would have been appropriate to engage in greater public capital spending to get more people back to work and thereby contribute to hastening recovery. It would give us assets that we will need in future if our industry is to be more competitive, such as better public transport and education.

Although at some future time public finances may be in a relatively healthy state, it might then be inappropriate to engage in large-scale public capital expenditure for fear of creating the very overheating of the economy which has occurred previously under Governments of both parties.

I also believe that the Chancellor has overdone the scale of the tax increases and that his judgment about what the tax increases are likely to do to demand in the economy is not correct. There was obviously a hint of that fear in the speech of the right hon. Member for Worthing.

The country has been through a severe recession. People who have money are frightened that they will soon not have much of it and feel that they should not risk spending it. Many more people borrowed and are now in great difficulties. Negative equity and disaster in the housing market are leading people to be very cautious.

I recall when the effect of a previous Chancellor warning of and indeed recommending future tax cuts was to encourage people to spend. If people see large tax cuts coming, they are likely to be more cautious about spending, particularly against the background of their experience of the recession and that of their friends and relatives.

I am not one who actually seeks a consumer-led recovery; I would much rather see an investment-led recovery, hence the policy proposals that I described a moment ago. I do not think that we will get a consumer-led recovery against the background of fear about the effect of these tax cuts. What I say about capital expenditure is borne out in what the Treasury and Civil Service Committee said. I am not praying the Committee as a body in aid of the whole of what I argued a moment ago. Indeed, there were differences of view in the Committee on the Budget judgment, which are expressed in the various amendments that were moved.

In paragraph 90, the Committee collectively and without dissent said:

> "We believe that the reduction in the level of capital expenditure announced in the November 1993 Budget reflects the relative ease with which such cuts can be made. We recommend that a proper priority should be given to capital expenditure in future spending rounds."

In the preceding paragraph we cast doubt on the Government's optimism about their private sector initiatives—not hostility, but doubt about how the Government can rely on major private sector contributions to public works projects after all the experience of the Jubilee line and crossrail, and the difficulty of assembling that mix without the public sector taking on the risks that turn it into public borrowing.

That weakness in capital expenditure will lead to shortages of capacity and weaken our competitive capacity for the future. That applies not only to the physical investment in, for example, the transport system, but to our investment in education.

Mr. Ian Taylor: In searching for clarity in what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, may I say that it appears that he does not want the tax increases to come in, because he is worried about the recovery, and that he does not want to cut public expenditure. The consequence of that must have been the increase in borrowing, which could well have caused other problems for the economy. Where is he prepared to make the changes?

Mr. Beith: I did not say that there should never be any cuts in public expenditure. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the Treasury and Civil Service Committee report and the amendment in it that I moved, he will see that it is clear that I wanted a different mix of fiscal tightening and public capital expenditure. That recognises that one would not be able to project from that the achievement of as great a reduction in the borrowing requirement through tax increases, but one could hope to secure reductions in the borrowing requirement through the taxes paid by the people who would then be in work as a result of the public investment, and the reductions in the benefits that would need to be paid out to those people.

That is a judgment that the Chancellor has made. I disagreed with his judgment about the scale of the tax increases and its effect on recovery and about how reasonable it would be to allow in the borrowing for some more capital expenditure. The Committee pointed out that all this talk about ending the public finance problem "once and for all"—the words that the Chancellor used—betrays an assumption of reliability and certainty in the whole process, which is foreign to anybody and everybody's experience of those matters. We are all talking about judgments. I am arguing for a different judgment.

Mr. Forman: In his argument about getting more people back into work and so increasing revenue, does the right hon. Gentleman not recognise that there is bound to be a first year public expenditure cost in doing that, and therefore that the deficit will worsen before it improves? If he is intending to take the strain on borrowing, he must realise that there are implications for monetary policy in allowing full reign to the use of capital receipts by local authorities, which is, I believe, part of his party's policy.

Mr. Beith: The answer to both questions is yes. That is why I argued that it would have been better if we had done that earlier. The effects would then have come through now. There is, of course, a monetary policy implication in what we are all talking about today. If the Government's measures have too severe an effect on demand and growth, the pressure will be on the Chancellor to relax monetary policy to offset the effects of his fiscal policy. Let us be in no doubt that that is what lies at the back of this. It puts pressure on the Chancellor and on monetary policy, which might be inappropriate given all the other things that he must take into account, as long as it is he and not the central bank who determines that policy.

The range and scale of the tax increases are considerable. There is the VAT increase on domestic fuel—not just 8 per cent. this year, but 17·5 per cent. next year. That does not address the question of where many of the problems about global warming and carbon dioxide emissions lie. It does nothing about transport and the huge contribution that private transport makes to that. Nor does it address the issues of energy savings, about which I shall seek to direct the House when I introduce a Bill a week on Friday. I hope for much Government support for it, particularly as they are putting up people's fuel bills on such a considerable scale.

There is also the matter of 1p on national insurance contributions. It is not mentioned in the Bill. It is the equivalent of a penny on income tax for all but the higher levels of income. That is what is so unfair about it. It is done for straightforward tax and fiscal reasons, yet the Government stick it on national insurance so that they can go on saying that they have not put up the basic rate of tax—not that anybody is impressed by the story that the Government have not put up the basic rate when they have managed to put up income tax by every other possible means.

The failure to index personal allowances and the defiance of the Rooker-Wise amendment—I can say this in the presence of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) who moved that amendment—brings 400,000 more people into tax. I cannot count the occasions

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when I have heard Ministers rejoice in the number of people whom they have taken out of tax by indexing the personal tax allowance, year after year. This year I have not heard any of them mention that they are taking 400,000 more people into tax as a result of this.

Then there is the interesting case of mortgage interest tax relief. In the election campaign the Liberal Democrats were lambasted constantly by the Government on this issue. We argued that it was not a good idea and that we should look for ways of phasing it out because it involved a considerable subsidy from people who were not well off to people who were a great deal better off. On countless occasions, I have seen leaflets and have been at meetings where Conservatives challenged the incorrectness of such a course and used it as a means of attacking us. They are actually doing it by steady stages and will eventually complete the process if they are in power long enough. Let us have no more of their criticisms of us.

Conservatives were saying the same thing about petrol tax. They attacked us on the petrol tax increases that we proposed, which are smaller than the increases that they have introduced. The Government will pay a penalty for trying to hide their tax intentions and, having done that, to hide the scale of the tax increases. Most of what has been discussed in the press and on television in the past few days about their scale has been known since the Budget, and a large part of it since the preceding Budget. The Government will have to change their rhetoric and their way of describing things if they are ever to convince people that tax increases on this scale can be justified.

The Government are introducing two new taxes. What about all those Budgets in which another tax was abolished? Some of them were taxes of which we had never heard. But now the Government have managed to introduce two taxes that we have heard of. One, an insurance tax, is not a good idea, especially in the light of the experience of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who correctly pointed out the Treasury approach—"Bring it in low and you can always increase it later." The insurance tax may look low at the moment, but it can be steadily increased. It will not appeal to those whose insurance premiums are right at the margin of their spending, particularly pensioners in areas where there is a lot of crime, or fear of it, many of whom do not insure, or surrender insurance polices as premiums increase. It is not a good idea, particularly in relation to the revenue that it raises.

I do not have the same fundamental criticism of the airport tax, but I am worried about the impact that it will have on remote communities who are dependent on air communication. They have little alternative and will not be effectively safeguarded by the Government's attempts to make an exception that relates to the size and number of seats on the aircraft. That will not help many of the island communities in Scotland who will be affected by the tax, and also the remote communities on the mainland of Scotland who are dependent on air travel for any form of rapid communication across the country.

Mr. Salmond: The right hon. Gentleman listened, as I did, to the speech on Budget day—on St. Andrew's day—and heard the Chancellor give what apparently was a clear commitment that those people would be protected. But in the detail of the measure, as the right hon. Gentleman well knows, the vast bulk of island travellers will have to pay the airport tax. Is not it a matter of honour as well as a matter of finance that the Chancellor now changes his mind?

Mr. Beith: Indeed. I am giving the Chancellor the credit of assuming that he wants to exempt remote communities. That is why he talked about limitation on the number of seats on the aircraft, providing a tax exemption. If that is his intention, he will have to do much better to achieve the object. I am therefore tabling amendments designed to do that. I hope that Ministers will either come up with their own or be sympathetic to what we propose, if that is the Government's intention. It will hit people who have to travel frequently by air services and who are dependent on those services, rather in the way that Ministers get in cars to make journeys, or others of us get on trains or buses for regular and frequent journeys.

I was interested to hear the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne talking about hypothecation and his experience of the arguments about it in the Treasury. We have argued the hypothecation case in proposing at the previous election that a specific additional 1p of income tax should be used for added educational expenditure. The issue of hypothecation is worth examining. The Liberal Democrats are examining it as a party.

We have reached the point—if we have not already we shall certainly have done so after these increases—where the general public ask what all this is for. When they are confronted with massive tax increases designed to bail out previous economic failures, they are bound to say that they pay taxes in order to obtain certain benefits. If that is so, it is reasonable for the public to demand that we should look at ways of tying the tax more clearly to the benefit that they seek. That gives the Government less flexibility, but it might put more power in the hands of the people.

My general conclusion is that the Chancellor has put on too much by way of tax increases; that by their nature, in many cases those tax increases are unfair, for example, the national insurance contribution; they are not spent on or dedicated to the things that are most needed in the way of investment, and they represent a broken promise.

Ministers talk as if they are obliged to impose painful taxation measures to clear up the mess left by an irresponsible Government with whom they have no connection whatever. They seek to give us the impression that they are left with a painful task that they carry out rather as the headmaster used to carry out corporal punishment on the basis that "This hurts me more than it hurts you", as a direct result of taking over the reins of Government from a lot of incompetent scoundrels who must have been holding them for the previous 14 years. Yet they are part and parcel of that Government. They have held office in it at every conceivable level. That excuse simply will not wash.

The new Government line is that it is all right to introduce huge tax increases as long as they are to bail out their own crass incompetence and not to pay for better schools, better public transport or better benefits for disabled people. That will not wash either. The Government say, "Never mind our policies. Never mind our record. Our instincts are all right. Our instinct is to cut taxes." Well, the Government's economic instincts were wrong because they gave us the boom and then the bust, and their political instinct was not to tell the voters what they intended to do about it.

6.11 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): I have a great deal of sympathy with the argument advanced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and supported by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) for a technical Finance Bill to separate the purely technical issues from those which have mainline economic and political importance.

I listened with interest and amusement to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed when he talked of hon. Members putting questions that they did not quite understand to Ministers who did not quite understand the answers that they were giving based upon slips of paper from officials advising them. I wondered whether the right hon. Gentleman had in mind an incident some years ago when my noble Friend Lord Hayhoe was a Treasury Minister and we were dealing with some extremely arcane aspects of the tax code. In the spirit of great co-operation that reigned in those days, my noble Friend said, "I must tell the Committee that I do not fully understand the answer that I am giving, but I can assure it that it is right." That was accepted.

Almost in the same category comes the passage on funding in the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing referred. I believe that all members of the Committee concluded that what we had agreed to there was right, but it was based more upon confidence and trust in our advisers than on any great depth of understanding.

Sir Terence Higgins: I think that my hon. Friend will agree that it would be helpful if the Financial Secretary, in replying, could say whether, on the old definition of fully funding, we are underfunding or overfunding at the moment.

Mr. Watts: It would be enlightening for all of us.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary referred to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's report, as did the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. The House will be relieved to learn that I do not intend to go through its conclusions in great detail. I hope that hon. Members find it informative and useful. It reviews monetary policy and inflation prospects and, in paragraph 17, we conclude:

> "It would appear that the short term prospects for inflation are good."

The report then moves on to examine economic prospects and, in paragraph 40, we conclude that there is still a significant output gap which will ensure that the economy continues to operate at below full capacity for some years to come and therefore:

> "Notwithstanding the scale of the fiscal tightening announced in the March and November Budgets, the degree of monetary easing already seen, together with a recovery in world markets, existing spare capacity estimates and an improved trade position, suggest that average annual growth of 3 per cent. over the medium term is a reasonable central projection."

Clearly there will always be doubts surrounding any forecast, but, on the balance of the evidence that we received and the judgments that we reached, that central forecast is reasonable and attainable.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary referred specifically to the Select Committee's conclusion in paragraph 46 of its report on fiscal policy. It is probably that part of the report that is most germane to the Finance Bill. Our conclusion referred back to the Select Committee's report on the March 1993 Budget in which we concluded that

> "further increases in taxation or reductions in public expenditure would be required if the Government was to eliminate the structural Budget deficit."

The Select Committee then went on to say:

> "We welcome the fact that the Chancellor has tightened fiscal policy further. The balance between fiscal and monetary policy has been dramatically adjusted over the past year and this is very welcome for medium term prospects for the economy. We agree with the Chancellor that if further action had not been taken to redress the fiscal position, this would have had adverse economic consequences."

That was a considered view reached by the Committee, and not without or before consideration of other possible strategies.

The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred to amendments that were moved during our deliberations on the report. The one that was moved by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed and supported by the hon. Member for Durham, North and other Labour members of the Committee expressed concern about the size of the fiscal adjustment and the possible impact that it would have, and sought a different mix between fiscal tightening and capital expenditure. The right hon. Gentleman argued that there should perhaps have been more room for greater capital expenditure, notwithstanding the constraints, to go alongside the fiscal tightening.

That was not in the end the overall view of the Committee, but the proceedings show that the balance, at 5:4, was fairly close and that the Committee as a whole had some sympathy with the view that capital expenditure in this Budget had received a rather low priority than, in particular, in the autumn statement of November 1992. We recommended that a proper priority should be given to capital expenditure in future years.

That shows that, when these matters are considered calmly and rationally, a less partisan overall view of strategy can be struck. There is no doubt in my mind that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was entirely correct in his view that borrowing could not be allowed to continue at existing levels unchecked, and that, as we enter a period when we anticipate substantial and sustained growth, that is precisely the right time to conclude that part of that growth can be taken in the medium term in higher taxes in order to reduce borrowing so as to lay the foundations for sustainable growth into the future and the aspiration of Conservative Members that that will lead to opportunities to get direct taxes lower in future.

Mr. Stern: Does my hon. Friend also agree that many of us hope to return to the heady days of the late 1980s, when the public sector borrowing requirement was eliminated and replaced by a public sector debt repayment?

Mr. Watts: I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has set out a sensible and credible strategy to bring the public finances back towards balance within the foreseeable future, and that that will provide us with a real opportunity to look at options, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) argued.

If we are in that happy position, we can make choices about whether the burden of taxation should be reduced or expenditure be allowed to increase, but while finances are

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not in balance and are not in vigorous health, those chances do not present themselves to my right hon. and learned Friend or any Chancellor in future years.

Much has been made of the possible comparison between the burdens of taxation imposed on an average earner by Conservative and Labour Governments. In the past week or so, the most popular comparison has been between the proportion of average earnings taken in direct taxation—income tax and national insurance contributions —in 1978-79, and the proportion that is taken now.

Before making such crude comparisons, however, hon. Members should bear in mind the fact that, under the last Labour Government, the real net income of an average earner rose by only 0·6 per cent. The real net income of that same person—given that he has continued to enjoy average earnings throughout the period of Conservative government—has risen by more than 40 per cent., or £80 a week.

A parliamentary answer last week reveals that today's average earner pays a slightly higher proportion of his income in direct taxes than did someone on average earnings in 1978-79. If that is true, it tells us only that, over the intervening period, although personal tax allowances have been increased by more than inflation—more than would be required by the Rooker-Wise amendment—they have not been increased as rapidly as earnings. In arguing against the consequences of the facts, the Labour party seems to be arguing against the principles of progressive taxation on which the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) waxed so eloquent.

The right hon. Gentleman pointed out that the highest marginal tax rates had been reduced under the present Government, but did not appear to take on board the stark fact—presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor)—that the top 10 per cent. of income earners today contribute 45 per cent. of the total income tax take. In 1978-79, when marginal tax rates were very much higher, that same 10 per cent. contributed only 34 per cent. of the total take.

Even by the right hon. Gentleman's definition, the reforms that we have made to income tax rates over the years have made the income tax system much more progressive: those with higher incomes are contributing a higher proportion of the overall revenue raised by the tax.

There are, however, other bases on which to make comparisons. Rather than comparing the proportion of average 1978-79 earnings absorbed in direct taxation with today's proportion, we should consider a different, perhaps fairer, proposition. If the last Labour Government's income tax policies had continued—if personal allowances had been increased only in line with inflation, which I understand to have been Labour's policy at that time, and if the same marginal tax rates of between 33 per cent. and 83 per cent. on earned income and 98 per cent. on savings income had continued to apply—what would be the proportion of an average earner's income taken in tax in 1994-95?

The answer is interesting. In 1994-95, the average earner would be paying 21·9 per cent. of his income in direct tax as a result of the policies of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor; under a Labour regime, with the index that I have described, that same person would be paying 25·4 per cent.—an extra £13 a week.

I could, of course, make assumptions about how the policy might have changed, but I think most of them would be unfair to the Labour party. I might have assumed, for example, that Labour would want expenditure to increase year on year, and might have chosen to pay for that increase by raising taxes rather than by continuing to increase borrowing. Such assumptions, however, would not have been favourable; I am trying to be as fair to the Labour party as I possibly can.

On Third Reading of the last Finance Bill, I spoke of the need for what I described as "son of BES". The business expansion scheme, in its existing form, was being phased out; I saw a need for replacement measures to encourage equity investment in small businesses. I welcome the package of measures contained in the Budget and the Bill, which is designed to encourage such investment—in particular, capital gains tax reinvestment relief, the enterprise investment scheme and venture capital trusts. I shall be especially happy to speak about those measures when, along with others wading through this enormous Bill, I debate them in Committee.

I also welcome the new regime to assist the unit trust industry to improve its export performance in the European Community, and to grab back some of the vast amount of business currently managed from Luxembourg. That regime was introduced following an assurance given by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary during the passage of the last Finance Bill. Both those measures deal with interests that I have consistently espoused.

The changes contained in the Bill will play a vital role in improving our public finances, reinforcing the foundations for sustainable growth on which our ability to lower taxes again in the future—we retain that as our central objective, unlike the Opposition parties—must depend. I wholeheartedly support the Bill.

6.26 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I support the Opposition amendment—which I distinctly heard my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) move: there can be no doubt about that. In fact, I heard much of what was said as I resumed my seat after the intervention.

The huge tax hike contained in the Bill has clearly been caused by the deficit. That is apparent both from our discussions here, and from other discussions that have taken place in recent months. It is also accepted, certainly by Opposition Members, that the prime cause of that deficit is mass unemployment.

The overall Budget package that we are debating again —I am grateful for the Chair's forbearance in that regard —may even add further to the number of unemployed people: that is the paradox inherent in it. Certainly it will not enable unemployment to fall even to what might be termed an acceptable level. Because of the Government's refusal to run our economy in a more intelligent fashion, we are storing up massive problems for future generations.

Unless we begin to accept the proposition that work is the foundation of human endeavour and well-being, and that a nation's greatest asset is the capacity and willingness of its people to work, we are in real trouble: we shall be heading towards social disintegration. However, we do not seem to be accepting that proposition at present.

We have a choice, of course. According to Professor Colin New of Cranfield university—whom I would term an engineering thinker—by the early part of the next century, we may either have 15 million people working 40 hours a week and 15 million on the dole, or have 30 million people working 20 hours a week. One option, says Professor New, spells social disaster; the other spells social equity.

That is the choice that is facing this and other industrialised western nations.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Am I right in thinking that the hon. Gentleman is advocating more part-time work—which, as far as I know, is not Labour party policy?

Mr. Rooker: I am not advocating anything of the kind, but I am saying that, unless we accept the idea that work is important to individuals—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members clearly do not accept it. If they did, we should not be creating a scrap heap of mass unemployment which means the loss of hope for millions of people.

No attempt has been made to manage the situation. If we do not manage it, we shall find that half the population is fine and in secure jobs while the other half constitutes a virtual no-hope economy. That spells social disaster. I do not like the direction in which the Government are heading; nor do I think that the Bill is heading in the right direction.

As has been said, the Government have lost the people's trust. Trust is a key factor for political parties and political leaders. It has been a missing ingredient for a long time in this country, but it has taken the Government a long time to lose it. I am certain that they can regain the people's trust, but the problem is that it will take them as long to regain it as it took them to lose it and, in the intervening period, they will have to meet the electorate at a general election. For the first time in a decade and a half, they will meet the electorate having lost their trust and without being in a position to regain it. That will be the difference between the next election and those of 1992, 1987 and 1983.

Judging from experience, it seems that the British public do not take too kindly to being ambushed with new policy ideas—whether financial or social—during general elections. There is abundant evidence that people's minds are made up well in advance of the white heat of an election campaign. That process is now under way—people are making up their minds about what they will do when the election comes, whenever it may be. The process cannot be reversed. It is therefore crucial that those of us who oppose the Government lay the groundwork well in advance.

For a so-called mature democracy, we have incredibly immature popular mass media, so it is even more important to articulate the foundations of a different way of running the country. For the sake of our fellow citizens, there has to be a better way of running the country than that which we have seen in the past 15 years.

That way has to be presented not only at the general election but in the months and years before. The Government will unashamedly steal good ideas. They will steal every good idea they come across, but this time they will do so having lost the trust of the people. That will work to the advantage of those who propagate a better way forward.

I have heard Tory Members on television and on the wireless—or the radio, as it is more popularly called—calling for their supporters to stand firm "at this trying time". In the Chamber, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor can look behind them and see that they have a majority in the House. No one denies that that is the case, in the Division tonight or in those that will come in the summer. Being able to see their support is their parliamentary comfort factor.

However, when they go outside to face the people, things are rather different. When they leave here and look behind for their supporters "at this trying time", they will realise that they received only 42 per cent. of the votes in the ballot box and the support of only 33 per cent. of the British electorate in 1992. They do not have a legitimate majority in Parliament to drive through their policies. They received the support of only one third of the total electorate at the previous general election. That is a fact that cannot be denied.

Mr. Forman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: I do not want to be diverted, but that point needs to be stressed constantly.

Mr. Forman: On an historical point, surely the hon. Gentleman realises that, if one applies that test to our system of government, one has to go back to 1935 to find a Government who received the votes of more than 50 per cent. of the qualified electorate. Surely he is using an outdated argument.

Mr. Rooker: I am in favour not only of a modern economy but of a more modern electoral system. I believe that people's views should be represented here according to the votes cast. The Tory party is over-represented in terms of votes in the ballot box, which is why it is in trouble now and why it is wholly bewildered by the fact that the country is up in arms not in support of its policies but against them. The Tories did not have a majority to start with, but I do not want to get diverted. *[Laughter.]* I should be happy to debate the issue at length, but you would rule me out of order if I were to do so, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I and some of my colleagues from Birmingham were not present for the presentation of the Budget in November and December. We were otherwise occupied at a three-day inquiry into parliamentary boundaries in Birmingham. I therefore paid more attention than usual to the press reports, some of which I re-read this morning.

I picked up one newspaper dated 1 December and read four headlines: "Hidden tax will bite in spring"; "Double whammy of Lamont and Clarke costs family £430"; "Recovery for the Tories and for the country"—that was the headline of the leader column—and "Clarke masters the art of invisible taxation". They are rather different from the headlines this morning and those of the past few days.

We no longer read about the "master of invisible taxation", because the Tories have been rumbled—the public have rumbled what has happened, not only in this Budget but for the past decade and a half. Now that their taxation policies have been rumbled, panic has set in, and the simplistic reaction of many Conservatives is to call for more cuts in services.

Their dilemma is that the public are already receiving fewer services for more taxes. The Government cannot justify the extra taxes, because they have not promised corresponding extra services. That is their dilemma, not ours, and we shall seek to exploit it and ram it home at every opportunity.

Not all the challenges to our services will be financial but I shall dwell on the financial aspect for the moment. There will be an attack on the benefits system. I wish to

[Mr. Rooker]

make it clear that I am in favour of maintaining universal benefits for the elderly and for the youngest in order to ensure maximum take-up by those who are dependent on them, but I also favour clawing back payments from those who clearly do not depend on them. That must be a fairer way in which to proceed. We must ensure universal take-up by the oldest and the youngest, because we know that enormous numbers of people do not collect their non-universal benefits.

I do not mean, however, that we should pay benefits willy-nilly and irrespective of resources to the richest in the land. I cite one example. I see no justification for the fact that a low-paid worker earning £60 or £65 a week—too little to pay income tax—should have to pay more than £5 a month in national insurance to help to pay for the current state retirement pension of someone who is receiving a substantial private pension, when the recipient has not paid for the state pension but has paid for the private pension. The pay-as-you-go system for the state pension is nonsense if we are calling on the very lowest paid to fund the state pension for people with substantial private pensions. There ought to be a clawback mechanism for that, to bring in some equity and fairness. The same ought to operate, on the grounds of equity, for the youngest.

I want universal child benefit. I would like it to be properly indexed and fully funded to meet the costs of bringing up children, bearing in mind what my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said earlier about the reason why we abolished the income tax allowances related to the children in the family and merged them with family allowance all those years ago. Families have been ripped off terribly in recent years, because the benefit has not been properly indexed and was never set at a level sufficient to meet the costs of bringing up children.

Universality is the key to ensuring that we do not miss out the vulnerable, but that does not mean that we do not have a mechanism for clawing it back from the wealthiest in the country, who obviously do not need it in terms of dependency.

Sir Terence Higgins: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the national insurance pension should be means-tested?

Mr. Rooker: No. The right hon. Gentleman has been here much longer than I have, and has also been a Treasury Minister. The national insurance pension is getting smaller as a proportion of pensioners' incomes, and it will continue to get smaller proportionately.

One of the reasons is that the Government are committed to freezing it in real terms. Because it increases only in line with prices and not with earnings, the pension is frozen in real terms, and has been frozen in real terms for more than a decade. It has cost a married couple of pensioners more than £20 a week, because it has been frozen in real terms. There is no extra benefit for those pensioners.

The pension ought not to be frozen in real terms for the generality of the population. It is based on pay-as-you-go. It is not a funded system. I cannot see the benefit, however, in ensuring that the pay-as-you go system operates for the millionaires and the wealthiest people in the country, who could give up what is a pittance to them, which they do not need and—what is more—they have not paid for because by then they are not paying national insurance contributions. One can therefore bring in a clawback mechanism on the wealthiest people in the country.

I see nothing in social justice against that. However, the national insurance pension has to be a universal benefit, available to every citizen in the land. Otherwise, acceptable changes, based on equity, would not be passed by the House.

I shall suggest three and a half new taxes before I conclude. It behoves the Opposition to do a little bit of free thinking, because we do not like the unfairness of the taxation system and the way in which it has been rigged against the poorest in the country during the past few years, as I will show using the Government's figures.

There are many taxes in the Bill. I lost count whether there were 12 at this stage or 20 if one counts the two Finance Bills put together. Some we oppose; others we support. I have not heard anyone speak—I do not expect that anyone will—against the extra increase in tobacco duty in excess of the rate of inflation.

I cannot believe that any sensible Member of the House would not vote for that tax. Every all-party Committee, from the Public Accounts Committee to the Health Select Committee, has called for increases in tobacco duty on the grounds of improving the health of the nation, which has a by-product in reducing the financial burden on the national health service. In my view, probably 3 per cent. is not enough. I declare myself a non-smoker, but that is not the point.

Smoking is the cause of the biggest killer in this country —coronary heart disease, which kills 300,000 people a year. It is a tragic loss of life, and it is heavily based on the people's propensity to smoke. Although I would not wish to ban smoking—that would be crazy—we may be able to use the price mechanism to price people into good health. There is nothing wrong with that. It is a tax increase that we can support. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

I do not want to go into the highways and byways of the insurance surcharge. I understand that it is a new tax. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne is right to say that it is outrageous that the Chief Secretary came to the House to promote a Finance Bill with new taxes, a Bill which is large by any standards—I do not complain about that, as I shall not be serving on the Committee—and did not refer to those taxes. I should have thought that one would be proud that one was bringing forward new taxes to broaden the tax base. People have tried to broaden the tax base for a long time, although it can be done in unacceptable ways—VAT on fuel was an example.

The insurance surcharge does not relate to crime, although I think that it is a crime prevention measure. It is, in effect, a surcharge on motor vehicle insurance, which is one of the biggest causes of crime in the country as a result of the irresponsible ownership of motor vehicles that are left empty and not parked properly, wasting much police time. However, the imposition of a surcharge, effectively, on motor insurance will lead to people cutting corners by cutting the cover they pay for.

The insurance surcharge will not assist pollution. It will not reduce overcrowding on the roads. It would have been much more effective to make the provision of free parking by employers a taxable benefit in urban areas, including this place. I am happy to suggest that and get it in the neck, if necessary.

That would cut overcrowding on the roads. That would cut pollution. That would be a worthwhile new tax to consider. It would have the benefit of raising money, and it would assist public transport and have the other spin-off effects that I have mentioned. That would be a much more effective way of bringing in a new tax. It is not intended to bash the motorist. I simply take it as an extension.

When people challenged me, as a Member of Parliament, about all the perks we have, the only two perks that I have ever been able to mention since I have been a Member of the House are permanent 24-hour, 365-day parking free of charge in the centre of Birmingham and in the centre of London.

We have the peculiar arrangement that people have to pay to park cars. The parking of cars uses up space. That in itself is a cost, and in some ways it can be met. Some people know what the costs are, whether it is commercial parking or not. It would have been more effective, in terms of pollution and overcrowding on the roads, to make the provision of such parking a taxable benefit than to bring in a surcharge on motor vehicle insurance.

The Finance Bill could also have been a vehicle—that was not an intended pun—for securing proper funding of the national health service. That is why I was delighted with the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne. We could have used the Finance Bill to introduce a special tax for the health service, made up of an income and expenditure element.

I see no problem about setting aside, and I have called it a set-aside tax. If we can have set-aside for land, I am sure that we can have a set-aside of part of income tax or a set-aside of one of the expenditure taxes, to be hypothecated, to use the technical term, as a way of funding the national health service. It is the single area, at national level, where a specific task to run a service would be acceptable. I think that it would even be popular.

I also think that we should fund part of our compulsory education service—I emphasise, the compulsory years—from local education bonds. We ought to consider that seriously. I know that my local authority in Birmingham is making inquiries and considering the issue. It would require changes in the law. Local people need to know that there is some transparency in the provision of their services and the way in which they pay for them.

Hypothecation for health at a local level and for the compulsory part of education would be useful because it would be transparent. It would ensure that the services were provided. People would see what they were getting for the cash. It would enable the services to be ring-fenced. There would be a defence from the constant simplistic calls of people who demand cuts. The cuts always fall on the wrong elements of our social wage. I also think that the transparency of that type of tax would enhance value for money. The only downside is less Treasury control and I for one can live with that.

I shall not recite the figures on the tax burden increases, which were so well illustrated earlier by the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham.

I have to confess that I had a moment of inner pleasure on Sunday as I heard my noble Friend Lord Healey taking apart Lord Parkinson on the non-indexation of personal allowances. The freezing of personal allowances will create, from April, 600 or more new low-paid taxpayers in every constituency in the country. I hope, that hon. Members are proud of that. If anyone thinks that 600 is not very many, 24 Conservative Members have majorities of fewer than 1,200 and 13 have majorities of fewer than 600.

We are at the margin, it is true, but the Budget is creating almost half a million new low-paid taxpayers. It is a thundering disgrace that the lowest-paid people in the country should be asked to put their shoulders to the wheel in that fashion to pay for the Government's economic mess.

The most telling point that I have come across in recent months shows that the Conservative party has not simply happened to come up with this year's Budget, or last year's Budget. My example proves that increasing taxes on the low-paid and on average earners is not a mistake, or a one-off incident that the Government can put away in aberration or get out of in the next couple of years, before the general election. The tax increases in this Budget and in the spring 1993 Budget are part and parcel of a long-run process of shifting wealth, income and the tax burden in this country.

My example comes from the Government's own publication, the 1993 edition of "Social Trends". Table 518 shows that, between 1979 and 1989, real net incomes for the poorest fifth of the population, after housing costs had been taken into account, remained exactly constant, whereas for the middle fifth they increased by 23 per cent., and for the wealthiest part of the population, the top fifth, they increased by no less than 40 per cent. There is the contrast.

That did not happen because of one incident in one Finance Bill; it has been part of a long-run process ever since 1979, when the Conservatives came into office. In Budget after Budget, we can detect the shift. All in all, it is making our society more unequal and more polarised than ever. The Bill will only make matters worse.

6.51 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I do not propose to follow up the intriguing suggestions of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) about free parking in Birmingham, not to mention the means-testing of universal benefits. However, I agree with him that the Finance Act is not popular legislation. Nobody likes paying increased taxes or welcomes the need for the state to take more money out of the economy, but there are times when that is necessary, and I strongly believe that this is one of them. The measures in the Bill are entirely justified.

At some £50 billion, the budget deficit is unsustainable and it had to be tackled, for good reasons. If the deficit continued at £50 billion, an increase in interest rates would inevitably and rapidly follow, and soon after that, curiously enough, there would be a short-term increase in the exchange rate. As the deficit continued, that would end and the exchange rate would collapse, which would lead to further interest rate rises. Almost inevitably, lenders would then refuse to provide more money for the Government to finance their deficit.

We have been there before. That is precisely what happened in the mid-1970s, and it led to what happened to the Labour Government—the coming of the International Monetary Fund and the forcing of savage cuts in the budget of this country. So the problem had to be tackled. There was no question but that the deficit was unfundable in the long term.

[Mr. Matthew Carrington]

In tackling the deficit we have two choices, and I am glad to say that the Government have taken them both. The first is cutting Government expenditure, and I believe that that has been done as far as is possible at this stage. In yesterday's debate we heard how difficult it is to limit the growth in Government expenditure, let alone to cut it. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury told the House earlier that we shall cut about £8 billion from expenditure over the next few years. That is welcome, but it is by no means enough to bring our finances back into balance. That inevitably means that, even with all the reductions in public spending, we still need tax increases.

The increases have to be large. We cannot limit them to a level that we hope will be sufficient, but that may prove insufficient. One of the principal reasons for increasing taxes at this stage, and showing that we are doing something about our budget deficit, is not only to ensure a rapid reduction in the deficit but to make certain that the financial markets have considerable confidence in the Government's determination to reduce it. That confidence will allow lenders to continue to provide the Government with the money needed to carry them over a period during which the borrowing requirement is bound to remain high, and, unfortunately, may even increase, as it tends to in a period of recovery from recession. We must boost the confidence of the markets that the Government propose to tackle our fundamental problems.

Of course, the tax increases proposed in the Bill, which I believe are right, may turn out to be too high and, in a shorter time than some people suppose, we may find that the Government have raised too much tax. Then we shall be faced with the happy prospect of having to decide where to cut taxes. That time will come rather sooner than some pessimists think. It will come; the signs of the recovery of our economy are strong. We have heard that estimates of economic growth have increased from 2·5 per cent. at the time of the Budget to almost 3 per cent., and even that may underestimate how rapidly the economy is growing.

That rapidity of economic growth may mean that the tax paid to the Exchequer increases more rapidly than we projected; in fact, it is certain to do so. We may find that the Budget deficit is brought down more rapidly than we expect. That will not happen this year, but the signs may start to appear next year. Certainly, in three years' time we shall start to see significant effects of a sustained economic growth at those levels of recovery. So I hope that we shall soon see more pleasant Finance Bills.

The speed of recovery itself can cause problems, especially if it gets out of control, so one of the benefits of the tax increases will be their effect in slowing down the historic tendency of our economy to overheat. Taxes may provide the necessary damper. If our economy grows too fat, we risk returning to our historic problem of the conflict between interest rates and foreign exchange rates. As our economy recovers, the pound tends to increase rapidly in value. Historically, that problem has been tackled by reducing domestic interest rates, which continues the overheating of the economy, and foreign exchange rates increase even further. We then end up in a boom-bust cycle, as we did most notably in 1988. That in itself is undesirable, and the problem needs to be tackled. I hope that the Treasury is watching carefully the strength of our economic recovery, and will ensure that it does not get out of control.

Mr. Salmond: Given the current state of our balance of payments, is the hon. Gentleman not concerned about the possibility that we may currently be in a bust-bust cycle?

Mr. Carrington: The hon. Gentleman must not be watching the economic indicators or keeping in touch with the many constituencies in which business and economic activity is growing visibly and fast, and where activity is showing encouraging signs of sustainable and rapid recovery.

That recovery raises the question of whether interest rates need to be cut to enable the stimulation of the economy, as is often suggested. Interest rates should not be cut. There would be little benefit from doing so. Interest rates are at an historically low level and cutting them will not encourage investment. Investment decisions are less dominated by interest rate levels and much more dominated by the ability to sell the goods and services. What drives the recovery of the economy is investment decisions, not the cost of the money necessary to provide that investment. Little would be gained from cutting interest rates and if the Government did that, they would run the risk of over-heating the economy.

Foreign exchange strength, especially against the deutschmark as we have seen in recent weeks, is not something to worry about. Such strength is unfortunate for exporting industries, especially those exporting in Europe, and will undoubtedly dampen our export-led recovery, but it will also right itself, because recovery in the German economy has begun. As soon as that recovery in the German economy has gone beyond a certain stage and there is great confidence in it, the rate of the deutschmark will rise again and sterling will depreciate against the deutschmark.

I welcome the Finance Bill. It is unpleasant medicine, but I believe that it is the right medicine at the right time. The measures in the Bill provide the possibility of sustained, non-inflationary growth in our economy, a possibility that we have not seen for many years and one that we should go for with full confidence.

7.1 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I support the Opposition amendment, which I, too, clearly heard my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) move. I interpreted the prospect of a tax overshoot, instanced by the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington), as a general criticism of the proposed high taxes. If it was not that, it was indeed a sophisticated speech.

The Chief Secretary's speech was brief—much briefer than his usual speeches—brash and aggressive and it seemed to be a diversion, a ruse—

Mr. Salmond: It was brazen.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman says that the speech was brazen and I also attach that epithet to the Chief Secretary's singular performance. I heard the right hon. Gentleman ask plaintively where all the Welsh honesty had gone. I resisted the temptation to intervene but, in his absence, I say that he has one honourable Welsh Member in me, one who is honest and makes an honest observation of the Bill. The people of Wales will totally reject what he has proposed. I can honestly say to the House that, in Wales, the proposal for value added tax on domestic fuel is greatly, bitterly and angrily rejected. There is no case for it to persuade the people of Wales.

The Chief Secretary made his speech flanked by what I thought were anxious-looking Ministers. Later, I noticed that the Chancellor left the Front Bench and took up a position on the Back Benches beside the hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts). What the subject of their collusion was, I do not know. In Wales, we describe the Chancellor as "Ken the tax" and that is an honest report from Wales.

I have a letter from the regional electricity board, which was addressed to me as a resident of north Wales and is headed "Introduction Of VAT On Domestic Fuel". It said to me, as a householder:

> "As you may be aware from recent press coverage, supplies of domestic fuel may continue to be zero rated where an advance payment has been credited to your electricity account by 31-3-94."

I found that surprising, but when I held my surgery days later in the town of Buckley, one of my constituents, Mr. Tasker, came to me with a similar letter and told me of his anger and disgust at the letter because, he said, the proposition was unfair. He did not have spare money to make a payment in advance. He saw the letter as an invitation to those who were well off to take advantage and he instanced the predicament of his fellow constituents who found it hard to make ends meet over this financial year and could find no money to put aside for the year after that.

There is an injustice at the heart of the Bill. Imposing VAT on domestic fuel is an unjust measure that brings forth a doubtful proposition. The indignation and anger of my constituent was real and I put it to the House, and specifically to Government Front Benchers, that they should concede the case that is made in our amendment.

It is helpful to hon. Members to be accessible to their constituents and to live among them. I hold nearly 50 surgeries a year and on Friday in Buckley some 54 people consulted me. It took me more than three and a half hours to interview them. Throughout the consultation, their anxiety about not being able to make ends meet was repeatedly raised. The Bill will make the predicament of my constituents worse.

A residents association in my constituency was determined to consult me about the residents' problems in meeting fuel bills.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that not only the imposition of VAT but the proposals for cuts in benefit in general terms suggest that the Government are making people who are caught in the poverty trap and who are already some of the poorest members of society pay for the mismanagement of the economy, specifically through the measures that they have introduced over the past 14 years?

Mr. Jones: I agree with my hon. Friend. The important word is poverty. It is a growing poverty and it is a fuel poverty. My surgery attracted people who were anxious about the future, their fuel poverty and their housing problems. They find the going tough. Heating their homes adequately through the winter is difficult and their domestic budgets are strained to the limit, yet we are discussing a measure that will make their problems greater.

One constituent from Penycoed told me that she had arthritic joints and had a ventilator for asthma and that her daughter had a heart condition and was also epileptic. She had extreme difficulty in carrying buckets of coal, so she had a coal bag in her kitchen. When I inquired about the specific problem in buying fuel, she told me that she used two to three bags of coal a week; bags of coal are £6·50 each. She said that she often used an electric fire and that she also often used hot-water bottles. She said that she paid £10 to £15 a week on her electricity bill.

Those are the raw facts of people—ordinary, honest, decent people such as my constituents who are already up against it. This unjust measure proposes hardship. The Bill was arrogantly presented by a Cabinet Minister, without addressing its contents. That is an honest observation by an hon. Member from Wales. The House has not considered such an unjust measure for many years. On behalf of my constituents, I protest in the knowledge that, so far, the measure has not a shred of support.

Another constituent was similarly affected. She said that she had to retire from work because of a severe back complaint. She had arthritis in her shoulders, neck and spine, and it was necessary for her to keep warm. She said that, each week, she used three bags of coal at £6·50 each. She said also that her electricity bill was about £16 a week. She bought logs to keep her fire going.

Wales is not noted for high wages. I am sorry to say that Wales is top of the low wages league. People on low wages already find the going tough in terms of their domestic fuel budget. I remind the House that, for about 10 days in November, in anticyclonic weather, temperatures dropped greatly. At that time, the houses of those who were not wealthy and of those who could not afford perpetually to feed the electricity meter became very cold. I had a series of petitions from householders, mainly those on council estates. I made it my business to meet those people in their own homes. There was a meeting of about 12 or 14 people, including some of those who had signed a petition.

Mr. Richards: If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about the cost of electricity, will he tell his constituents why he voted against the proposal to build a gas-fired power station at Connah's Quay in his constituency, which would have produced cheaper electricity?

Mr. Jones: I should like the hon. Gentleman to meet the people whom I have met and explain to them why he is prepared to support an unjust measure which will put domestic budgets under greater pressure.

When I met one group of householders, the person who made her home available to her fellow signatories and me said that it was her usual practice to light her fire, the sole source of heat in her home, late in the day. For the purposes of the meeting that I attended, she lit the fire early. Mothers told me of their worry that in such weather there was only one warm room. Some mothers said that it was too cold upstairs for their children to sleep and that there were icicles on blankets. I believe that, because some residents in that street had recorded the temperature in their homes in the dead of night.

One way to help to relieve my constituents' predicament and that of several million others is to modernise houses and make them draughtproof and warm. The benefit of modernising a house is that work could be found for six or eight people, thereby making inroads into high unemployment. It would also make people happy and healthier.

[Mr. Jones]

The Government are hellbent on imposing another unjust tax. First, there was the poll tax; now there is value added tax on domestic fuel. It will hit those on low wages but above benefit level very severely. The Government cannot begin to expect a pennyworth of acceptance from the nation if they propound unjust measures. At its heart, the Bill is very unjust. If the Government want the nation to pull together to overcome our economic problems, just and fair measures will be required. VAT on domestic fuel is most unjust. The nation yearns for a programme for national recovery which proposes fair measures. The Government do not have the respect of our people. The Government are neither wisely led nor decisively led. Many aspects of the measures go against the grain of a national sense of fair play. I therefore hope that the Government's proposal is defeated.

7.16 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I begin by declaring my interests, as set out in the Register of Members' Interests, as an adviser to NatWest Securities, a director of Dewe Rogerson Consultants and an adviser to the Institute of Taxation. I need hardly say that none of those institutions has the faintest idea of what I propose to say.

In the six years in which I have been a Member, there has not been an occasion on which we have debated the Finance Bill on Second Reading against the background of such lively public interest in the issue of taxation. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) is right to laugh at that. There is no doubt that, over the past few days, the Labour party has been making the running. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has enjoyed the experience, because it will be very short. I am confident that this debate will mark the point in the public discussion of the issue throughout the country at which the tide turns. I am confident of that for two precise and specific reasons.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) notably failed to take the obvious opportunity of saying how she would achieve the essential prerequisite to reduce the burden of taxation of which she complains by reducing public expenditure. Over and again the question was put to her, and over and again she characteristically avoided it.

The people of this country are not fools. They will draw their own conclusions from the hon. Lady's evasive answers. From running household budgets, running the budgets of industry and business, small and large, and running the businesses of clubs, voluntary bodies and charities, they know that it is profoundly frivolous and puerile to dispute one side of a budget without being prepared to take into account the consequences for the other side. It is frivolous to the point of being farcical—and it goes way beyond the normal irresponsibility with which we associate the Labour party in these matters—for the Labour party to say that the Government are raising too much money by means of taxation without being prepared to say how the Government should be spending less, so as to balance the Budget at a lower level.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): On the subject of answering questions, will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether he intends to vote for the new tax rises and for the imposition of VAT on fuel? Will he also give the House a short resume of what he told his constituents about tax at the election?

Mr. Davies *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. It ought to be clear to the House that the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel supplies is already the law of the land.

Mr. Davies: Having made my strictures about the evasion of difficult questions, I am sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you would not want me to be subsequently and unjustly accused of a similar evasion because you have ruled a question out of order. I am only too anxious to respond to the hon. Gentleman. I said at the election with conviction, and I repeat it now, that the party for which I have the honour to stand is the party of low taxation. The Conservative party is the party which delivered in the 1980s and is most likely to deliver in the future the lowest possible rates of taxation with the lowest possible burden of public spending and borrowing.

I shall vote this evening, as I have said in my constituency, and with all the conviction at my disposal for the increases in taxation and for the extension of VAT to domestic fuel. I believe that that was the right and thoroughly responsible measure for the Government to take in the present circumstances.

The second reason why I believe that the debate will turn during the evening is the Labour party's attempt to depict the Conservative Government as a high taxation Government on the basis of the statistical fact that taxation as a proportion of national income is slightly higher at present than it was at a particular time in the late 1970s. The attempt to depict the Conservative party as a taxation party on the basis of that statistic is based on an optical illusion. That statistical fact conceals a reality which is thoroughly creditable to the Government.

If taxation is slightly higher as a proportion of national income and as a proportion of public expenditure, that is because borrowing is lower both as a proportion of national income and as a proportion of public expenditure than it was when the Labour party was in power. Here again, the Labour party underestimates the intelligence of our voters. Our voters know perfectly well—whether or not the Labour party is willing or able to acknowledge the fact—that borrowing is merely deferred taxation. If we borrow more money today, we will have a higher interest charge tomorrow and we shall have to meet that higher interest charge either by raising taxation or by further cutting public expenditure tomorrow.

That is the salient statistic. Public expenditure as a proportion of national income—current plus deferred taxation as a proportion of national income—is substantially lower than it was in the 1970s. Indeed, the figures are set out incontrovertibly on page 115 of the Red Book for all to see. At present, public expenditure as a proportion of national income is about 44 per cent. Let us look back to 1974-75, when the proportion was 48·75 per cent., or 1975-76, when the proportion was 49·25 per cent.

In the 1970s, the Labour party actually had a level of current and deferred taxation, or aggregate taxation, that was five percentage points higher than at present. That is the optical illusion which will not survive its exposure during the debate tonight.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Is not the hon. Gentleman being too simple-minded in just talking about tax and borrowing? Is there not the question of other receipts? In the 1970s, about 10 per cent. of income came from other receipts. Were not those industries which have now been privatised a major factor in that? Would they not have provided a continuing source of income to the Government, which has now been lost?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman's intervention was based not so much on an optical illusion, or an attempt to put the wrong gloss on the facts, as on something more elemental—a misunderstanding of the facts. During the 1970s, the nationalised industries turned in an aggregate net loss to the country. They included a large number of industries which, now that they have been privatised, are generating considerable sums of money for the Exchequer by paying corporation tax. The figures in relation to that have been so often quoted in the House that I do not need to detain it on that subject.

It is because of my analysis that what counts is the total amount of public expenditure which has to be met by either current or deferred tax that I particularly pay tribute to the courage of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench. They have cut public expenditure by more than £4 billion below the level of the rigorous control totals which they had previously set. In the difficult world of politics, I know how easy it is for Back Benchers to urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to cut public expenditure further, which I regularly do. However, I recognise that cutting £4 billion from the control totals was a major political achievement, and I think we should give them the credit which they are undoubtedly due.

I shall turn to one of the other major issues which have been thrown up by the Budget and by the Bill, on which the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) spoke earlier. That is the fear which has been expressed in some quarters that the fiscal retrenchment—the reduction in public expenditure and the increase in taxation which the Bill brings in—will have a negative impact on the growth potential of this country and, therefore, on our hopes to get unemployment down further. The fear is that that will act as an excessive check on growth.

I believe that that concern—which I understand theoretically—is misconceived in practice for this reason: we must remember that the economy has received considerable stimulus during the past two or three years. During the past three or so years, nominal interest rates have fallen from a base rate of 15 per cent. to a base rate of 5·5 per cent.—in other words, nominal rates have fallen by about 66 per cent., a considerable reduction over a brief time, by any historical standards.

During the past 15 months, the base rate has fallen from 10 per cent. to 5·5 per cent. The time lag in such matters means that a great deal of the stimulus that derives from those reductions in interest rates is still in the pipeline. It will still hit the economy in terms of its impact on borrowing, the creation of money, the increase in demand and, therefore, the potential increases in investment, output and employment. I have no doubt that those increases will come through.

On top of that, there has been the devaluation. Despite some rise in the sterling parity during recent months, the pound is still of a parity 10 per cent. lower on a trade-weighted basis than it was in September 1992. That again is a considerable measure of stimulus and, again, not all its effects will have come through.

Finally, we have had the considerable fiscal expansion which preceded this responsible Budget in which we went from a fiscal surplus to a public sector borrowing requirement of about £50 billion on an annual basis. That is a considerable stimulus.

Against the background of all those stimuli, a lot of us would have been worried if some fiscal or other retrenchment had not come through at this stage. We would have been worried that we would overdo it and head into the inflationary problems that have beset the British economy so often and so unfortunately in the past. So, far from being worried about it, I am greatly relieved by the element of fiscal restraint that my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget introduces.

The other factor that we cannot ignore is the international context. Foreign trade accounts for about 40 per cent. of our gross domestic product. We know that our continental trading partners in the rest of the European Union, which represents about 60 per cent. of our overseas trade, are not growing at all. Last year, they had an average growth rate of between minus 1·25 per cent. and minus a little more than 1 per cent., whereas we have enjoyed a positive growth rate of about 2 per cent. That is already a three percentage point differential between our growth rate and those of our major trading partners. The whole of economic history makes it clear that one cannot sustain a substantial differential in growth rates without running into balance of payments problems or inflationary problems, or a combination of both.

Therefore, it is reassuring in the present circumstances —even though I hope that our continental competitors, for all our sakes, will begin to show some positive growth next year—that the reasonable assumption was made that there were natural limits to the extent to which we could drive up the growth rate in the short term. Again, I endorse and welcome the courageous judgments—I use that word advisedly—of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Now, my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General may have been relatively gratified by some of the observations that I have made so far. However, I have to tell him frankly that, if I applaud, welcome and admire the substance of the Budget and the fiscal judgment that lies behind the Finance Bill, including the brave decisions to set up new taxes, such as the airport tax and the insurance tax, and the extension of VAT to domestic fuel—all of which are the subject of great controversy—I utterly abhor the form of the Bill. I regard the text of the Bill which has been presented to us tonight in an unprecedented two volumes and 400 pages of proposed tax law as an abomination and an example of how we should not legislate.

The Bill is a disgraceful comment on the work that has been performed by the parliamentary draftsmen who have the nerve to present it to the House. It is far too long. I was always brought up to believe that the lazy and easy thing to do was to write at great length; the difficult thing to do and the test of one's drafting was how succinct one could be. The parliamentary draftsmen who produced the Bill have not even heard of that principle, let alone tried to implement it.

Not only is the Bill far too long, far too prolix—a simple ad valorem duty on insurance comes out at 18 pages—but

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it shows all sorts of evidence of sloppy thinking and drafting, such as definitions produced way after the terms are first brought into the text. It simply is not good enough.

I began my speech by declaring an interest as an adviser to the Institute of Taxation. I hope that I shall still have that interest tomorrow. Perhaps I will not, after my remarks have been reported to it. The fact is that if one group of people will benefit from this appalling piece of drafting, it is the professional tax advisers. The other side of that is, of course, that the cost of compliance to the taxpayer will increase and, even more crucially, the clarity of the law will be diminished. Parliament and democracy will thereby suffer.

I wonder whether I could leave my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General with a thought. I applaud the Government's initiative in introducing into the civil service an element of competition from the private sector through the principles of contracting out and market testing. I beg him to put right at the top of the priority list for market testing and contracting out the future drafting of the Finance Bills presented to the House.

7.34 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I wish to speak in support of the amendment and to take this opportunity to examine the effect of the Budget on charities and other voluntary organisations. In doing so, I should like to register my interest as an adviser to a community care project supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, whose community care programme I ran before my election to Parliament.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations expressed its disappointment in restrained terms. It said that the Chancellor's Budget had proved to be a "missed opportunity" and that several aspects of it would further increase the tax burden on charities and voluntary organisations and to produce the perverse effect of deterring people from volunteering.

It is important to set the charitable sector in its context as a significant player in the economy of Britain. It is a sector worth about £16 billion a year. It directly employs almost a quarter of a million people. It is larger than the United Kingdom motor industry. Despite that, charities are still uniquely penalised by the present VAT system. They currently pay more than £335 million a year in irrecoverable VAT. They pay more in tax than commercial organisations or local authorities, which do not have to pay VAT on expenditure associated with the services that they provide. Those services are increasingly exactly the same as the services provided by charities.

A clear example is domiciliary care. Local authority home care services are exempt from VAT. However, the community care rules set by Ministers at the Department of Health require local authorities to spend 85 per cent. of their community care grant in the independent sector. When a private care agency acts as principal—that is, provides staff to care for people in their own home—it is liable for VAT. That increases its costs and obviously, in turn, the costs to the elderly or disabled people to whom the agency provides services. Meanwhile, care services provided in registered residential homes are VAT exempt. The position is a mess of inconsistencies.

A core aim of the community care legislation was to remove what the Audit Commission called "the perverse incentive"—that was a financial incentive that positively encouraged people through the social security system to enter residential nursing homes rather than to remain cared for in their own home. The imposition of VAT on care services in people's own homes, while care services in institutions are exempt from VAT, perpetuates the financial inequalities and, in turn, the perverse incentive.

I now turn to VAT on domestic fuel. The Chancellor has announced inadequate measures of help for pensioners with the additional costs of VAT on domestic fuel. However, he has failed to acknowledge the position of charities which provide residential care for elderly or disabled people. Estimates of the additional burden on charities range from about £30 million to £50 million. Many smaller organisations are seriously considering reducing their services.

The Government may be happy to deal with elderly people's fear that they will be unable to meet their heating bills by telling those who live in their own homes to turn their heating down, put on an extra sweater and knit a woolly hat. But the manager of a residential care home cannot turn down the heating. Such staff will have to make a choice—a choice that many voluntary organisations and charities now face—between cutting another service and asking their friends, supporters and volunteers to undertake still more fund raising. Does the Chancellor really believe that it is a proper use of volunteers and other workers who support charitable effort that they should spend more time rattling cans and running jumble sales to help their organisations to meet VAT bills?

A further aspect of increased taxation is the increased costs resulting from the new tax on insurance premiums. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has reckoned that the imposition of a 3 per cent. duty on a general insurance premium will represent an additional cost to the charitable sector of about £4·5 million. The obvious fear is that that will prove to be a disincentive to charities' taking out adequate insurance cover against the risks involved in the day-to-day provision of their services.

I should like to quote from the letter that the Charities Tax Reform Group sent to the Chancellor when the Budget proposals were being drawn up. The letter from that very large consortium, which represents all the major charities and charitable voluntary organisations, states:

> "In spite of ministerial assurances to the contrary, we are beginning to wonder precisely what value the Government places on the voluntary sector. Charities are not the icing on the cake of state provision. In many areas, such as life boats and rehabilitation services for the newly blind, they are the only provisions."

There is no limit to the fine words that the Government will deploy in their apparent support for the work of voluntary organisations and charities up and down the country, but voluntary organisations and charities are increasingly sceptical about the Government's will to do anything to sort out the increasing burden that they have to bear in serving their communities. They are asking the Government to listen to their well-argued and reasoned case for reform of charitable taxation.

7.42 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I do not wish to take the line of the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell), as I do not know anything like as much about the subject as she obviously does. However, I shall read the report of her speech in *Hansard* and think more closely about it.

I should like to begin by concentrating on a procedural point that has been well made by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It concerns the size of this Finance Bill and the opacity of its language. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and others who have pointed out forcefully that this is a very powerful argument for splitting future Finance Bills, and preferably this one, into a technical measure, which could perhaps be dealt with through a semi-Select Committee procedure, and a political measure, which would attract debate such as we have had today, especially at an earlier stage.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General and the Whip who is on duty will take note of the fact that very few hon. Members on either side of the House have expressed disagreement with that view. I hope that, for once, the business managers will be made aware, through the usual channels, of the feelings in the House, and will take those feelings into account.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): When we were talking to each other, the Opposition offered this option to the Treasury team, but it was turned down.

Mr. Forman: I am sorry to hear that. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will have second thoughts about the matter in relation to this measure, and certainly in relation to future Finance Bills.

I should like to make a few points about the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), whom I am delighted to see in the House, if not exactly in her own place. In opening for the Opposition, she made great play of the Labour party's alleged new credentials as the taxpayers' friend and the tax-cutting party.

I have been in the House since 1976, but this is something unusual for me to hear. When some of my hon. Friends and I asked where and how the hon. Member would cut taxation if her party were in office, we were told that she would not extend value added tax to domestic fuel and power. That comes as no surprise, as it is the subject of the Labour party's amendment today.

If the Labour party—this Johnny-come-lately of the tax-cutting cause—is to be taken more seriously, the hon. Lady and her right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition ought to demonstrate some commitment to cutting levels and rates of income tax, and similar commitment in the sphere of corporation tax and, perhaps, in the sphere of national insurance contributions, all of which ordinary electors tend to regard as taxation. I am telling the hon. Lady gently—and I shall give way if she wishes to intervene again—that her party's record does not indicate very powerful tax-cutting credentials. This is something of which the electorate should take note.

With regard to the Labour party's position in relation to public expenditure savings—the other side of the account —the hon. Lady, in answer to questions from Conservative Members, was able only to make comments that were rather fatuous. In saying so, I am turning the adjective against her. Her fatuous answer was that a future Labour Government would cut unemployment.

As I pointed out in an intervention during the course of the speech of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, cutting unemployment—if the process is to be state-led—inevitably involves some initial extra public expenditure, which in turn is likely to increase the deficit, encourage extra public borrowing, and possibly even put upward pressure on interest rates—or there may be a combination of all those things.

I cannot see that, in the short term—politicians have to deal with the short term as well as the long—it is enough simply to parrot that the Labour party would cut unemployment.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that our greatest concern about the Conservative Government's taxation policy, as demonstrated in the Budget, the Finance Bill and the direction in which the country is going, is that freezing personal allowances has affected people at the lower end of the income scale far more than the wealthy? Indeed, wealthy people have benefited from Conservative tax policies since 1979. The people at the bottom are losing considerably as a result of the freezing of personal allowances.

Mr. Forman: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I believe that, if he looks at the tax tables in the Red Book and in the Inland Revenue's press releases, he will see that income at all levels is affected by the Chancellor's adjustment of allowances. It is true that, relatively speaking, the effect may be greater on those in low-paid work. However, I am very keen that, on the social security side, we should boost such things as family credit, which is designed to assist the low-paid in a cost-effective manner.

Were we to put much faith in the Labour party's new-found position—it has taken the Opposition about 15 years to reach this point—it would be rather like putting Dracula in charge of the blood bank, as my right hon. Friend the former Member for Bath, who is now the Governor of Hong Kong, used to say. That is how the electorate ought to treat what the Opposition is saying.

In spite of the fact that this Finance Bill is the product of the first unified Budget in modern times, it is still public spending that creates the need to borrow and the need to tax. The need to borrow and the need to tax do not drive public spending. I wish it were otherwise, but that is the reality.

Because it would have been wholly impracticable to make large cuts in public expenditure in one year—something that could not sensibly be done by a responsible Government—and because it would have been wholly irresponsible of the Chancellor not to seek to reduce the level of public borrowing over several years, as his Budget measures are intended to do, my right hon. and learned Friend had no responsible alternative to a substantial increase in taxation through this Bill. That is something that his predecessor did in the Budget of last March, and Governments of different political hues throughout the European Union are doing likewise almost as we speak.

Such an approach to public finances is obviously unwelcome to everyone who pays tax, whether direct taxpayers, indirect taxpayers or corporate taxpayers. The alternative to such fiscal responsibility would either have been punished by the markets, if the level of unchecked borrowing had brought on a funding crisis, which would have been the worst possible outcome, or, in less dramatic

[Mr. Forman]

circumstances, would have led to the monetisation of public debt—in other words, another bout of severe inflation. That is something which this country, in a highly competitive global economy, could do with like a hole in the head.

As Martin Wolf put it in the *Financial Times* on Monday:

> "The proper start for discussion of the fiscal burden is not with taxation, but spending. In the short term governments may borrow, rather than tax. In the long term, revenue will have to be raised, either to service debt or in the form of the inflation tax."

Those of us with long memories will know that inflation is the most insidious form of taxation and that it affects this country more than most, or used to, because of the consequences of so-called fiscal drag.

Conservative Members were greatly relieved that the Chancellor and his immediate predecessor grasped the nettle of deficit reduction this year as the main priority of fiscal policy. With the economic recovery now healthily under way and a structure of taxation which, at least in terms of corporate tax and income tax, is now much more responsive to the economic cycle than it used to be—that is one of the positive legacies of my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Lawson—it should be possible to reduce PSBR relatively quickly as the recovery gathers pace. At any rate, it should be possible to reduce it to a safely low level by the end of this Parliament, which I understand to be the objective of the Red Book.

Once the PSBR reduction is achieved via the mechanism of this Budget and subsequent ones, I urge my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to adhere to two broad principles of fiscal policy in future Finance Bills and Budgets.

First, they should recognise that the right approach to tax policy requires continuing, endless tax reform, especially by making sustained efforts to broaden the base of taxation, so that lower rates of tax in all categories can be achieved without loss of revenue. The figures that have been quoted in the debate relating to the impact of the personal tax changes in 1988, in particular, reveal the way in which one can broaden the base, lower the rates and get in more revenue. The same was true during the period of growth in the 1980s, in relation to corporation tax following the 1984 reforms.

In that context, I greatly welcome clauses 73 and 77, which progressively restrict to 15 per cent., in 1995-96, the tax relief available via the married couple's allowance and mortgage interest relief. It is the right decision to phase out those allowances gradually and to drive towards a situation where we can emulate Hong Kong, which has a standard rate of tax of about 15 per cent.

Such action by the Chancellor will increase the effective rate of tax, but it should leave the way open for future reductions in the marginal rates of tax, and steady progress towards making 20 per cent. the standard rate of income tax. Perhaps 15 per cent. is too much to ask for in the foreseeable future, but it should be feasible to broaden the 20 per cent. band as part of broadening the base of tax. That is something for which the Chancellor should strive.

My second point of principle is that we shall only achieve those lower rates of tax on income, which we must have if our economy is to remain internationally competitive, if we also move gradually, over the years ahead, towards more of an expenditure-based tax system. That implies lower rates of tax on income and capital, with the burden of providing extra revenue borne more by VAT and excise duties.

I therefore support the extension of VAT to domestic fuel and power, even though it is an unpopular move, which was contained in the Finance Act 1993. It forms a logical part of a longer-term thrust of policy, with a broader base for VAT. This could enable the Chancellor, perhaps next year, to reduce the standard rate of VAT to 15 per cent. and to introduce a lower starting rate on the real essentials at perhaps 7 per cent. or 8 per cent., as happens elsewhere in the European Union. That is not an outlandish suggestion, and it would offer a net contribution to the overall revenue according to runs on the Treasury model that I have seen. I set out those broad arguments in my speech during the Budget debate, so I will not weary the House by repeating the consequentials tonight.

The House will know that I am the parliamentary adviser to the Institute of Chartered Accountants. Having declared that interest, I should like to put down markers on two further points which arise out of the Finance Bill and which cause some concern to the accountancy profession.

The first point has already been raised by the president of the institute in a letter to the Chancellor. There is little point in introducing "simplified assessment" clauses in a Bill of this kind if their effect is to be vitiated by the tortuous style of parliamentary draftsmen. That point has already been underlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies).

It might have been better to allow the profession and all taxpayers to get used to the current year basis of assessment in the cause of simplification, which was brought in initially last year, before introducing the far-reaching changes of self-assessment, which are planned to be fully introduced before the current year basis of assessment is fully running.

Secondly, many in the profession have grave reservations about clause 241, which appears to allow the Inland Revenue extensive powers to obtain papers relating to people's personal tax position, subject simply to the consent of a special commissioner. I do not know enough about the technicalities of this matter because I am not an accountant, but it has been brought to my attention that it would be well worth Treasury Ministers reconsidering the issue to ensure that they have got it right.

The Bill is necessary. It is the legislative expression of but one part of a responsible unified Budget. It takes some useful steps towards a more broadly based and buoyant tax system, and I hope that further steps will be taken by the Chancellor in subsequent years.

I must end by offering the House the rather sad reminder that the overall burden of taxation can only be lowered, at any stage in the economic cycle, if the burden of public expenditure is reduced. That is likely to mean going further with the deliberate reduction in the scope and responsibilities of the state. Big government is always likely to mean high taxation.

To escape from that universal dilemma, which affects all societies, we must continue to privatise, to contract out and to reassess and reduce the role of the state. That way lies greater freedom and prosperity, and that is the path that we should follow.

7.57 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I begin, uncontroversially, by accusing the Government of racial incitement. I do not believe that I can possibly interpret the actions of the Chancellor as anything other than that, given that he decided to launch his Budget on St. Andrew's day and now has its Second Reading on Burns night. I suppose that I should be grateful that the House was not recalled on Hogmanay to debate some other part of this miserable Budget. I detect a plot to ruin Scotland's great national days with debates on this depressing Bill.

There is no doubt that the Cabinet would benefit from some Burns——

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Burning.

Mr. Salmond: No doubt that will come to them all in due course. In this earthly life, however, the Cabinet would benefit from some quotes from Robert Burns. Earlier today the Prime Minister dared to accuse another hon. Member of speaking in cliches. The Prime Minister obviously has not encountered

"O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!"

I certainly believe that if the Cabinet, collectively, had read "Holy Willie's Prayer" they would never have embarked on a "back to basics" policy. If Rabbie was silently and mockingly listening to our proceedings tonight—who knows, perhaps he is—he might get the imspiration to go off and pen, "The De'il's awa wi' th' Vatman."

The Chief Secretary earlier said that it was not possible to target the compensation scheme for VAT on domestic fuel to allow those vulnerable groups in the coldest areas of the country, who will suffer most, to benefit from some extra compensation package. The Chief Secretary told me in grand terms that it was not possible to target fiscal measures in such detail. I went to the Library and discovered that it had been possible specifically to target huge tax handouts. Almost £14,000 million was given away in tax handouts over four years starting from the 1988 Budget—£12,516 for each high-rate taxpayer. The geographical split for those tax handouts was 58·7 per cent. for the south-east of England, about twice its population share, and 4 per cent. for Scotland, which is about half its population share. The Government were clearly capable of targeting that fiscal initiative but are somehow incapable of targeting a compensation scheme to allow some additional benefit to those who will suffer first and foremost from the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel.

The present level of fuel poverty is totally unacceptable. It is well documented that there are 3,000 to 5,000 deaths in Scotland every winter because of the rigours of the Scottish climate. On 28 October a debate on cold climate allowance was initiated by hon. Friends in Plaid Cymru and the SNP. That debate had two remarkable features. After the debate I received a letter of apology from a social security Minister, the first time that I have had such a letter following a debate, in which he apologised for inadvertently misleading the House on some statistics. That is a cautionary tale for Ministers who suggest that the cold climate of Scotland does not translate into higher fuel bills. The Minister led himself into trouble by trying to disprove that obvious fact.

The second remarkable feature about the debate was that only 33 hon. Members voted in favour of a cold climate allowance. To their eternal discredit, Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen sat on their hands during the vote. If my memory serves me correctly, only eight Scottish Labour Members were prepared to defy their party's instruction and voted in favour of the allowance. The deplorable attitude of Labour Front Benchers on that occasion has certainly not gone unnoticed by the many organisations representing pensioners and other vulnerable groups in Scotland. That debate was designed to highlight the fact that fuel poverty is utterly unacceptable. The imposition of VAT on domestic fuel will inevitably cause more suffering to more people in those groups.

I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). He capably showed, by using individual examples, that it was nonsense to believe that the compensation scheme would be adequate in real terms for his constituents. The best guess is that for vulnerable groups the compensation scheme will meet about half the VAT imposition. In broad figures, I calculate that over the next three years an extra £500 million will be taken out of the Scottish economy by VAT on domestic fuel. The rebate by way of the compensation scheme will be about £130 million, or about 25 per cent. of the total tax yield. That averages an additional £75 a head over those three years for every man, woman and child in Scotland.

The heaviest additional burden will fall on the vulnerable groups who are already unable to pay fuel bills. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), has joined us in the Chamber. I should like to see some semblance of a sign that there is a Scottish dimension to this policy. Even at this stage, Scottish Office Ministers should attempt to persuade their Treasury colleagues that the cold climate problem needs to be addressed and not made worse by the Bill. Scots suffer the paradox of fuel poverty amid energy plenty.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside said that it will be possible, at least for a time, for some people to escape VAT on domestic fuel. Helpfully and carefully, some electricity companies, one of which is the Hydro Board in Scotland, are putting in a readable place in electricity bills the information that, if bills are paid in advance, VAT can be avoided. That is because VAT is charged at the point of sale and not at the point of use. I am informed by my accountancy friends that those who have the money to pay their electricity bills for the next three years could get a much higher return than is available from any bank or building society.

For those who have £2,000 or £3,000 in the bank, such knowledge is useful, but once again those who will be hit hardest by the measure will be totally unable to finance even that sort of temporary tax avoidance. I do not begrudge people the loophole, but I would like to see it widened so that it could be used by vulnerable groups who most need such relief. But, more than that, I should like to see a properly funded cold climate scheme, such as the one suggested many times in the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). That would tackle the problem at its source.

Because of the Government's repeated failure to raise allowances when that is inconvenient for the Treasury, people on depressing and disgracefully low incomes will now be expected to pay income tax. A person on the princely annual income of £3,445, or £66·25 a week, will have to pay it. That compares with a £124 a week tax threshold in France. If the Government were prepared to

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consider the raising of allowances by 15 per cent., financed perhaps by the raising of the ceiling on national insurance contributions—which is approximately a pound for pound exchange involving no additional cost to the Treasury—it would be possible to raise the level at which people pay tax to £4,033 a year, or £77 a week, which is hardly a prince's ransom. I hope that most hon. Members agree that, in terms of equity, that would be a much more reasonable level at which to expect low-paid workers to come into the taxation net than the current depressing £66 a week.

At the last election the Labour party suggested the raising of the national insurance ceiling. In a sea of nonsense, that was an island of common sense in Labour's proposals, and I wish that the Treasury would consider the trade-off that I put forward because it would be of enormous benefit to low-paid workers.

There has been little notice taken and, as yet, little comment on a specific tax incentive in the Bill. In a Budget that was awash with taxation increases for a huge number of people, many of whom will be totally unable to meet these imposts, there was a significant taxation concession. It was not announced by the Chancellor in his Budget speech, but it is in Inland Revenue press release No. 23 on petroleum revenue tax, one of the many attendant on the Budget details. That tax concession was extraordinarily specific. In an earlier speech in the House I said that if it had been an income tax concession, it would have been rather like the Chancellor announcing a concession for people called Clarke, whose first name was Kenneth, who happened to be Chancellors of the Exchequer, who wore Hush Puppy shoes and who dressed in a dishevelled manner.

The tax concession on petroleum revenue tax is drawn in quite remarkably specific terms and is for a single pipeline system in the North sea. It is not for all pipeline systems, but for one called the Central Area Transmission System—CATS. It was already the beneficiary of some £200 million of public finance in terms of offsets against petroleum revenue tax to enable it to be established. The Treasury now believes that it should benefit from an additional tax inventive of £20 million over the next few years.

I should like some explanation from the Financial Secretary of how a Budget which increased taxation across the board could find an additional £20 million to respond to the no doubt intense lobby from British Gas, Amoco and other oil companies which make up the CATS consortium.

Significantly, from a Scottish viewpoint, the pipeline from the central North sea to Tayside is currently suctioning Scottish gas out of Scottish waters with no economic benefit whatsoever to the Scottish economy. As a result of the tax subsidy to the CATS pipeline, Scotland has become the first country in history to pay a consortium of international oil companies to take away one of our most valuable natural resources.

The message from the Finance Bill is clear: even when times are tough, the Government look after their own. That is very clear indeed from the lack of equity in the taxation proposals. Even at a time of financial stringency, another £20 million could be found to bung to the companies in the CATS consortium to enable them to continue the process of denuding Scotland of its natural resources.

The Budget which was introduced on St. Andrew's day and which has its Second Reading on Burns night is resplendent with anti-Scottish measures, from VAT on domestic fuel to extra subsidies to the Central Area Transmission System. Such a Budget is inflicted on Scotland, a country which has huge amounts of energy but is desperately in need of power.

8.11 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): Earlier this evening, I had the rather unusual experience of hearing my parliamentary representative, my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), speaking on the Bill. I am the only hon. Member in the House who is a member of the Institute of Taxation and my hon. Friend is our parliamentary representative. At the end of his speech, he questioned whether he would still have a job tomorrow. I shall certainly be contacting the institute in the morning to discuss his future.

As several hon. Members have said, the Bill is quite a substantial document. I have not yet had the opportunity to read it. I doubt whether anyone has read it all and it will be some time before anyone will be able to cross reference the Bill to various sections of existing tax legislation.

Like my parliamentary representative, I have some concerns about the form and scope of the Bill, which runs to 419 pages. I have conducted a short exercise on its contents. Altogether, it raises about £7 billion in extra tax. I have found that measures accounting for around £6·9 billion—more than 90 per cent. of the tax raised—are contained in 51 pages of the Bill, so the other 370 pages do not appear to deal with significant tax-raising measures. There may be some merit in the argument that we have heard today from some of our colleagues, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts), that it may be time to decide whether some of the technical aspects of the Bill can be considered separately.

The Bill provides a particular challenge to hon. Members in terms of scrutiny. There has been criticism in recent years that various Acts have not been adequately scrutinised. Although the Bill will not affect everyone in Britain, it contains provisions that will affect many businesses and companies and may create difficulties.

The Bill should also be a monument to one of the tax strategies of the Labour party. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is for ever saying that, if only we could close up all the tax loopholes, we would raise much more revenue. I am sure that the Bill's 419 pages contain many measures aimed at closing so-called loopholes, but I suspect that they will raise very little revenue. That illustrates the paucity of the argument that the hon. Gentleman advances on behalf of the Labour party.

Before this evening's debate, I spent some little while trawling through the columns of *Hansard* trying to ascertain Opposition Front Bench policy on the budget deficit. Despite studying many column inches and listening to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) this afternoon, I found very little information on what Opposition Front-Bench Members think about the budget deficit and whether the Labour party advocates any policy changes.

If one trawls through *Hansard*, one finds comments such as that from the Leader of the Opposition on Budget day when he declared that

"the deficit is the symptom, not the cause."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 943.]

I wonder what he means by that. Does he mean that it is a symptom of recession and that the whole budget deficit is cyclical? I can find very little economic basis for that. I am aware of only one economist in the United Kingdom—Professor Patrick Minford—who believes that the entire budget deficit is cyclical and that, if we had sufficient growth, it would disappear. Professor Minford's particular brand of free market economics supports the view that there has been a supply-side revolution in the United Kingdom and that an upturn in growth will lead to the elimination of the budget deficit.

Coupled with those vague phrases from the Opposition, one often comes across statements referring to investment, jobs and skills. There may be an implication that the way to solve the budget deficit is to spend more to make the deficit bigger and it will then get smaller.

We heard a little more of that view tonight from the hon. Member for Peckham, who implied that Labour's answer to the budget deficit was to abolish unemployment. She did not tell us what policies she would put in place to do that, but those policies seem to have escaped her socialist colleagues who were in office in France and those still in office in Spain. Somewhere in the Labour party there seems to be some magic solution to do away with unemployment at a stroke and to make substantial inroads into the budget deficit.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was wise to reject siren voices advocating that the budget deficit would either cure itself or could be cured by greater helpings of public expenditure. In his Budget on 30 November, he wisely and rightly set about balancing the budget. He made it clear that unless the deficit were tackled, the recovery could not be sustained, low inflation could not be maintained and British industry would not be able to compete effectively in the world.

Since the Budget, we have seen a marked upturn in confidence. We have seen signs of that from the CBI yesterday and in the financial markets. Since the Budget on 30 November, the equity markets have risen by some 11 per cent., demonstrating that investors—who include millions of people in Britain—have confidence in the future of British industry and believe that there are opportunities for increased profitability and success. Furthermore, gilt-edged securities have risen in value and their yields have fallen.

The long-term rate of interest has fallen some 0·5 per cent. since Budget day. That is a significant development. Long-term gilt-edged securities are now yielding around 6·5 per cent. That is the lowest level that gilt-edged securities have reached in the experience of most hon. Members.

One would have to go back quite a long way in British economic history to find long-term gilts at 6·5 per cent. If the Labour party is keen for an investment-led recovery, it should welcome that development, because long-term interest rates, the rate that Government have to pay for borrowing money, determine in turn the rate that industry and businesses have to pay to borrow money, build successful businesses and invest for the future. That is a most welcome development.

That economic environment in the United Kingdom gives us much about which we should be cheerful. The prospects for the remaining years of this Parliament are good. There can be above-trend growth of the order of 3 to 4 per cent. a year, and low inflation. We have what economists call quite a large output gap in the United Kingdom and substantial unused resources, which, in a recovery, can be brought back into play. The prospects for the rest of this Parliament are: continuing low inflation, running at 2 per cent., above-trend growth of 3 per cent. plus and falling unemployment.

If one looks at that background and at what is likely to happen economically over the next three years, one can understand something of the frenzy of the Labour party's current reckless attack. To pose as the party of low taxation is nothing but humbug. What the Opposition will have to witness over the next three years as they sit on the Opposition Benches is month after month of good inflation figures, good growth figures and falling unemployment. That is not a happy political prospect for them.

It is strange that the Opposition are opposing tax rises at the moment when in the past they argued that the recovery should be investment-led. Some of the tax increases that are coming through will help to change the balance of the recovery more towards business and industry. Business and industry are in a strong position for the future. The ratio of corporate liquidity is at its highest level since 1988. Orders for construction and investment are increasing sharply; up some 6 per cent. in the first 10 months of 1993. Stock building, an important component of recovery, is also likely to rise in the coming year.

Furthermore, export markets are much better for the United Kingdom. The figures released in November by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade show that, in the three months to August, exports to non-EC markets had increased by some 14 per cent. We can have a recovery, and one that is not just consumer-led but driven by industry, investment and exports. That is a much healthier outlook than we have had in prospect in the United Kingdom economy for some while.

Some hon. Members may criticise some elements of my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget. Against the economic task that he had to undertake, it would have been difficult for him to keep everybody happy. Overall, he has completed the process of rebalancing the economy—a task that we set ourselves over the past 18 months. He had the courage to address the budget deficit. Let us remember that there were many voices—in the House and outside—who urged him before the Budget to do nothing. By addressing the budget deficit, he has set us on the road to a sustainable recovery and sustainable low inflation.

I believe that later tonight the House will reject unequivocally the Opposition's attempt to set us on some rake's progress. I believe that the House will reject the concept that we should run huge deficits and increase public spending. I believe that we shall vote for policies to eliminate the deficit, to facilitate cheap capital, to enable British industry to revive and to ensure that we have a balanced and successful recovery over the remaining years of this Parliament.

8.20 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I should like to begin by reading out a letter that I received from one of my constituents. It was sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I think that it is unlikely that he will read it out, so I shall have great pleasure in reading it for him. It says:

> "Dear Mr. Clarke,
>
> I write to protest at what I regard as the inequity of the new tax measures introduced in your recent budget.
>
> While I can appreciate the Government's need for raising extra revenue, I can see no reason whatsoever for increasing the tax burden on those least able to pay it.
>
> I felt shocked and deeply betrayed to find today that my Additional Personal Allowance, for which I qualify as a mother of two young school-age children separated (unwillingly) from her husband, had been cut by £340. For me, despite working full-time as a teacher, this reduction in allowances means facing the unavoidable threat of forgoing some of those activities which I regard as necessary for my children's full development, such as out-of-school activities, which include swimming, music and sports lessons.
>
> How can it be right that they should suffer such deprivations when another family, more fortunately positioned than mine, could meet this burden without noticing the extra weight? Perhaps this is one true interpretation of that phrase that seems to be on all Government Ministers' lips, "Back to Basics"—i.e., do without, do without."

The real inequity is the way in which the Government have cheated the British people with remarks such as, "We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT", which was said by the Prime Minister just a few days before the 1992 general election. Is it any wonder that people regard Tory politicians with such scepticism? It is not just me who says that; one has only to look at the opinion polls and the tabloids, which are such good reflectors of public opinion these days.

It has been said even by Ministers that no one expects what politicians say immediately before an election. I suggest that the Conservative party gets back to real basics such as telling everyone what will happen and not trying to con the voters into believing that something will not happen when they know that it cannot be avoided.

It is now obvious that the Tory party must have been expecting that it would not be in office, and therefore not held accountable for the tax rises which it knew were inevitable. Just think what its fickle friends in the tabloid newspapers would have said if the Labour party had had to deal with the shambolic mess in which the Tories left the economy in April 1992.

It is true that ordinary people are suffering from the tax rises that the Chancellor is imposing, not the people who benefited from Nigel Lawson's largesse in the previous Tory Government when he abolished the highest rate of tax. Pensioners, students, people on disability benefit and low-income families with children will suffer the most. Lloyd's is trying to bail out rich Tory Members of Parliament. Overseas aid is financing arms sales to Tory backers. Westminster council is turfing out homeless people so that their homes can be sold to Tory voters. It is a case of, "We'll look after our own, and the rest of you will pay for it."

In answer to questions that I asked the Chancellor, he told me that, under his and his predecessors' Budgets, those in the lowest 10 per cent. income group will be just over 1 per cent. worse off. He also told me that if he had taken the money by raising the rate of income tax, the bottom 10 per cent. would not have seen any change in their income. Therefore, not only does the Chancellor take away from people more money than ever before; he chooses to take it from those who can least afford it.

All Opposition Members agree that the most unfair tax of all is VAT on fuel. According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, the poorest households spend 13·25 per cent. of their incomes on fuel, and that is before VAT. They are the people who will not be able to save energy by turning down their heating because they already run only a minimum level of heating—the pensioners on basic state incomes, students living in rented accommodation and the unemployed.

Many people are already afraid to turn on their heating when they feel cold because they know that at the end of the day they will not be able to pay their bills, so they have no room to cut back any further on heating and VAT. The proportion of their incomes spent on fuel will increase to 15·5 per cent. and that will go up to 20 per cent. in April 1995 when the full rate of VAT is imposed.

People who work in the public sector, such as the health workers to whom I spoke yesterday, will find their living standards particularly hard hit. As well as having to pay the extra tax, they will suffer from a public sector pay freeze during the next three years.

Yet at the other end people on high incomes, earning £800 a week or more, spend only 2.25 per cent. of their incomes on fuel compared with 13·25 per cent. for those on low incomes. When VAT is imposed, that figure will increase to only 2·75 per cent.—hardly noticeable to a person on an income at that level.

Throughout the Tory agenda there is the same message —"If you are old, poor or helpless, expect nothing from us. If you are already well off, this Tory Government will protect you." It is a strange philosophy that taking money away from those on low incomes will make them work harder but that those on high incomes have to be rewarded to produce the same effect.

We have heard something about small businesses from the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg), who is no longer in the Chamber. The Budget will do little for the small high-tech businesses that we are relying on to get us out of the recession. A recent survey carried out among small businesses in my constituency revealed that, despite the fact that they are new businesses, only one in three have borrowing facilities with banks. Banks are widely distrusted and have a major public relations problem. Only 6 per cent. had obtained a small firms loan under the guarantee scheme. Interestingly enough, less than a third thought that interest rates affected their businesses. I regret that the good news that the Government have been pouring out will not affect their businesses.

The firms themselves regarded traditional venture capitalists as expensive and they were perceived as having little idea about technology-based business. About 60 per cent. of the investments made by venture capitalists are in management buy-outs. A management buy-out on cheap terms is considered to be small business finance. The most widely used method of raising equity funds outside immediate family and friends was corporate funding.

That leaves small firms with the potential to create hundreds of thousands of jobs with totally inadequate means of expansion and development. Banks and venture capitalists tell us that plenty of money is available, but they usually claim that the proposals themselves are not good enough. In fact, that probably shows poor judgment on the part of the banks and faulty risk assessment techniques.

St. John's innovation centre in Cambridge, which has about 150 small firms under its roof, is sometimes asked for help by its tenant companies which have already approached the bank and been refused help. The requirement is usually short term, about six to nine months, so it may not be considered appropriate for equity or loan finance. But in the past couple of years, out of 30 firms that have been helped in that way, in only two cases was the decision to provide help incorrect. Those are firms that should have been helped by the banks to which they turned first but which turned them down as being a poor bet. But 28 out of those 30 firms were helped from another source.

The survey raises questions about whether traditional providers of finance can any longer evaluate risk. What seems to have emerged in Cambridge is the growth of a black economy for funding as traditional sources are unwilling or unable to meet demands. That leaves a major problem for those businesses in my constituency that are not lucky enough to be in St. John's innovation centre or those that need equity, where the nature of their businesses does not lead to corporate venturing.

In case it sounds as though I am just another disgruntled person hitting out at the banks and the venture capitalists, let me say that what I am trying to do is to express my profound concern about the relationship between the financial institutions and the industrial sector. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West regaled us with wonderful stories about the way in which the financial markets were doing extremely well at the moment. But the real problem is the relationship between the financial institutions and the industrial sector. The financial sector does not seem to be helping industrial productivity in Britain in the best possible way. We are seeing a long-term damaging effect on industrial productivity in Britain. That can lead only to the continuation of our well-documented industrial decline.

That is not because we do not have the people or the ideas—we have both in great abundance in Britain; it is because the financial sector is geared to the non-productive quick-buck merchants who could not care less about Britian's future, only about their own personal gain.

I do not know whether that is what the Government mean by the entrepreneurial spirit, standing on one's own feet or providing for oneself and one's family. But the only way forward is to restructure our financial institutions so that they support British business rather than send it headlong into terminal decline.

The measures proposed in the Bill are inadequate. They only tinker with the problem. I hope that Tory Members who care about small businesses and VAT on fuel will join Opposition Members in the Division Lobby tonight.

8.37 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I found the comments of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) most interesting, not least because they seemed to lead us towards something which was for many years an essential part of Labour party policy—the partial or complete nationalisation of the banks and the financial institutions. But the problem that the hon. Lady defined will be solved by greater competition between financial institutions rather than less, and will certainly not be solved by the state stepping in and telling the financial institutions that they must lend whether or not they consider the proposition a good one.

I want to spend the time allotted to me talking purely about some of the technical aspects of this large Bill. In my maiden speech, nearly 11 years ago—I apologise for repetition, but I promise not to come back to the subject for at least another 10 years—I pointed out that the standard work recording all the law on income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax, published by Butterworth, which the late and much lamented Lord Ridley referred to in that debate as the "Butterworth mountain", had, 1,017 pages in 1978, and by 1983 had increased to 1,266 pages. Therefore, within five years it had increased by roughly 20 per cent. By the end of 1993—before the enactment of this Bill—it had increased to 3,940 pages. Such an acceleration rate would be much admired in a space vehicle, but I am not sure that it is entirely to be welcomed in complex legislation.

As several speakers have pointed out, it is alarming that a Finance Bill should be so long that it must be produced in two volumes. I hope that I shall be forgiven if I cite the observations of that excellent magazine *Taxation*, on whose editorial board I happen to sit. Every year, the Treasury responds to representations from numerous bodies about whether certain necessary legislation should be included in the Finance Bill by saying that it would be difficult to make the Bill any longer. The editor of *Taxation* points out that it may be a little difficult in future to argue that this year's Bill had to have no more than 417 pages, that last year's had to have no more than 296, and so on.

I wish to defend my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary in one respect. One reason for the length of the Bill is clear to those of us who have read it: instead of incorporating numerous amendments to individual sections of the existing legislation, the draftsmen chose to introduce the major reforms in the Bill by replacing whole sections of that legislation. The effect is especially clear in the clauses introducing the current year basis of assessment, and those enabling a change to a self-assessment taxation system.

It is possible that the legislation repealed by the Bill is at least as long as that which replaces it. I hope that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will clarify the matter in due course; I also hope that the Bill will not be much longer than 417 pages by the end of its Committee stage. I have long urged the Treasury not to add unnecessary clauses in Committee, and I hope that it will stick to that policy. We may well not be faced with an additional 417 "net" pages of legislation.

I warmly welcome some measures in the Bill. It includes the first instalment of legislation to replace the previous year basis of assessment with current-year assessment. That reform has been urged on the Treasury for as long as I have practised as a chartered accountant —and I started in practice in 1964.

In the past, it was considered too difficult; but we are well rid of a relic of the past which—like, for instance, our Sunday trading legislation—the rest of Europe viewed as quaint. It was felt that we were living in the previous century. I also welcome the provision to formulate the rules for corporate membership of Lloyd's: that institution clearly needs corporate membership, and it needs tax legislation to match it.

What I do not welcome is not so much the purpose of the Bill as the esoteric and—as others have pointed out —unnecessarily prolix way in which it is being introduced.

[Mr. Michael Stern]

It is all too easy to cite examples from the raw and unstudied Bill, but is it really necessary to use the language exemplified by schedule 7(7)(5)(8A)(1)(a), which states:

> "where the whole of the accounting period to which any insurance premium tax is attributable falls within the period of six months next before the relevant date ('the relevant period'), the whole amount of that tax shall be referable to the relevant period"?

I am sure that the Financial Secretary will be given an opportunity to explain that and many similar phrases. I am equally sure that he will not be expected to understand his explanation for more than 10 minutes after he has given it, and that many lawyers will disagree with that interpretation of the legislation at the time when it is presented, 10 minutes before and 10 minutes after. We really can do better than the abortion of the English language that is being served up on us.

Like many others who have spoken, I hope that future Bills can be split into two parts. Unfortunately, it is too late to do so with this Bill. One part would consist of a financial Bill dealing with the raising and spending of money; the other would comprise a tax management Bill dealing with the method of doing that. I would welcome such a move, not least because it would give us the chance to consider the detail of the legislation longer. Moreover—this is perhaps a slightly controversial constitutional point—it would allow us to designate a tax management Bill as a non-money Bill, thus gaining the advantage of double consideration of some of the more detailed wording, which could be debated in the other place.

As I said in an earlier intervention, I was a member of the Jopling Committee, which recommended that all major Bills should be timetabled at the outset. Towards the end of this complex Bill, a great deal of legislation requires detailed consideration. If we engage in the standard practice of holding lengthy debates on timetabling and on the first few clauses, and endlessly debating the economic policy that lies behind the Bill, there is a danger that the important work of the Committee will be done badly—if, indeed, it is done at all.

My fear is heightened by something that was said by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Nicholas Brown: It is nothing to do with me.

Mr. Stern: In the 13 January edition of *Accountancy Age*, the hon. Gentleman is quoted as saying:

> "This year's debates on the bill are going to look like the Battle of the Somme. It will be parliamentary trench warfare."

That may well be good politics, but the one thing of which we can be sure is that it will enable the House to produce bad legislation.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): That is up to your side, not ours.

Mr. Stern: In the past, responsible Oppositions have considered it part of their task to assist the Government to produce slightly better legislation than was served up to them. It is a shame that the current Opposition do not adopt the same approach.

In view of the declaration of war issued by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), the only way in which to secure proper, detailed consideration of all aspects of the Bill is to ensure that, on Monday, when the Committee stage begins, we begin with a timetable motion for the entire Bill.

The clauses relating to the introduction of current year assessment, for instance, will be implemented—in theory—in 1996. Many businesses that start their operations after 5 April, or whose accounting date falls shortly thereafter, will be affected by those provisions before Report; hopefully, the provisions will have been considered in Committee.

It is therefore crucial that at least one Committee has the opportunity to consider the provisions before they become effective in practice. In view of the length of the Bill, I urge my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to consider carefully giving all parts of it a fair wind by means of an early guillotine motion.

8.49 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): On the day that the Government announced that sustainable development must henceforth be the touchstone of all their policies, and on which they also published four important documents as a follow-up to the Rio summit, I thought that it would be appropriate to consider the imposition of value added tax on domestic fuel, in relation to which an amendment has been tabled, from an environmental perspective.

The Government have claimed that VAT is in part an environmental tax. In the document on climate change, they list VAT on domestic fuel as one of the instruments for reaching the target of reducing carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the end of the century. They suggest that the target can be reached through the more thrifty use of domestic fuel which will result from the instrument.

The document speaks of a reduction of 1·5 million tonnes in carbon dioxide emissions. That is 1 per cent. of all carbon dioxide emissions from all forms of energy use. It may not sound a great deal, but it is 15 per cent. of the 10 million tonnes reduction in CO_2 emissions that the Government need in order to reach their stabilisation target by 2000. The Government's intention may be fulfilled, but the reduction is to be brought about in a grossly inequitable way. That point has already been mentioned, and I shall cite one further set of statistics to prove it.

On average, bills will increase by £108 for the bottom 10 per cent. of households in terms of level of income, but by only £135 for the top 10 per cent. There will therefore be a gross disparity in the Bill's effect. Any compensation package will be a blunt and inadequate instrument. I stress that it should be a fundamental principle that environmental taxation must take account of equity.

In moving towards sustainability, as we must—the Government have today stated that there is a terribly urgent need to do so—we must proceed in a socially equitable manner. The geographical inequity caused by the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel can be seen in a comparison between Wales and the United Kingdom as a whole.

In Wales, the full rate of VAT on domestic fuel will take up 0·9 per cent. of usual disposable income, compared to 0·7 per cent. in the United Kingdom as a whole. I dare say that one could find the same disparity between the north and south of England. It proves yet again that a taxation system that punishes low-income groups also punishes the regions where average incomes are low.

That is a general point to be made against the Budget and the Bill. Taxation that punishes low-income groups redistributes wealth by taking it from the less prosperous areas, impoverishing them still further. The first principle is therefore that we must move towards sustainability while taking account of social equity.

A related principle is that a large proportion of the proceeds from any environmental taxation should be invested, first, to maximise the environmental gain that it is intended to bring about and, secondly, to prevent the taxes from being inequitable. In other words, environmental taxation should be recycled in the form of action to maximise environmental gain.

A self-evident way of adhering to both principles would be to introduce a comprehensive energy efficiency package aimed, in the first instance, at lower-income groups. It is perfectly feasible and should be clearly set out as part of the package if we are to take seriously the Government's claim that VAT on domestic fuel is an environmental tax.

Domestic energy consumption produces 41 million tonnes of CO_2 a year, which is 27 per cent. of total emissions from energy use. It is a very substantial contribution. A 20 per cent. reduction through an energy efficiency programme in homes is perfectly feasible, and would in turn produce a saving of 8 million tonnes a year. It would, of course, take several years to complete such a programme, but we could be well on the way by the end of the century. It would be a far more effective contribution towards the task of reaching the target in 2000 than the use of VAT as one of the instruments for that purpose.

Energy efficiency must surely become a major investment priority if we are to take seriously the rhetoric of the Government's documents, and their rhetoric is very strong. I cannot understand why energy efficiency has not become a central priority. I believe that the total investment in energy efficiency measures is currently well under £100 million a year. We need to be far more ambitious.

The Government have used the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel as an argument against agreeing to the European Union proposal for a Europe-wide carbon tax. I heard the Paymaster General use that argument when I attended a sitting of European Standing Committee B. He said that we did not need to agree to the European demand for a carbon tax because we had our own instrument, and this was it.

A carbon tax would be far preferable as an instrument for achieving that aim. It would apply across all sectors, not the domestic sector only. It would apply to commerce and to transport, which is especially important, and those are sectors where, as we all know from observation, energy use is often profligate. I believe that it is profligate in the retail sectors especially. Huge quantities of energy are wasted by overheating and by constantly opening doors. A carbon tax would tackle that waste. It would be more effective and far more equitable.

A carbon tax would also discriminate in favour of renewables. However, one should note that the European proposal is for a carbon and energy tax—a combination —so it is not quite as effective in that way. That combination was suggested because the European Community does not wish to act strongly against coal and oil, and it does not wish to support nuclear energy. However, a carbon tax would discriminate in favour of renewables, as it should if we are serious about the environmental issue.

I hope that I have made my few arguments clearly. I hope that I have said enough to show the way in which the Government claim about the tax as an instrument of environmental policy is unsustainable and the way in which they get the process of environmental taxation off on the wrong foot by not associating it with the other fundamental and essential principles. I hope that I have completely justified our decision to vote for the amendment and against the Bill.

8.58 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): Hon. Members would not thank me, I suspect, if I followed the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) too far down that route. I believe that the extension of VAT to domestic fuel has an important role to play in reflecting the true cost of energy consumption in our society. The hon. Gentleman did not mention several aspects—the enormous unparalleled package of help to those people who will most need it, the fact that fuel prices are falling, the massive expansion of the home energy efficiency scheme, and so on. I could go on, but I shall not.

I was listening to the radio yesterday morning when the dulcet tones of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) reached my ear. He was speaking about tax. The thrust of his remarks was that he did not think much of the tax proposals in the Bill. He expressed himself with some vigour—so much vigour, in fact, that one might have thought that he would be rather more certain about his position—yet he remained curiously unwilling or unable, under questioning, to confirm whether, had a Labour Government been elected in 1992, taxes would have been higher or lower than is proposed in the Bill. He did say that it did not matter very much because, if there had been a Labour Government, the taxes raised would have produced money to be spent on what he said were "sensible things". On that basis, he justified the theory that Labour taxes are good and Conservative taxes are bad.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not, as one might expect, spell out what "sensible things" he had in mind, but all Conservative Members know that there is an extensive shopping list. Not much of it appears very sensible from our point of view. There is no doubt—we have heard something about that this evening—that there would be an attempt to spend a way into full employment.

I have thought hard about that. If one of the principal reasons we have a budget deficit is that we have spent too much money as a Government, I simply do not understand how spending more will help—even if, as he seemed to argue, and as the hon. Lady the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) seemed to reiterate, the excessive element of spending arises only in respect of unemployment benefit. That seemed to me a curious allegation. It brings me to my next argument.

Obviously, all hon. Members want unemployment to continue to fall and spending on unemployment to fall, but singling out the increase in unemployment as the reason for the deficit shows a failure not only to grasp the difference between cyclical and structural spending patterns—which is quite serious in someone who aspires to be a Chancellor of the Exchequer—but to understand the way in which the deficit has accumulated and where the money is spent.

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

Spending on unemployed people has undoubtedly increased in recent years. It has increased throughout the developed world, for reasons which Opposition Members do not seem to understand. The recession that the world has been experiencing has been international. The United Kingdom is pulling out of it now, happily—much of the rest of the world is not yet.

I have examined the figures. Opposition Members seem to have gone to *The Sun* for their figures on the subject. I went to a combination of the Red Book, the excellent document "The Growth of Social Security" and the Library. Spending on unemployed people in 1993-94 is put at £10·4 billion. That is a great deal of money.

Of course it is important to get unemployment down, not only for fiscal reasons but for social reasons, but it is important to understand that £10·4 billion represents about 13 per cent. of the total social services bill and less than 3·5 per cent. of Government spending. To pin the blame for the deficit on an item of expenditure representing less than 3·5 per cent. of Government spending is arrant nonsense, but it happens to be convenient nonsense because it obscures the need to confront the real issue, which I will discuss in a minute.

The other reason why the talk about unemployment being the root cause of the deficit is nonsense is that unemployment is one of the few areas of Government spending that goes down of its own accord, as well as up. For example, between 1986-87 and 1988-90 spending on unemployment fell by 50 per cent. in real terms. In addition, as the House will know, unemployment has been falling sharply in recent months—it fell by 223,000 in 1993.

That is no thanks to Opposition Members, who, as well as paying scant regard to the good news when it comes through, do their best to moan about British industry at every possible opportunity. We have heard some of that this evening. When Opposition Members do that, I wonder whether they understand that they are criticising not the Government but ordinary men and women, from the shop floor to the board room, who have been straining every sinew through an extremely difficult recession to improve the productivity and profitability of their businesses. As a result of those efforts, productivity and exports are at record levels, profitability is on the up and Britain is growing faster than any other European country. The CBI survey published yesterday confirms that positive trend. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) mentioned the encouraging figures for corporate liquidity.

The last thing that people in industry want is gloomy lectures from the Opposition, half-baked statements about how life under Chancellor Denis Healey was somehow better than it is today, and adherence to the Euro-socialist action programme, which would add £5 billion to the cost of British industry and send the unemployment figures soaring. It is not good enough for the shadow Chancellor to pin the blame for higher taxes on increased spending on unemployment benefit. That is another fatuous strand in the series of fatuous arguments that we have heard from the Opposition. In the light of their employment policies, it is also hypocritical and shoddy.

I shall now answer a question that was asked earlier. There are two clear underlying reasons why there is a deficit—the after-effects of the recession, which obviously reduced Exchequer income, and the recent levels of Government spending across the board. As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said, over the past five years the Government have increased spending on education by 25 per cent. in real terms, and since 1992-93 alone, spending on health has risen by 5·5 per cent., investment in British Rail has been trebled and spending on law and order has increased dramatically. Amazingly, at every point the Opposition criticised the Government for spending too little in all those vital areas.

That brings me to the vital question that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary asked the hon. Member for Peckham. Perhaps over-optimistically, I look forward to getting an answer where he failed. The Opposition must come clean. If they criticise the Government for the tax increases, will they say where they would have made the savings necessary to restore sound national finances? The silence is almost Pinteresque. Spending restraint does not appear to feature in the Opposition's vocabulary. It did not do so in the 1970s, either—at least not until it was too late, and Denis Healey, whom Opposition Members now seem to revere as a paragon of fiscal probity, had to go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund, having cut Government spending in crucial areas such as health.

Of course nobody likes to pay increased taxes. The Government, unlike the Opposition parties, do not like having to ask for them. But it is one thing to return to the impoverishing cycle of tax and spend to which the Opposition parties tacitly or overtly still adhere and quite another to raise taxes against a background of tight spending restraint. Let us remember that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has announced that more than £8 billion is being taken out of the control total over the next three years.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) spoke about fair taxes. Those start when Government spending comes under scrutiny. Fair taxes start on the premise that there is no such thing as Government money, only other people's money which Governments take away and spend in different ways. That is the basis for fair taxation.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary will understand that it is in no way a criticism of him when I say that I cannot find it in my heart to give an enormous cheer for the tax increases in the Bill. However, in common with other Conservative Members, I understand why they are necessary. I agree with those Conservative Members who have expressed confidence that the tax increases proposed in the Bill will not unduly impact on the recovery.

There is a great deal to welcome in the Bill besides the effective action being taken to reduce the deficit, which is clearly its primary purpose. I especially welcome the measures for business, as somebody who has spent 10 years in the equity markets and who now has a consultancy for the SG Warburg Group, the investment bank. I especially welcome those parts of the Bill which are designed to help businesses and to help stimulate equity investment.

I was sorry that the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) felt that the new enterprise investment scheme, which would replace the business expansion scheme, was inadequate and was not able to welcome it. It has a great deal to offer for those smaller companies that we know will lead recovery and will lead the whole process of job creation. For far too long, smaller companies have laboured under inadequate access to equity investors and have had to rely, sometimes excessively, on debt. I have long been a great believer in spreading equity investment and ownership and anything that is done to promote that robust type of long-term finance is to be warmly welcomed.

I also welcome the proposals for capital gains reinvestment relief and the venture capital trusts. I would add only that it is a pity that the proposals to restrict the indexation allowance on capital gains to prevent it creating or increasing a tax loss are likely to act as a disincentive to investment, especially in unquoted companies. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will listen carefully to the concerns expressed by individual investors and by market practitioners on that point.

With an economy which has become fundamentally stronger, more competitive and more productive under the Government, Britain is well placed to sustain economic growth at a rate that can only improve as the international recession lifts. The Finance Bill underpins that opportunity by securing the foundations for national prosperity and deserves the whole-hearted support of the House.

9.13 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I have only five minutes so I shall have to curtail my remarks, but as I spoke for half an hour in the Budget debate, I cannot complain.

The Bill is important because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) said in her brilliant demolition of the Conservative party, it could well represent a turning point in modern political history and certainly in the reputation of the Conservative party. The Bill has exposed the Conservative party as the party of tax trickery, tax unfairness, tax dishonesty and tax lies. The Government may be forgiven by some of the British people for putting up taxes, but they will certainly not be forgiven for promising the opposite and for cheating their way to election victory through their fraudulent claims.

Secondly, the Bill is significant because behind that tax rise is the economic incompetence of the Government. The Labour party has alway known about that, and now the British people will realise it. Thirdly, the Bill makes it clear that the Conservative party represents only a small section of society—the rich. Middle-income and low-income earners are clobbered by the Bill. Those groups will unite and throw out the Conservative party at the next election.

Taxes should be increased, but only for the rich, such as the top 1 per cent. of the population, who have benefited to the tune of £3·2 billion a year since 1988. Tax increases certainly should not have been targeted at middle-income people, and especially not at low-income people. Coupled with public expenditure cuts, we have the most massive piece of discretionary deflation since the 1930s. With a very weak recovery, that is exactly what the British economy does not want. Opposition Members oppose the Bill because it will knock that recovery on the head and make further recovery far more difficult, and because of its devastating effect on millions of middle-income earners, people on low pay and people on no pay.

Many measures will affect people on low pay. About 500,000 people will have to pay more in national insurance contributions, although they are not even in the income tax net. The Government have targeted the increase at them. Also, 400,000 people will be brought into tax for the first time. Allowances—for example, the married couple's allowance and the single parent's allowance—have been affected.

In the Budget, the Government boasted of what they were doing for low-income women through their child care allowance. However, yesterday I received a written answer that showed that only 10 per cent. of people presently on family credit could get the full benefit of that measure. Many measures will hit the low-paid, particularly low-paid women, who constitute a disproportionate number of the low-paid.

One matter that has not been mentioned much is the public sector pay freeze, which is actually a public sector pay cut.

As for people on no pay, the main criticism is that the Bill will do nothing to relieve the mass unemployment that still afflicts the country. We all know that the official figures show unemployment coming down, but the labour force survey shows that far more people are out of work and are looking for jobs. That figure is not only large but increasing.

There is to be a vote on the VAT amendment. VAT on domestic fuel will punish not only the people whom I have mentioned but those who are on benefit and whom the Government boast that they are helping with a compensation package worth £1·3 billion. Only half of that is discretionary, and the other half is automatic uprating because of inflation. People on income-related benefits will gain by 0·4 per cent. A person with a partner and two children will gain 45p a week. A single person will gain far less. That is the only compensation. In future, the payment will be the normal uprating.

On pensions, the Government boasted of the extra 50p, but we must remember that a single pensioner will receive a derisory increase of £1 next year. Pensioners will still suffer as a result of the measure. I appeal to Conservative Members to join us in the Lobby.

9.17 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), I wonder whether we would have heard Conservative Members speaking in favour of fiscal rectitude if the Labour party had won the previous general election. It is not long ago that Conservative Chancellors boasted that they had dealt with the public sector borrowing requirement, reduced taxation and increased essential public expenditure. In fairness, they did not say that they had dealt with the deficit "once and for all", but the debate has moved on rather a long way since those heady days.

Now, the Conservative party not only acknowledges that tax increases are necessary but rather irritably says, "So what?" when asked whether the tax rise is equal to 7 percentage points on the basic rate of income tax. The issue has moved on from whether taxes should rise to which taxes should rise and who will bear the burden. The tax cutting of the late 1980s reduced the tax bills of the richest. The tax rises of the post-election period are much more evenly spread. Taking the 1988 cuts and the more recent increases together, all but the very wealthy are worse off.

Last year, I suggested that the then Chancellor—after his inevitable dismissal—might end up with a job lecturing on demand management at the London School of

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

Economics. This, I now appreciate, was very unfair to the right hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Thames (Mr. Lamont) and I unreservedly apologise. He should, of course, have sought a post lecturing on the new post-Keynesian economic theory—one which is unique to the British Conservative party—known as demand mismanagement.

It takes a peculiar kind of short-sighted greed combined with enormous arrogance to manage demand in such a way as to take a pro-cyclical rather than a counter-cyclical fiscal stance, and exacerbate rather than offset the economic cycle. That also belies talk of automatic fiscal stabilisers. This is not the Conservative party's first foray into demand mismanagement. The policy that it has adopted is entirely consistent with the way in which the 1981 Budget's tax rises were put into place in the depth of a recession.

The folly of the short-term tax cuts of the late 1980s is bluntly exposed by the Budget speech and the accompanying measures included in the Bill. The Chief Secretary told us earlier that his party's "every instinct" is to cut taxes. Having heard that, it is hard to believe that there are £2·5 billion worth of tax increases contained in the Bill for the financial year 1994 to 1995, rising to £4·8 billion worth for the financial year 1996 to 1997.

Altogether, the Budget increases almost entirely reverse the tax cuts which were made in the late 1980s and they exceed anything enacted by Labour Governments. They hit the poor hard and middle-income families the hardest. The tax burden rose from 34·75 per cent. of GDP in 1978 to 1979 to a peak of 39·25 per cent. in 1981 to 1982. It fell to 37·25 per cent. in 1988 to 1989, largely as a result of cuts in the top rate of income tax.

The Conservatives ask what Labour would do. They might at least give the Labour party credit for what it did at the time. It voted against those cuts, and warned that the reduction was unsustainable. At the same time, there was the ideological divide which still exists between the two parties. If it is possible to make tax reductions, it is the Labour party's view that those reductions should go to the very poorest in society and not to the very wealthiest.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I am sorry, but I do not have much time. I would like to make a little more progress, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

In 1993 to 1994, the tax burden fell to 34·25 per cent. of GDP, partly as a result of the cumulative effect of the tax reductions of the late 1980s, but mostly as a result of the effects of the recession on Government revenues.

By the time all of the tax rises come in, and allowing for some recovery, the tax burden is projected to rise to 38·5 per cent. of GDP. That more than offsets the previous tax cuts, although the new taxes are not being paid by the same people who benefited from the reductions. The wealthiest 1 per cent. of our fellow citizens received about £3·2 billion from the 1988 tax cuts. They will pay about £300 million after the tax rises next year. That is a saving of £2·9 billion for them, and yet the tax take for the economy is almost up to its peak of 1981 to 1982.

Mr. Richards: What does the hon. Gentleman now say that the top rate of direct taxation should be?

Mr. Brown: I am addressing myself to the measures in the Finance Bill which is before the House today. It is not my intention to introduce my own tax and spending package, even though I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would rather debate that than the package which the Government have brought before the House today.

The journey back to massive tax increases has been accompanied by the most extraordinary series of climbdowns and U-turns. The journey has been accompanied by the sort of incoherence and double standards which would make even the most well-motivated observer of the Government's management of the economy a little cynical.

I can remember the present Prime Minister denouncing the Labour party at a Welsh Conservative conference a few years ago for planning to peg the married couple's allowance and mortgage tax relief to the basic rate of income tax at 25 per cent. Having alleged that that was our plan, he denounced us thoroughly for it. He then went on to implementing it, engendering not a little cynicism on the way. There was more to follow. Both those tax reliefs are now pegged to the 20 per cent. band.

At least it could be said for the previous Chancellor that he has a tax band to peg the reliefs to. The present Chancellor has not even gone through the usual form of introducing a lower band and accusing the Labour party of secretly planning to undermine two important tax allowances. He has arbitrarily introduced a new 15 per cent. rate for the allowances without reference to any other part of the tax system.

One of the key features of the Chancellor's Budget and the accompanying Finance Bill is its complete opportunism. It is the sort of opportunism that might induce cynicism. Presumably, next year's Chancellor will have the job of tidying it up. In the past, Conservative Chancellors have boasted that they have regularly abolished yet another tax, even if on closer examination it turns out to be the duty on matches and mechanical lighters or something of the sort. The present Chancellor is not bothered with any of that. He has introduced two new taxes, not to broaden the tax base but simply to introduce new taxes. He has done it because he needs the money.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: On the subject of needing the money, yes of course.

Mr. Milligan: The hon. Gentleman is making a detailed attack on Government policy. In the spirit of his speech, may I ask him to give one detail about the Labour party's policy? If Labour had won the election, would public expenditure today be higher or lower?

Mr. Brown: As I said before, I have not come to the House to present my tax and spending plans. The fault of the Labour party—I suppose that the hon. Gentleman is right to refer to it—was to put its tax and spending plans candidly and truthfully before the electorate. The Conservatives put before the electorate a version of events that turned out not to be the truth about either our tax and spending plans or their tax and spending plans. I have to inform the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) that, although it may be possible to deceive the electorate once, I doubt whether the Conservative party will ever be trusted on these matters again.

The Bill contains an astonishing series of deceits and U-turns. Direct tax allowances are again frozen. That is an effective increase in income tax—something which the hon. Member for Eastleigh no doubt promised his electorate that he would not do. The reduced rate band again turns out to be a device for reducing the value of tax allowances instead of reducing the rate of income tax.

The life cycle of the business expansion scheme is remarkable. It has gone through introduction, praise, exploitation, abuse, denunciation, abolition and now resurrection as the enterprise investment scheme. What do we make of clause 89, which reneges on Chancellor Lawson's arrangement for the indexation of capital losses? Is the Conservative party united behind that measure? I suspect not. The clause will reduce the incentive to invest in risky ventures—something that the enterprise investment scheme is supposed to encourage. I see that the clause is listed in the Red Book as an anti-avoidance measure which blocks a loophole. If the Chancellor thinks that that is a loophole, he would not know a loophole if it hit him in the face.

The Budget is incoherent. Its hallmark is fiscal opportunism. There is a further problem. The question of the deficit——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Lady ought to be interested in the deficit.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Could this be described as copious reference to notes, or is the hon. Gentleman simply reading his speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): That is not a point of order for the Chair. The hon. Gentleman is making a valid speech.

Mr. Brown: I shall not disappoint the hon. Lady. I shall do my best to keep her entertained as well as well informed. However, I certainly would not want to misquote the Chief Secretary or the Financial Secretary.

There is a further problem when discussing the Budget. It is the deficit. The Chancellor has said that it will be dealt with "once and for all". Let us give him the benefit of the doubt. That ought to cheer up the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman): we are giving the Chancellor the benefit of the doubt. Let us assume that he is not planning to do a flit next door and leave the debt and the bad credit rating to the new tenant of No. 11. Let us assume that that will not be another broken Conservative promise and that he means what he says. I have to say that the spending targets that he has set are very tight. The control total for the non-cyclical elements of public expenditure allows for growth of only 3·8 per cent. between 1992-93 and 1998-99. Under Baroness Thatcher's Government—and Baroness Thatcher was no slouch when it came to dealing with public expenditure—the comparable figure at the same stage of the economic cycle was 12·5 per cent. We are dealing, therefore, with extraordinarily tight parameters for public expenditure.

In the unified Budget process, we are supposed to consider tax and spending together and there are a number of questions to which the House should address itself. Can the public sector pay freeze hold as private sector earnings increase? It is also right to ask whether it is fair that it should hold. Even though the Chancellor's dodge with the contingency reserve is a genuine cut in spending, I do not see how it can be repeated.

What happens if there is a real contingency that cannot be met from within Departments' budgets? Will the savings drawn this year from the environment and transport budgets be repeated? I think not. How far will the Government say to local authorities that they are going to cut their budgets and how sustainable will that policy be? Is not the heart of the matter that the Chancellor, to reach his tight public expenditure targets, will have to reduce the civil service by about 10 per cent.?

Are the Government confident about their legislation? I do not entirely think that they are. I have a briefing note provided by Mr. Ian Gambles for the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary—and myself. Mr. Gambles draws the Chief Secretary's attention to a number of points. He starts by saying:

> "You are responsible for piloting the Finance Bill through the House."

It is just as well that the Chief Secretary has Mr. Gambles to point that out to him. One could not possibly have drawn that conclusion from the Chief Secretary's speech today. Mr. Gambles, who is a shrewd man and clearly has a future under the next regime, goes on to say:

> "Life is likely to be made more difficult this year by the Opposition."

Revealing the Government's true intentions, he says:

> "Committee of the Whole House is arguably rather pointless . . . It may be worth floating the idea of dispensing with it . . . But it is very unlikely that they"

—meaning the parliamentary Labour party—

> "will be in a mood to be so co-operative on this occasion."

That certainly captures the spirit of these exchanges.

Mr. Gambles goes on to say—and this is the very good advice—

> "Assuming we do have Committee of the Whole House, it would be very odd not to debate there the two short clauses introducing new taxes."

He is referring to air passenger duty and insurance premium tax. The Chief Secretary is extraordinarily lucky to have such an adviser. I listened to the Chief Secretary's speech and I did not hear him mention air passenger duty or insurance premium tax, so it is just as well that there are good civil servants to remind him of the contents of the Bill.

This trusty aid goes on to say:

> "It is also hard to see how you can avoid having at least one, and probably two debates on the floor of the House relating to income tax and the restriction of MIR"—

mortgage interest relief. But good advice follows. Mr. Gambles says:

> "On the former, it might be better to go for clause 72 (personal allowances) rather than clause 73 (restriction of the married couples allowance)",

pertinently going on to say,

> "where there will be linkages with 'Back to basics' and Child Support Agency issues."

Why would the Chief Secretary want to avoid discussion of "back to basics"? I leave that to the House to ponder.

Mr. Gambles, a good and faithful servant, draws our attention to one more matter that will certainly be of interest to hon. Members—including, perhaps, the hon. Member for Lancaster, whose attention I see I am almost holding: who will have to serve in Committee? The question to which we all like to address ourselves is, "Who is going to do the work?" It is made clear in the document that it will not be the Chief Secretary. Those of us who were responsible for the untimely interruption or at least

[Mr. Brown]

the revealing of the right hon. Gentleman's holiday in Barbados two years ago during the passage of a Finance Bill will sense a certain irony in that.

The document says:

> "I attach a list of Finance Bill clauses with an illustrative division of responsibilities between yourself and your colleagues. It is based on the following assumptions:
>
> you take a small number of high-profile clauses".

It is only fair that I should treat the House to the final carve-up. The Paymaster General will be responsible for 67 clauses and six schedules of this mammoth volume. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury gets 64 clauses and is trusted with one schedule—someone clearly having followed last year's proceedings quite closely. The Financial Secretary is entrusted with the overwhelming bulk of the Bill—perfectly fairly, as he does these things very well. He gets 102 clauses and 14 schedules. Let us hope that we can deal with all this expeditiously upstairs. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, leading his men from the front, gets six clauses and two schedules. So much for the fair division of labour in the Conservative party.

Much has been said about the imposition of value added tax on domestic fuel. The Opposition contend that the House should have a further chance to consider this matter. The reasons are very clear.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The Opposition forgot about it the last time.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Lady really is showing some enthusiasm. I shall do my best to deal with all the points that she has raised from a sedentary position. However, I am not sure that I shall succeed if she keeps firing questions.

It is our contention that VAT is a regressive tax. Indeed, of all the zero-rated goods and services that the Government could have picked on, fuel is the most regressive one to tax. We believe that the compensation package is inadequate. Most pensioners will get only half of what they need, and the same is true of families on income-related benefits. The tax hits standing charges as well as fuel consumed, undermining its credibilty as an environmental measure. My hon. Friends the Members for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) made the point that it will hit charities, costing them an extra £35 million over the next two years. And there is further transitional injustice inasmuch as those with money can pay in advance and avoid the early imposition.

It has been said repeatedly, but is worth pointing out again, that before the last general election the Conservative party promised that it would not increase the rate of VAT or extend the scope of the tax. This was stated clearly, firmly and repeatedly, but it has been reneged on.

I wish, in my concluding remarks, not just to make the case against this tax but also to make the case for further consideration by the House. When the tax was introduced the House was not made aware of the other tax rises imposed in the autumn Budget. Nor was it made aware of the latest growth forecast. We were not given a chance to assess the impact of this tax increase on economic recovery. When the tax was introduced, the House had no knowledge of the details of the compensation measures that were supposed to offset the effects of this imposition on the poorest of our fellow citizens. The compensation package has been bludgeoned through the House. Surely it is reasonable that the House be given a further opportunity to consider it in the light of the inadequacy of the compensation package.

Why are the Government failing to take public opinion into account before the tax comes into effect? The Chief Secretary might find that the public would be less cyncial about Parliament if, just occasionally, some notice were taken of their opinions.

Is not the House supposed to be considering a unified Budget process which is supposed to bring together tax decisions and spending decisions? Northing of the kind has happened. This is a complete sham.

I urge the House to reassert the principle of annual scrutiny of Government tax measures and to reassert its right annually to refuse supply. It is perfectly possible for Conservative Members to vote for our amendment without ultimately opposing the Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] They can do so without, untimately, opposing the Bill.

Parliament should think about the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. It should support our amendment, because we are more than just a rubber stamp for the Cabinet's decisions. The right to refuse supply on an annual basis should be a fundamental part of the British constitution, if it is not already.

I do not believe that Parliament has been treated so roughly since the reign of Charles I. It is worth hon. Members remembering his fate. He fell because he was disloyal to his closest associates, chief of whom he got rid of in an effort to save his own skin. He was given to saying one thing and doing another. He told lies and induced cynicism. He was not up to the job and was given to petulance. He might have been described by Andrew Rawnsley as "Richard Nixon, played by Brian Rix." In the 17th century, Parliament stood up for itself, and we should do the same.

9.40 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I am sorry to tell the House that I do not have a minute from Mr. Gambles to read out, although I enjoyed listening to that minute, and some of the text was familiar.

I must start by commenting briefly on the length of the Bill and on what several of my right hon. and hon. Friends said about that. The Government are aware of the fact that a Bill running to more than 240 clauses and published in two volumes causes concern to both sides of the House, and, in particular, to some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Its length is not a source of pride to us but, none the less, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) drew attention to some of the reasons for its length. We can return to that subject in Committee.

I listened with respect to the views expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), by my hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Mr. Watts) and for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). They set out their concern that the Bill contains substantial chunks of technical tax legislation which they believe could be as adequately dealt with in a separate taxes management Bill. My hon. Friends and the House will be aware that that has been proposed more than once by the Procedure Committee. The Government always listen with respect to its views, but we have set out clearly the reasons why we do not espouse the cause of a separate taxes management Bill.

In recent years, in order to deliver better quality tax legislation, we have ensured that, as far as possible, advance consultation has taken place on the technical aspects of Finance Bills. The Bill is no exception, because roughly half of its clauses have already been subject to consultation. I hope that that will lead to better-informed consideration in Committee.

All those comments underline the importance of the first point raised by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary about the importance of an orderly consideration of the Bill during its passage through Parliament. I very much hope that the official Opposition will see fit to assist in the orderly discussion of the important issues. I hope that the Bill does not become the victim of parliamentary guerilla tactics that deny us the opportunity to give it proper parliamentary consideration.

The debate has presented the House with a certain difficulty, because for as long as any of us can remember there has always been a clear distinction between the Labour party and the Tory party when it comes to the consideration of economic matters. The Labour party has consistently argued for extra money for public services. Today, that cause was maintained in a distinguished fashion by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). His speech, however, seemed to be more directed in code to those on his own Front Bench than to members of the Government Front Bench.

The tradition has been that Labour argues for more money for public services while we recognise the need to restrain ambitions for the public services without an affordable tax burden. The House has been asked to believe that during the past week there has been an important event —it might be described as a seismic event—in British politics. We have been asked to believe that Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen have changed sides in the argument and have suddenly become more concerned about the tax burden than about increases in public expenditure. We have the rather touching prospect of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary marching shoulder to shoulder to control the tax burden and deliver the taxpayer from increased taxes.

Not surprisingly, the prospect of this unexpected alliance has aroused some interest in the media. It is right for them to be interested because if it were true that the Opposition had changed sides in the argument, it would be rather like Martin Luther calling off the Reformation. The key phrase is "if it were true". Every hon. Member knows that Labour's claim to be the party of low tax simply does not stand up to five minutes' serious examination.

Labour appears to believe that it will be allowed to conduct two separate but parallel debates—one on tax and one on spending—and that no voter anywhere in the country will make the link between its advocacy on one day of extra public expenditure and on the next of control of the tax burden, and that those two unrelated debates are carried on in hermetically sealed units.

Let us look at what happened last week on the issue of tax and expenditure—one week in the life of the Labour party. On Monday, the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), the Opposition spokesman on overseas aid, railed against reductions in official development assistance. On Tuesday, I did not have to read far through *Hansard* to find the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) because he asked the first question at 2.35, and joined his hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) and for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) in railing against alleged reductions in grant aid to the Health and Safety Executive.

On Wednesday during Environment questions it was the turn of my parliamentary neighbour, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who railed against what he called the inability and unwillingness of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to provide extra money for public expenditure on London. On Thursday, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who makes the others look like amateurs, was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) —*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend is an excellent Member and he asked a pertinent question. He asked the hon. Gentleman why he opposed compulsory competitive tendering, which is producing £130 million extra for patient care. The response by the hon. Member for Brightside was informative. He dismissed my hon. Friend's perfectly correct question with the comment "brass neck".

The real spending commitment of the hon. Member for Brightside was not made in the House last week: it was made, as is often the case with Opposition spokesmen, to the lobby group that they wanted to buy off. It was made through the columns of *Public Finance and Accountancy.* In that journal, the hon. Gentleman made the commitment to take Britain into the 7 per cent. club of countries that spend more than 7 per cent. of gross domestic product on health care.

That commitment would cost £6 billion and still the Labour party expects us to take it seriously as the party committed to controlling the tax burden.

Mr. Chisholm: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No. I have not finished the story of last week in the Labour party.

Last Saturday, against the background of the spending concerns and commitments that had been rolling out of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen for the whole of last week, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and the hon. Member for Peckham sought to persuade the British people that Labour would tax less. That is the politics of make-believe.

The hon. Member for Peckham cut a sorry figure today. She was charged by her Front Bench with making a speech arguing the case for lower tax. So deeply ingrained were her own habits that she could not resist the opportunity of implying that we needed to spend more on health and transport. The hon. Lady's habit of advocating extra public expenditure is so deeply ingrained that she does not seem to have noticed that it is inconsistent with her new-found interest in controlling the tax burden.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member or Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). The Opposition Front Bench are playing a dangerous game in front of their own goal. By stressing the importance of tax as an issue, they are creating the opportunity for the Government to show the importance of expenditure restraint if we are to deliver the low tax burden, and that is precisely what I and my hon. Friends intend to do.

Mr. Ian Taylor: As my hon. Friend was discussing the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), did he notice that she was so modest in moving the motion in the name of the Leader of the Opposition that hardly anyone in the House heard her move it? That reinforced the fact that she forgot to table the amendment in the Budget debate.

Mr. Dorrell: It is within the memory of every hon. Member that the reason why the amendment is on the Order Paper today is that somebody on the Opposition Front Bench forgot to move the relevant amendment at the end of the Budget debate. It is the hon. Lady's good fortune that the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means was in the Chair to prompt her today. Perhaps she regrets that that friendly prompt was not there at the end of the Budget debate.

Labour Members have no credibility whatever on those issues. By arguing the case for low tax, they demonstrate why they sit on the Opposition Benches and will continue to sit there. They show that they are unselective and cannot resist a populist cry, never mind that it is inconsistent with the argument that they presented last week or even a few hours before. They have no strategy and cannot resist a sound bite.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary that the best sound bite on the subject of the Labour party and tax came from the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). I quote him with respect as I always do. He is a former tutor of mine, who, quite rightly, said:

> "I think the Labour party ought to accept that we will always be likely to have a higher tax burden than our opponents because we believe in public spending."

That is the truth about the Opposition. It is the truth about what they want to do and, furthermore, it is the truth about what they did. They cannot escape the fact that, when they were in government and had the opportunity to deliver their aspirations, between 1974 and 1979 the average share of national income taken in public expenditure was 46 per cent. That was the average for the five years they were in office.

During the current cycle, public expenditure will peak at 45 per cent. of national income and we have published in the Red Book firm plans to reduce the share of national income taken by public expenditure from 45 to 41 per cent.

The fact is that the Labour party spends more. It wants to spend more. It is because it spends more that it is inevitably committed to tax more.

Mr. Pike: Does the Financial Secretary recognise one important factor? It would have helped them in their attempts to spend money and avoid taxation increases if the Government had not destroyed such a large part of the British economy and employment by trying to maintain the pound at an artificially high value when it was in the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Dorrell: That was the policy espoused by the Labour party. What the hon. Gentleman overlooks is that, over the past 12 months, the year in which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East projected continued increases in unemployment, we have delivered a reduction of 225,000 in the unemployment queue and a growth rate of 2 per cent. against an almost equivalent recession rate in the former West Germany. The recession rate last year in West Germany was 2 per cent. whereas there was 2 per cent. growth in this country under this Government.

There is, of course, an escape route for the Members on the Opposition Front Bench. It is just as well that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East spotted it in advance. It is the escape route that they used last time. "Oh, no," they said, "we do not need to raise the tax burden. We can pump up expenditure. There is always another way of squaring the circle. We can borrow it." That is what they did the last time. The borrowing requirement of national income was 7 per cent. between 1974 and 1979. That was the average deficit. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen). The key difference between the parties in the debate this evening is that, when we commit ourselves to expenditure plans, we accept that it follows that we must finance those plans responsibly.

We saw between 1974 and 1979 what happens when Governments do not do that. They deliver instead 15 per cent. inflation, economic decline and a cycle of disappointed expectations. We shall not allow that to happen. The reason for the Bill is that we are committed to put in place the tax plans that are necessary to deliver responsible finance of our expenditure proposals, because that is what underwrites and will sustain the recovery in the medium and long term. That is the key difference. That is the essential priority that the Bill represents. It underwrites the recovery. That is not only our view; virtually every independent commentator has agreed with the Government's view that it is necessary to close the budget deficit, and to do that by reducing public expenditure and raising revenue.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Is my hon. Friend not being a bit unkind? Surely there is one Department—just one—where the Labour party would spend less.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend would no doubt have his own candidate for that. The one Department that the Labour party usually regards as the milch cow, the one that can always be safely reduced, and whose future one can gamble away, is the Ministry of Defence. Whatever the figure, the Labour party always says, "You can spend less."

The Government are determined to deliver key economic disciplines. We shall continue to deliver the improvement in living standards for the British people that we have seen since the Conservatives took office. The vote at the end of the debate is about whether the House is prepared to take the necessary action to deliver the key economic disciplines. It is a straight choice between the responsible finance of the Conservatives and the Opposition's public services on the never-never. It is a straight choice between sound money and a return to the Opposition's borrowing and inflation.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No.

It is a straight choice between sustainable growth and the stagflation of the Opposition. It is a straight choice between the Government improving living standards and a return to the cycle of despair of the Opposition.

My hon. Friends understand that choice and the British people understand that choice. That is why the House will accept the Bill tonight and why, more importantly, the Bill will underwrite the re-election of the Government when the time comes.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 321.

Division No. 90] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark

Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 327, Noes 296.

Division No. 91] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*

Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew

Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger

Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm

Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith

Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Ordered,

That Clauses 28, 46, 72 and 77 be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

That, when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Committee tomorrow.

Civil Legal Aid

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.32 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Earlier this year, there was considerable discussion on the extent to which legal aid should be available in civil cases. My hon. Friend the Minister will recollect that I was not backward in supporting the policy of the Government—that civil legal aid should remain generally available, with some readjustment of income scales. As my hon. Friend will be aware from our subsequent correspondence, information coming to hand over the past few months has given me cause substantially to revise that opinion and I must admit that I am now very doubtful about the utility of legal aid in civil cases and about whether it fits at all into an equal opportunity society.

My hon. Friend will be aware that my doubts arise from two cases, both of them in my constituency and both involving a legal action between one party fully supported by the legal aid system and one party who has not only had to find all the legal costs of the action but cannot hope to recover any costs if successful in the action. The case of Rolfe *v.* Harries is the sort of boundary dispute that occurs too often in a suburban area where lawyers have been less than 100 per cent. accurate in drawing up the title deeds. It was the sort of dispute that would normally have to be settled by some means short of legal action, simply because neither side could possibly afford the potential cost.

Unfortunately, in that case, one side, namely Mr. Rolfe, could afford the potential cost, as he was entirely supported by legal aid, despite the fact that, at every stage, it was clear to all the lawyers concerned except the Legal Aid Board that his case had not one whit of merit. Although, on two separate occasions, the court has come to the identical conclusion about the merits of his case, the fact remains that Mr. Rolfe was able to pursue it in the knowledge that the costs to him would be insignificant, whereas, having won their case, Mr. and Mrs. Harries were faced with costs which to most people would be ruinous and which would certainly have had a significant effect on their standard of living in retirement.

The case of Jones *v.* Sinton, a dispute over a claim by Mr. Jones for a share in the successful business started by Mr. and Mrs. Sinton, is again one which would normally have been settled by agreement if Mr. Jones had not been able to obtain the full support of the Legal Aid Board for a claim to take over the business or a substantial part of it from the people who set it up. Again, Mr. and Mrs. Sinton face at least substantial financial hardship even if they win the case, as they are advised is highly likely, because they have been forced to enter into a legal action against a litigant with the full resources of the state behind him. That is clearly a classic no-win situation.

In correspondence in those two cases, my hon. Friend the Minister has stated that the percentage of legally aided cases where judgment was against the legally aided client has fallen constantly over the past decade and currently stands at less than 10 per cent. I find that statement very worrying. What was the percentage a decade ago? We must remem[illegible] that the percentage represents cases where injustice has been created by the intervention of the state. Clearly, 10 per cent. of cases in which the Legal Aid Board

[Mr. Michael Stern]

was wrong is much too high, because of the consequences of the board's getting it wrong, but at no stage has either of my constituents received so much as an apology from the board for getting it wrong. After all, my constituents cannot sue the Legal Aid Board for negligence in deciding whether there was a reasonable case for action, as clearly it was negligent in the case of Rolfe *v.* Harries and might prove to have been negligent in the case of Jones *v.* Sinton.

In addition, although my hon. Friend the Minister has suggested in the case of Jones *v.* Sinton—no one has made a similar suggestion in the case of Rolfe *v.* Harries—that my constituents could apply to the Legal Aid Board for certification to be withdrawn in respect of Mr. Jones, they are advised by their own lawyers that they, the lawyers, do not know of any case in which such an application has been successful. It would be interesting if my hon. Friend would confirm that the percentage of such successful applications —that is, for the Legal Aid Board to reconsider a patently wrong decision—is considerably less than the 10 per cent. of cases in which the Legal Aid Board gets it wholly wrong.

I have already pointed out that, win or lose, the unaided litigant cannot recover his costs except in the case in which the unaided litigant suffers severe financial hardship. A non-lawyer such as myself might have assumed that the potential loss to the owners of a successful small business, in which all the proprietor's funds are committed to the business, or the substantial reduction of funds set aside over a working lifetime would amount to severe financial hardship, but clearly it does not. I should be interested to know how much room there is between the definition of severe financial hardship used by the Legal Aid Board and entitlement to legal aid. I suspect that there is not much.

The worries I have which are aroused by those two cases are, however, much wider. It is clear that the Legal Aid Board can be fooled by someone claiming financial hardship. Common sense says that an organisation that has fewer resources than the Inland Revenue and the fraud squad will be fooled some of the time, but the consequence of its being fooled falls entirely on a random victim. It is clear that there needs to be some system whereby the Legal Aid Board can be called to account for, and to pay compensation for, its own mistakes.

Above all, the two cases demonstrated to me—this is why I am drawing the matter to my hon. Friend the Minister's attention—that there is something desperately wrong with a legal system in which, by the offer of maintenance in a legal action, the Legal Aid Board can effectively pick, and indeed select, winners.

Without civil legal aid, many people have said that we have already reached a situation where civil justice through the courts is available only to the rich or to the insured. With civil legal aid, we have introduced the additional element of the state using taxpayers' funds like dice in a craps game, and that is clearly wrong. If the state is unable to withdraw from civil legal aid—I am sure that philosophically my hon. Friend would agree with me—that legal aid which consists of putting the resources of the state behind one individual and against another when they are both citizens must be intrinsically wrong. If civil legal aid cannot be withdrawn entirely, it should be severely cash-limited and available only in certain types of case, for example matrimonial cases, as against the random scattershot approach of the dispensing of injustice which has been thrown up by the two cases.

10.42 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) on securing the debate, and thank him for the unfailing and characteristic courtesy with which he has dealt with the exchanges which preceded it.

My hon. Friend has referred to the support he gave last year to the eligibility changes for legal aid. I did not need reminding of that support, which was most appreciated. I am sorry that my hon. Friend has since become doubtful of the wider benefits of the legal aid scheme. I hope that tonight's debate will go some way towards removing some of those doubts.

My hon. Friend has written to me on a number of occasions about the case he has raised tonight, that of Mr. and Mrs. Harries, and once about the Sintons. As I think he appreciates, I cannot intervene in the way that the Legal Aid Board handles any particular case. Nor should my comments be taken to refer to the reasonableness of a grant of legal aid in the case in which the Harries were involved, or the ongoing litigation concerning the Sintons' business. However, there are two main points of wider concern to answer: the extent to which the legal aid scheme may permit hopeless litigation to be brought, and the financial consequences for a successful defendant facing a legally aided plaintiff. I will deal with each of those in turn.

Before the introduction of the legal aid scheme almost 50 years ago, it was possible for an individual of limited means to pursue a spurious claim through the courts by way of a speculative action, safe in the knowledge that, should he lose, his opponent would be unlikely to find it worth while trying to recover costs against him due to his impoverished circumstances. Over the years, the legal aid scheme has evolved into the system we know now and, while it may not be perfect, it is a great improvement on what occurred before.

A number of measures have been incorporated into the legal aid scheme to ensure that, as far as possible, privately paying clients are protected against having unjustifiable or even ludicrous cases brought against them by those who fall within the financial eligibility limits for legal aid. Indeed, today's legal system offers more benefits to its potential users than a system that does not include a legal aid scheme.

One of the measures adopted by the scheme which goes some way towards preventing spurious claims is the merits test. In addition to having to qualify financially for legal aid, an applicant must satisfy certain tests as to the merits of his case. An applicant must be able to show the Legal Aid Board—the granting authority for civil legal aid—that he has reasonable grounds for taking, defending or being a party to proceedings. He must also be able to show that his case has a reasonable prospect of success. The tests do not stop there. It must remain reasonable, as the case develops, for it to continue to receive public funding.

When the board makes its initial decision to grant a legal aid certificate, it has before it only one side of the argument and it must make its decision based on the facts before it. However, the opponent, or someone else entirely, may have information which puts the assisted person's case in an altogether different light. The Legal Aid Act 1988 therefore gives an opponent or anyone else the opportunity to make representations to the Legal Aid Board against the grant of legal aid. That is not merely a theoretical right. It is one which is taken up in practice in a fair number of cases, although it must be said that something that strikes an opponent as conclusive evidence of a weak case will not necessarily strike the Legal Aid Board in the same way. Using further evidence provided in that way, the board may decide to discharge the legal aid certificate, should the circumstances warrant it.

My hon. Friend has asked in what proportion of cases where such representations are made the board removes legal aid. I am afraid that the board does not keep a record of that. However, all such representations are taken very seriously and, unless they give the board nothing at all to go on, are pursued with the other side, who are asked to show cause why legal aid should not be removed. This process, combined with the board's checks on the continued validity of a grant of legal aid, ensures that virtually all weak cases are weeded out before the case reaches court.

In contrast, in privately funded cases, it is often not until the case comes to court that it is scrutinised and its merits are assessed. By then a large amount of costs may already have been incurred. The opponent is then faced with a further battle to secure his costs, sometimes to no avail. It is still possible, therefore, for a privately funded client to bring a bogus claim.

I must dispute my hon. Friend's comment that the board gets it wholly wrong if a legally aided plaintiff loses. Last year, more than 92 per cent. of legally aided parties won their cases. This is not to say that those cases which were lost should never have received legal aid. It is rather a reflection of the generally successful way in which the board applies the merits test. In answer to my hon. Friend's question, the figure for 10 years ago—the year 1982-83 —was 86 per cent. success. So there has been a significant improvement in the past 10 years.

I think that the current proportion is about right, because the Legal Aid Board's job is not to fund only sure-fire winners but to sift applications to ensure that only reasonable cases receive funding. There should, therefore, always be a proportion of legally aided cases which are lost. Otherwise the board would be replacing the "reasonableness" test with a test of complete certainty, and many perfectly respectable cases which stood a fair chance of success would not be given that chance.

Therefore, there are occasions on which the legally aided plaintiff will lose his case against an unassisted defendant. As I have said, I do not think that that is in itself wrong. I am, of course, concerned about the position of the privately-paying defendant, who may be by no means wealthy. Therefore, in the event of this happening, and provided that it is just and equitable for the defendant to receive costs from public funds, an order can be made for the costs to be paid by the Legal Aid Board. Before this can be done, however, at the first instance only, the defendant must be able to satisfy the court that he will suffer severe financial hardship if the order is not made. That final safeguard acts as a protection for those who would be most likely to suffer, despite successfully defending a claim.

I am concerned that my hon. Friend's constituents have been experiencing the problems that gave rise to this debate. However, I am grateful for this opportunity to explain to the House an aspect of the legal aid scheme that is not always easy to understand. It may be helpful if I set out the reasons for the scheme's operating as it does in this respect.

The need for the defendant to prove that he will suffer severe financial hardship—which my hon. Friend may find it consoling to know is a matter for the courts, and not for the board—has been called into question as being unfair. I am bound to say that if the provision could be considered in isolation from anything else, I might agree. But this cannot be considered simply on its own merits.

As my hon. Friend will know, there are many calls on public funds, both to widen the proportion of people or types of case eligible for legal aid and, more widely, in many other aspects of our lives. These cannot all be met from the public purse. What this provision therefore seeks to do is to protect those who would suffer most. This is not a perfect solution. It is perhaps inevitable that there will be cases in which the decision seems harsh. But, in view of financial realities, I consider that the balance represented by the provision is about right.

Legal aid expenditure has risen by 130 per cent. over the past four years. The public purse is not a bottomless pit, and there are many competing claims on it. This measure was debated fully by Parliament when the Bill was passing through it, and Parliament has determined that it is right for the defendant's means to be considered.

Whilst again I cannot comment on the board's handling of a particular case, it may be helpful if I set out my understanding of what happened on this aspect of the Harries case. I understand that two orders for costs were made in this matter—by the county court and the Court of Appeal respectively—and it is the first that has caused difficulty. It appears that the problem has arisen because there is some concern on the part of the board that the original order made in this matter is defective as no inquiry was made into the defendants' means before the order was made. The board has attempted to sort out the problem informally with my hon. Friend's constituents' solicitors in order to avoid the cost of any further court proceedings. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to do this, and the board now intends to apply to have the order rectified.

The board is quite happy to satisfy the further order made in this matter, by the Court of Appeal, once the inquiry into the plaintiffs' means has been concluded. The purpose of that inquiry is to assess the amount payable by the plaintiffs, with the balance of the appeal costs being paid by the Legal Aid Board. I believe that this inquiry stands adjourned at present.

Although my hon. Friend has not explicitly said so, I sense from his remarks a wider concern about the costs of civil litigation for those without the benefit of legal aid. As he will know, since the publication of the civil justice review in 1988 we have been taking steps aimed at reducing cost, delay and complexity in civil litigation, and this programme is continuing.

Finally, I must also address the underlying concerns that my hon. Friend has expressed about the whole nature of the current legal aid scheme and the use of the courts for resolving apparently minor disputes. As my hon. Friend may know, the Lord Chancellor is currently conducting a fundamental review of expenditure on courts and legal services, including legal aid. This will be looking at whether the present system offers the best forums for resolving disputes and at factors influencing cost in a number of areas of civil litigation, with a view to achieving changes that will reduce the cost of such litigation for all

[Mr. John M. Taylor]

those concerned in the system, including individual litigants and the taxpayer. If my hon. Friend, whose views I greatly value, wishes to write to me with any suggestions he may have about this, they will certainly be taken into account.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 26 January 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER

2.34 pm

Madam Speaker: I regret to have to inform the House of the death of James Boyce, Esquire, Member for Rotherham, and I desire, on behalf of the House, to express our sense of the loss we have sustained and our sympathy with the relatives of the honourable Member.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Local Government Reorganisation

1. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what delegations he or his Ministers received on the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill led by hon. Members.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): Since publication of the White Paper "Shaping the Future—The New Councils" in July 1993, my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Local Government has met 12 delegations led by hon. Members to discuss the Government's local government reform proposals. I will make arrangements for details of these meetings to be included in the *Official Report.*

Following is the information:

1 October 1993:
John Home Robertson MP and a delegation from East Lothian

1 November 1993:
Martin O'Neill MP and a delegation from Clackmannan District Council

5 November 1993:
Archy Kirkwood MP and a delegation from Berwickshire

8 November 1993:
George Foulkes MP and delegations from Kyle and Carrick and Cumnock and Doon Valley Labour Groups

12 November 1993:
Norman Godman MP and a delegation from Inverclyde District Council

26 November 1993:
Malcolm Bruce MP and a delegation from Westhill
30 November 1993:
Dennis Canavan MP; Michael Connarty MP and a delegation from Central Regional Council
1 December 1993:
Norman Hogg MP and a delegation from Cumbernauld and Kilsyth

20 December 1993:
Robin Cook MP and a delegation from West Lothian District Council

18 January 1994:
Brian Donohoe MP; Brian Wilson MP and a delegation from Cunninghame District Council

19 January 1994:
Rachel Squire MP and a delegation from Dunfermline District Council

19 January 1994:
Jimmy Hood MP and a delegation from Clydesdale District Council

Ministers also met a number of hon. Members and delegations prior to publication of the White Paper to discuss local government reform issues.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that information. As he will know, one of the delegations—the delegation from Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, which I led—was strongly opposed to the setting up of a south Ayrshire authority. Has he read the reports that state that the Ayr Tories have a blueprint to opt out and flog all the services if they win control of that authority? They have already started by making plans for a Spanish cleansing company to take over a contract.

Is the Secretary of State aware that we do not want the loony right ideas of Westminster and Wandsworth to be imported into Scotland?

Mr. Lang: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would want local authorities to provide services, or ensure their provision, in the most effective way possible, thereby raising the quality of service and reducing the cost to residents. I know, however, that he and his hon. Friends are in some difficulty in this regard. While the hon. Gentleman is a strong advocate of the establishment of a single all-Ayshire authority, his hon. Friends the Members for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) and for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) favour a three-authority Ayrshire. The Government have proposed a two-authority Ayrshire. The one thing that unites Labour Members is the fact that they all seem to oppose the continued survival of Strathclyde.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who oppose the establishment of single-tier authorities near to the people are those who represent councillors from the large regions who will find themselves out of jobs—or, alternatively, trade unions acting in respect of officials who will find themselves out of jobs? The Government's proposals have been welcomed; they are certainly most welcome on Tayside.

Mr. Lang: I welcome my hon. Friend back to the House. I am grateful for his support for single-tier, all-purpose authorities.

It is significant that every party in the House supported the principle of single-tier authorities at the last general election. Some Opposition Members may have forgotten the commitments that they made at that time.

Mr. Wallace: Will the Secretary of State confirm that he has received representations on the Government's proposals for water and sewerage, contained in the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill, as well as representations on local government boundary questions? The president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has referred the Prime Minister to the findings of the System 3 opinion poll, which showed overwhelming opposition to the Government's proposals. In his reply, the Prime Minister said that the proper approach was for Scottish opinion to be given expression through Members of Parliament. How does the right hon. Gentleman propose to determine Scottish opinion in a way that will satisfy him?

Mr. Lang: For one thing, I hope that we can get the Bill into Committee so that we can start looking at it. Opposition Members seem remarkably reluctant to allow the Committee to get under way. They deny all the established conventions and procedures of the Committee of Selection—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] They shout "No" now. I very much hope that that means that we can get the Bill into Committee. We can then pursue the testing of opinion about these matters.

Mr. Kynoch: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the controls on employment practice included in the Bill will be widely welcomed by many Conservative Members who have led delegations to him, particularly in the light of further revelations in the newspapers over the weekend about the employment practices of Monklands district council? Is my right hon. Friend fully confident that the body that he can set up to examine excessive salary increases during the reorganisation will indeed be effective, and will produce meaningful results?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend identifies an important matter. There was certainly strong feeling during the last reform of local government that there were abuses over the re-employment, sometimes at vastly enhanced salaries, of some local authority officials. The provisions in the Bill prevent that from happening again.

Mr. Welsh: Has the Secretary of State received a delegation of English Tory Members desperate to join the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill Committee? What qualification do English Tory Members have for membership of the Committee since they did not attend the Second Reading debate or speak in it? They have no electoral mandate whatever in Scotland and it is a purely Scottish Bill. Does the Secretary of State need English Members to prop up local government in Scotland?

Mr. Lang: It is significant that I have not yet received the delegation of English Conservative Members opposed to the Government's proposals that was promised by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). Like Scottish Members, English Members are part of the United Kingdom Parliament. It is here, in the United Kingdom Parliament, that we are proposing to legislate to reform Scottish local government.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in referring to Monklands district council, a Sunday newspaper carried the headline "Corruption in John Smith's Backyard"? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best thing that could happen to Coatbridge and Airdrie is the abolition of that disreputable council which the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), who is in his place, have signally failed to condemn?

Mr. Lang: With regard to the allegations, my hon. Friend may say that; I could not possibly comment. As for Monklands district council, I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government's proposals provide for the abolition of Monklands district.

Mr. George Robertson: Why are the Government so scared of having a majority of one in the Standing Committee on the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill? That is the precise mathematical formulation that their strength in the House would give them. Is it the fact that, having decided to gerrymander the local government map in Scotland, they want to gerrymander the majority in the Committee to force it through? Is it not the truth that the Government have now lost all enthusiasm for this costly, unnecessary, unwanted gerrymandering exercise and that the Secretary of State wants an artificial majority of two in the Committee so that he can abandon responsibility for what he has started?

Mr. Lang: As the hon. Gentleman ought to know, but perhaps does not, the selection of the Committee is a matter for the Committee of Selection. The Labour party has been gerrymandering that Committee and preventing it from starting work on the Bill. The hon. Gentleman's credibility on these matters is somewhat shattered. On 17 January, for example, he quoted with approbation that expert and authoritative journalist Mr. Brian Meek. He might like to know that the journalist whom he regarded as expert and authoritative said on Monday:

> "The Labour party's opposition to single-tier councils is duplicitous, dishonest and disgraceful. They are desperately seeking to protect jobs for the comrades and are quite corruptly, in my opinion, spending public money to that end".

Those are the views of a journalist of whom the hon. Gentleman said:

> "His words and views must be of some consequence in Scotland".

Highlands and Islands (Economy)

2. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the economy of the highlands and islands.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): The establishment of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the success of the campaign to secure objective 1 status have greatly strengthened confidence in the economy of the highlands and islands. I share this confidence and am committed to the policies on which it is based.

Mr. Macdonald: The Minister must know that two issues are causing great concern, especially in the west highlands and the outer islands. One is the continuing crisis in the salmon industry because of Norwegian dumping and the continuing blockheaded refusal of the Treasury to endorse the safeguard actions that are necessary to protect that vital industry. The other is of more concern to my constituency and concerns the apparent proposals now emerging from some officials in the Ministry of Defence to wind down or close down the testing range in the Uists. I ask the Minister for a commitment that the Scottish Office would fight to the bitter end any such attempt. He knows as well as anyone that that would devastate the economy of the southern isles.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman raises two important issues. On salmon, we welcome the Commission's introduction of emergency safeguard measures in the form of minimum import prices, which provide a temporary floor in the market while the longer-term problems facing the industry are addressed. We welcome the Commission's request to the farmed salmon industry to update information submitted to it about alleged Norwegian dumping in 1991. It would be helpful if the representatives in the hon. Gentleman's constituency forwarded the evidence to the Commission so that it can carry out the necessary investigation. I shall keep in touch with the hon. Gentleman on that.

As for Benbecula, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the Ministry of Defence is carrying out its review and hopes to complete it in the near future. An announcement will be made as quickly as possible. I will ensure that the points that he has made are put before the Ministers concerned.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the success of Highlands and Islands Enterprise? Does he agree that the economy of the highlands and islands is inextricably linked with the rest of Scotland, which, significantly, now enjoys lower unemployment than the rest of the United Kingdom? On average, it has not been lower since the 1920s. Does he further agree that it is significant that Scotland enjoys record levels for manufactured exports, for investment in wholesaling and retailing and for manufacturing industry —something of which Scotland should be rightly proud?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Many of the points that my hon. Friend has made are absolutely right. For the first time since the 1920s, unemployment in Scotland is now below the United Kingdom average, and has been since January 1992. Manufactured exports were at a record level in 1992. Highlands and Islands Enterprise is doing very well and its funding—some £76 million for next year —is substantial. When one takes into account the fact that some of the funds for tourism and marketing will be transferred, that represents an increase. Its morale is very good.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Minister recognise that, although objective 1 status was a welcome achievement in the highlands, there is now widespread concern that the Government are undermining that achievement by slashing public expenditure and waiting for the European Community to pick up the tab? Does he not realise that not only are those cuts damaging to the highland economy but they risk the effectiveness of objective 1, because they will deny the additionality principle, which is a key to the Community's financing of those projects?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The funding is additional. The £250 million funding represents the highest per capita allocation in the United Kingdom for objective 1 and recognises the special circumstances of peripherality and sparsity of population.

There have been many successes recently in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Rockwater won a £25 million contract for 80 jobs at its fabrication yard near Wick; Caithness Glass is creating some 20 new jobs within the next two years; and Norfrost is to create at least 120 jobs. The prophecy of doom and gloom is not met by the facts.

Local Government Reorganisation

3. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the officials of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local government reorganisation; and if he will make a statement.

9. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet COSLA to discuss the provision of local authority services.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Local Government and I are due to meet representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on Friday, as part of the normal consultation on local government finance matters. I hope that their policy of non-co-operation will not prevent them from turning up.

Mr. Hogg: Does the Secretary of State recognise the serious situation that those who live in new towns face —the double jeopardy of local government reorganisation and the winding up of the new towns agency? Will he make a particular point of discussing those matters with councillors Gray and McKenna?

Mr. Lang: If the councillors or the convention in general wish to raise those matters at our meeting this week, I shall be happy to discuss them. The meeting will be concerned primarily with the substantial sum of money that the taxpayer, through the Scottish Office, gives to local government—approaching £6 billion. Those are the matters with which we shall be primarily concerned at our meeting.

Mr. Chisholm: Why does the Secretary of State propose to waste large sums of taxpayers' money at a time when Scottish local authorities are facing the biggest cuts in Government grant since the Conservatives came to power in 1979? Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that the real-terms cut in Government grant to Lothian region will be 4 per cent. once the transferred community care money is stripped out, and that is bound to mean service cuts and big council tax increases? Will the right hon. Gentleman also tell us why Edinburgh district council is not getting one penny in housing support grant, with the result that that council faces the terrible choice of slashing repairs or raising rents beyond the rate of inflation?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to debate the housing support grant when the order is brought before the House in due course. The hon. Gentleman talks about waste. I assume that he is associating that with the proposals to reform local government. That will not lead to waste; it will lead to substantial savings. As for expenditure on local government, the Government-supported expenditure will rise by more than 3·5 per cent. next year and per capita in Scotland under this heading is substantially higher—at 34 per cent. more per head of the population—in Scotland than it is in England.

Mr. Hood: The Secretary of State seeks to abolish elected regional councils and to replace them with unelected, unaccountable quangos. How much taxpayers' money will be paid in salaries and pensions to those unelectable, unaccountable quangos?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman seems to misunderstand our proposal. We do not propose to replace regional councillors with quangos: we propose to reform the two-tier structure, in some cases around existing regions and in some cases around existing districts, and to achieve a single-tier, all-purpose local authority structure which will apply throughout Scotland and which will create more efficient and stronger local democracy.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my right hon. Friend remind Opposition Members that the majority of local authorities are Labour controlled and that the waste of money is the result of them spending pensioners' and taxpayers' money unnecessarily, and often on themselves?

Mr. Lang: My hon. and learned Friend is right in that there has undoubtedly been some waste in local government over the years. When I contemplate the planned expenditure by Strathclyde regional council of no less than £500,000 on propaganda linked to its own survival, I think that the money could be better spent by providing better services to their local residents.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Secretary of State agree that it is in the best interests of COSLA, as it is in the best interests of the House, that the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill should be considered by a Committee that best reflects the balance of the parties in the House? Speaking as a member of the Committee of Selection and as someone who is keen for the standing Committee to start its deliberations as early as possible so that important issues such as Berwickshire can be discussed, I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that the Committee can start next Tuesday as long as he rises to the Dispatch Box now and says that he is prepared to accept a Committee comprised of 25 members.

Mr. Lang: As a member of the Committee of Selection, the hon. Gentleman should know that those are matters for the Committee of Selection, not for me. I am keen for the Committee to start its consideration as quickly as possible and I am keen to have a substantial Committee so that the Bill may be fully and extensively debated. I look forward to making progress in Committee. I shall approach the Committee stage in a positive frame of mind as seeking to improve the Bill in the time-honoured way and to achieve at the end of the day a reform of local government around which all parties can rally.

Mr. Maxton: As the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) seems determined to continue the smear campaign against Monklands district council and my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition, will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to tell the House that the Government auditors who carried out the Monklands district council audit this year have, as reported in the *Glasgow Herald* this morning, given the council a clean bill of health? Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore instruct his hon. Friends to stop this campaign which is designed purely to try to discredit my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and has nothing to do with Monklands district council?

Mr. Lang: One of the qualities of this place is that it allows free speech to all hon. Members. If hon. Members choose to show their disquiet about aspects of how Monklands district council or any other district council is run, that is their privilege. What is perhaps surprising is that the hon. Gentleman finds it necessary to draw attention to the auditors' clean bill of health.

Mr. McLeish: I am talking about a real scandal. Will the Secretary of State answer the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)? When will he intervene to tackle the right-wing excesses of Tory-controlled Kyle and Carrick district council? Will he confirm that the lunatic council has agreed to build houses and desecrate land at Burns cottage in Alloway, one of the most important heritage sites in Scotland? Is it a matter of building homes for votes? Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the council has torn up a contract for cleansing which has two years to run, is barring the in-house tender and that Provost McDonald has admitted that he has had discussions with Spanish contractors?

Will the right hon. Gentleman condemn such actions, or are they merely a forerunner of what we can expect under the gerrymandered local government reorganisation—Tory flagships such as Wandsworth and Westminster? In Scotland we simply do not want them. Why does not the Secretary of State abandon local government reorganisation?

Mr. Lang: It is notable that Labour Members complain about what they regard as offensive criticism of one local council, but immediately indulge in it themselves in respect of another. There are suitable safeguards on behaviour for all local councils. There is also a commission on local authority accounts and the parliamentary commissioner, and local authorities themselves have substantial statutory responsibilities. I am confident that the appropriate processes will be applied as necessary in Kyle and Carrick, as in the case of any other council.

Forestry

4. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current estimated area of forestry land in Great Britain; and what the figure was in *(a)* 1984 and *(b)* 1964.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): The area of forest land in Great Britain is currently 2·4 million hectares, compared with 2·2 million in 1984 and 1·7 million in 1964.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that extremely helpful reply. What percentage of broadleaf trees is there in the woodlands and forests of the United Kingdom, and what plans are there for a further expansion of forestry in the United Kingdom? Does he agree that the balance of payments is important, and what part do timber products play in our balance of trade? Does he also agree——

Madam Speaker: Order. I think I have an Adjournment debate on my hands. Come on, Mr. Pawsey —that is enough.

Mr. Pawsey: I shall leave it at that then, Madam Speaker.

Sir Hector Monro: Trees take a long time to grow.

I thank my hon. Friend for the great interest that he is taking in tree planting. Last year, 14,000 hectares, or 40 per cent., of tree planting was of the broadleaf variety, which is most encouraging. Planned planting in 1994-95 is

32,960 hectares, on private and commission land, and planned planting for the year after is 33,500 hectares, so that the Government well appreciate the importance of increasing tree planting, especially for the timber industry.

Dr. Reid: Does the Minister understand that the proportion of forestry in the area covered by Motherwell district council is very small, but that, despite that deficiency, it has made a grand job of tackling the tragic consequences of the decline of the steel industry? Will his colleagues, therefore, please meet representatives of Motherwell district council to hear their strong opposition to the crazy plans to abolish the council and their opposition to the rest of the plans for local government reorganisation in Scotland?

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman is pretty ingenious in bringing in local government. I certainly welcome the planting of broadleaf and other varieties of tree in the Motherwell area. I know that the Lanarkshire Development Agency has taken particular interest in the environment of the area, and I am sure that, in years to come, we shall be glad that there has been so much additional planting there.

Mr. Gallie: Is my hon. Friend aware that timber harvested in the remote areas of the west of Scotland is currently transported by barge through the port of Troon to Caledonian Paper in Cunninghame, South? Does he agree that this means of transport is environmentally friendly, saves much wear and tear on our roads and improves the environment considerably? Does he also agree that it is a

Sir Hector Monro: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is an important means of transport, and especially for bringing timber from the island. I agree that Caledonian Paper is an important industrial facility for Scotland. I am glad that such a large proportion of Scottish timber goes there to contribute to its success.

Housing

5. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of tenants' organisations to discuss housing needs in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet tenants' organisations to discuss housing needs in Scotland and it is for local authorities to assess the housing needs of their areas. I often meet tenants and hear their concerns at first hand and Scottish Office officials regularly meet housing authorities to discuss their assessment of housing needs.

Mr. McMaster: Does the Minister agree that the recent Scottish Homes survey into house conditions in Scotland is a damning indictment of the current hopeless housing policy? At a time when thousands of Scots live in damp, decaying and often derelict houses, why does he concentrate all his energies on trying to get Scottish Homes tenants to opt out of the public sector? Will he take the opportunity today to make it clear to tenants that they can choose Scottish Homes as a landlord, and will he ensure that Scottish Homes lets those tenants know that? While he is at it, will he also give them the real democratic choice of opting for district councils as landlord?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: First, as far as the national house condition survey is concerned, the facts must be seen in perspective. The costs are 3 per cent. only of the total market value of the stock, which is about £88,000 million. I recognise that putting all that right, especially in relation to condensation and damp, will take some years, but substantial resources of £527 million have been made available to local authorities this year. Much will also be done by private landlords and owner-occupiers and there is about £372 million of funding for Scottish Homes.

As far as choice is concerned, Scottish Homes' purpose as a national housing development agency is to play an increasing enabling role in assistance for local authorities. As to choice for tenants at the ballots, for practical operating reasons Scottish Homes has decided that the ballot paper will contain two options. The hon. Gentleman is correct that tenants can opt to reject the choice if that is their wish, but the best possible choice will be put before them, they will be involved in the sifting process beforehand and the wish of the majority will prevail. Any tenant who feels strongly opposed to transfer can make his views known during the consultation process and suggest other options. In addition, tenants will have the opportunity to make representations directly to the Secretary of State, who has to approve any voluntary disposal once it is cleared by the majority.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Can my hon. Friend advise the House how many tens of thousands of houses in the possession of local authorities are unoccupied?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can tell my hon. and learned Friend that the census revealed that about 98,000 houses are vacant and, of those, fewer than 30,000 are public sector stock. We are carefully considering the issue of empty housing and we are engaged in a number of prospective initiatives to bring empty housing back into use.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Minister will be aware that the Ministry of Defence proposes to transfer service housing to a housing trust. Would it not make more sense for service housing to be transferred to local housing associations so that once service needs have been met any additional housing can be made available to meet local needs?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I discussed the subject yesterday with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence. A considerable number of houses that were surplus to requirements have already been sold. A housing trust will be set up, but, of course, housing association activity can be involved only where the price is reasonable as far as the housing associations are concerned. Obviously, if the price is not reasonable it would be unfair to press Scottish Homes unduly when local authorities have a great many other priorities in Scotland. I can assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that rapid progress is being made in Scotland and I am glad to confirm that.

Mr. McKelvey: Nevertheless the Minister will recall, with joy, I am sure, his visit to Kilmarnock last week when he saw for himself the progressive work of the Kilmarnock and Loudoun district council on housing business. Officials told him then that there is a desire among tenants now in Scottish Homes houses to transfer directly to that council. We seek an extension of democracy, so that all the choices are available to tenants. It would save time and money if those choices were given to tenants now.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It will, of course, be for Scottish Homes to decide whether there are special housing circumstances which would make the local authority an appropriate alternative landlord. I expect that in coming to a conclusion Scottish Homes will weigh three factors—the number of properties involved, their location, and the percentage of houses already held by local authorities. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that his local council already has a relatively high percentage of the stock in his constituency. No doubt that will be one of the factors that Scottish Homes will weigh during the process.

Children Act 1989

6. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals there are to introduce a children Bill with similar provisions to the Children Act 1989.

Mr. Lang: Our proposals for the reform of Scottish child care policy and law are set out in the White Paper, "Scotland's Children", which we published last August. We hope to bring forward a Bill when we are ready to do so.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is anomalous that children in Scotland do not have the same protection that children in England receive under the 1989 Act? Can he tell me what representations he has received since the White Paper was published last August?

Mr. Lang: I assure my hon. Friend that we attach every bit as much importance to that subject in Scotland as is attached to it south of the border. The procedures are different, and have been different for a long time, in some respects. I do not see a weakness in that, so long as the provisions are efficient. As for representations, the publication of the White Paper was itself the culmination of a protracted and prolonged consultation process, and it draws together a number of submissions and reports on issues that have been the subject of consultation, to help us to develop an integrated approach to that important subject.

Dr. Godman: Why are Ministers and their compliant officials dragging their feet on this important issue? The English legislation went through the House six years ago. As convenor of the Scottish all-party group on children and child law reform, I tell the Secretary of State that there is a critical need for such legislation, especially for children with disabilities and special needs—and the disruption to local government that will be caused by the Secretary of State's appalling legislation makes that need even more critical. Those children should be at the forefront of legislation going through the House now.

Mr. Lang: Legislation is certainly necessary on some aspects of our proposals, but we should keep the matter in perspective. A substantial proportion of the proposals that have been the subject of consultation and are touched on in the White Paper can be implemented, and indeed are being implemented, without the need for legislation. However, where legislation is needed we shall introduce it at the appropriate time.

Mr. Trimble: I notice that there is a similar delay with the equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland, where we, too, are five years behind the English legislation. Is it a matter of policy to delay the legislation, or are there particular problems in framing it, as in Northern Ireland, where there seems to be a lack of resources in the parliamentary draftsman's office? Is there the same problem in Scotland?

Mr. Lang: I am happy to be able to reassure the hon. Gentleman that there is no such problem in Scotland. Indeed, a substantial number of provisions are already being implemented. When we are ready to introduce considered legislation for the remainder we shall not hesitate to do so.

Mrs. Fyfe: In the International Year of the Family, has the Secretary of State realised that, to our shame, we have the worst child care in Europe, and that we have been waiting for more than five years for a children Act? His White Paper last August claimed that such a Bill was a priority, yet there was not a word about it in the Queen's Speech. Clearly, gerrymandering local authority boundaries has a higher priority than looking after children. Does the right hon. Gentleman's reply to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) mean that we shall have to look for bits and pieces of legislation tacked on to other Acts? When are we ever to have a decent, comprehensive children Act, such as one, as hon. Members have pointed out, which was passed in England five years ago? Why is the Secretary of State so neglectful of children in Scotland?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady considerably misrepresents the position and I am surprised that, above all, in an area which should not be subject to cross-party dispute, she should seek to talk Scotland down. The provisions for Scotland are already in place, are in operation and are envied worldwide. The children's hearing system, especially, is something which many other countries look to with considerable admiration.

Poverty, Glasgow

7. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to assist Glasgow district council to tackle the problems of poverty in Glasgow; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): The needs of Glasgow are fully taken into account in the level of central Government support to Glasgow district council, in accordance with the principles agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in the distribution committee. We are also making available extensive resources for Glasgow through Scottish Homes, Scottish Enterprise and other agencies, as well as the urban programme.

Mr. Marshall: Has the Minister read the Glasgow poverty profile produced by Glasgow district council? Is not he horrified at the appalling health and unemployment statistics? Is he aware that people living in Glasgow are two and a half times more likely to die before reaching retirement age than those living in more affluent areas?

Does not he realise that poverty is killing people in Glasgow? Will he accept the health board's recommendation that special targeting and expansion of investments is absolutely essential, or do his Government not give a damn about the poor?

Mr. Stewart: After decades of municipal socialism in housing, in planning and in education, I am not at all surprised that there are problems in Glasgow. The hon. Gentleman mentioned unemployment and I hope that he is pleased that unemployment in his constituency has dropped by well over 500 in the past year—2,500 down on the figures for January 1987.

I emphasise the facts to the hon. Gentleman that Glasgow district council—*[Interruption.]* If hon. Members would listen, they would find some figures of great interest to them. Glasgow district council receives the highest Government support per tax unit of any district council in Scotland, 40 per cent. of the urban programme is spent in Glasgow and in housing, in the current year, Glasgow district council receives £88·2 million for its housing revenue account and £25 million for its non-housing revenue account. There are many other parts of Scotland that look with great envy on those figures.

Mr. Wray: Does the Minister agree that poverty and deprivation bring crime and drug abuse? Is he aware that the baron trade of drugs is bringing in around £188 million in Glasgow, feeding 12,000 addicts? The addicts are feeding themselves with tamazepan, tenagesic, cannabis, lysergic acid diethylamide, librium and valium. What will the Government do about the fact that many youngsters find the morgue a common place in Glasgow?

Mr. Stewart: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a serious problem of drug abuse in Glasgow. As hon. Members will hear in answer to a later question tabled by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), we have set up a Scottish drugs task force. I have no doubt that, if the question is reached, my right hon. Friend will be able to detail fully the Government's measures.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Minister agree that one of the main causes of poverty in Glasgow is unemployment? Would he agree that the management and trade unions of Kvaerner in Govan should be applauded for its new adult apprenticeship scheme which was launched yesterday to retrain workers who are surplus to requirements? Would he also agree that the decision by Scottish and Glasgow Enterprise to recommend that that company should sack those workers before they are eligible for Government assistance is to be deplored? What does the Minister expect people who are made unemployed from shipbuilding in Govan to do? Does he expect them to start sheep ranching? Will he consider resigning?

Mr. Stewart: If the hon. Gentleman is asking me to resign, the answer is no. With regard to Kvaerner Govan, the Government look to employers to train their own work forces, as employers benefit most from such investment. With regard to training for work, the programme to which the hon. Gentleman specifically referred, funding is finite and must be targeted where the need is greatest. Therefore, we are specifically targeting training for work at people who are unemployed for six months or more. That group needs most help to get back to work. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that two thirds of those who become unemployed leave the register within six months.

Religious Education

8. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about religious education in Scottish schools.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Education authorities in Scotland are required by law to provide religious education in their schools. Guidance is set out by the Scottish Office Education Department, by circular and in national guidelines on religious and moral education which form part of Scotland's five to 14 curriculum programme. These confirm the Government's support for religious education.

Mr. Greenway: May I urge my hon. Friend to stick to religious education in all schools, that it be Christian centred and not influenced by the absurd recommendations of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority of England which suggests that children up to the age of 16 shall study five world religions? Does my hon. Friend agree that studies of that kind will lead to no knowledge of any world religion? That will be a denial of civilisation which is based on Christendom. Christianity should be the centre of religious education with only one other religion at the most.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We put the emphasis on that right in our guidelines. We have made it clear that Christianity, as the main religion in Scotland, will form a major part of religious education. The guidance is that syllabuses of religious education should, in all schools, be based on Christianity as the main religious tradition of Scotland. However, they should also take account of the teaching and practice of other principal religions. The guidelines are clear in their intention to ensure awareness of all the main world religions. We do everything in our power to ensure that the values of honesty, liberty, justice, fairness and respect for human dignity are implemented in that process.

Mr. Dalyell: What response is the Scottish Office making to the concerns of Archbishop Winning that the local government proposals would undermine the capacity for Roman Catholic education in Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We expect to see maximum continuity in schools. There are provisions in the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill to deal with that and we expect to debate them fully in Standing Committee. No changes are proposed with regard to the existing statutory provisions on Catholic education.

Mr. George Robertson: Returning to Archbishop Winning's letter to all hon. Members, may I draw the Minister's attention to what Archbishop Winning calls his real and growing fear about the impact of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill on Catholic schools in Scotland? The Minister must recognise that Archbishop Winning's concerns about the arbitrary and wholly ill-considered plans in the Bill for school catchment areas are shared by many others in Scotland of other denominations and of none.

Will the Minister now recognise that the expensive plan for butchering Scottish local government should be put back until there has been proper consideration through an independent review into all the implications for areas as vital as the education of Scotland's children?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The sooner we are in Standing Committee, the sooner we will debate those matters fully and in depth. Local government boundaries should not adversely affect Catholic schools or the existing provision for Catholic education.

Hospital Waiting Lists

11. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new initiatives the health service in Scotland has undertaken to reduce hospital waiting lists.

Mr. Stewart: My noble and learned Friend the Minister of State recently announced the distribution of funds totalling more than £3 billion to health boards for 1994-95, which, together with efficiency savings, gives an increase of 5·3 per cent. in available resources. It is for individual health boards to use the resources provided to take forward initiatives that will secure continuing reductions in waiting times.

Mrs. Michie: Is the Minister aware of the waiting list initiative at Canniesburn hospital, whereby patients from health boards in the west of Scotland will be offered treatment in the private sector in Glasgow or south of the border? Is it not ludicrous that national health service surgeons should have to tackle the backlog within the private sector? Will the Minister therefore confirm that my constituents in the Argyll and Clyde health board area who require such treatment might have to travel to England for it? If that is so, the once proud national health service in Scotland has reached a pretty pass.

Mr. Stewart: I can tell the hon. Lady precisely what the situation is. There has been insufficient capacity at Canniesburn hospital to treat all remaining "long waiters" for plastic surgery, which I think is what the hon. Lady refers to. Therefore, Greater Glasgow health board, with the other west of Scotland health boards, took an initiative. It put the contract out to a full competitive tendering exercise, and it went to the Bon Secour Health System, which is held in the highest regard. I thought that the hon. Lady would have welcomed that extra provision for her constituents.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that when the waiting lists and waiting times in the Glen Garry and Meigle catchment areas were calculated, future projections of population trends were taken into consideration? If so, will my hon. Friend confirm that the figures will be made available? The regional authority, the local authority and most of my constituents believe that calculations on the future of Meigle cottage hospital are flawed and consequently should be looked at again.

Mr. Stewart: I appreciate that my hon. Friend is speaking a constituency Member. I assure him that either my noble Friend the Minister of State or I will be very happy to meet him to discuss the detailed figures which lay behind the decision on Meigle hospital.

Mr. Connarty: Is the Minister aware of the tragic deaths of Rose McCormack and her son Jack in the town of Grangemouth before the festive season? Their bodies lay undiscovered for seven weeks. The child died of starvation. Will the Minister join Opposition Members in passing on the Government's deepest sympathy to the family, the neighbours and the town of Grangemouth? I am not trying to allocate blame, but will the Minister assure me that there will be an internal inquiry to find out how the bodies of a nine-month-old child and an insulin-dependent mother could lie undiscovered for such a long period?

Mr. Stewart: I join the hon. Gentleman's expressions of concern and sympathy to the relatives and friends involved. I assure him that an inquiry is under way. My noble Friend the Minister of State will be happy to meet him to discuss the matter.

Mr. Kynoch: Is my hon. Friend aware that Aberdeen Royal hospital, an NHS trust, the formation of which all Opposition parties opposed, is now treating a record number of in-patients, out-patients and day patients, and is carrying out a record number of operations? Is not that the best way to reduce waiting lists? The sooner that Opposition parties realise that our reforms are working in the best interests of patients, the better.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the concrete facts, which indicate that trust status works and improves services to patients. Clearly, Opposition Members have lost the battle over trust status. The Government have gone from strength to strength in terms of improvements, which are there for people to see for themselves.

Mr. Ernie Ross: The Minister may believe that, but I draw his attention to constituents of mine, such as the man of 72 who was approach my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) at church on Sunday. This 72-year-old man had to be helped into church, having waited for four months for an angiogram. The Minister cannot dodge his responsibility for the waiting lists, which continue as a result of his failure to provide proper funding for the health service.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot comment on the individual case to which he refers, as I do not know the details. However, I can say that the funds allocated by my noble Friend the Minister of State will allow for an increase of 2·5 per cent. next year in the number of patients treated. That is over and above the increase of 28 per cent. per annum in the number of in-patients treated in 1993 compared with 1979, and represents an increase of 225 per cent. in the number of day patients treated during that period. These figures, beyond any shadow of dispute, indicate a pattern of continued improvements in health care in Scotland under the Conservative Government.

Drugs Task Force

12. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has had any progress reports on the work of the Scottish drugs task force; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish drugs task force, which is led by my noble Friend the Minister of

State, has had three meetings and is meeting again on Friday 28 January. It expects to publish its report by the summer.

Mr. McAvoy: Is the Minister aware that a survey conducted recently by the Greater Glasgow health board confirmed that 12,000 Glasgow patients are considered to be misusing drugs? Does the hon. Gentleman know that in 1991 there were 24 sudden deaths among drug injectors in Glasgow and that in 1992 the figure rose to 73? The majority of the people involved live in deprived areas. The links between deprivation and drug abuse are clear and proven. This is a really tragic situation, which is affecting more and more people. When will the Government fund a strategy to tackle it?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can say, first, that we shall consider very carefully the submissions of the Greater Glasgow health board. But drug misuse is not confined to any one section of society. Under the urban programme, we are currently funding about 20 drugs-related projects in Scotland, at a cost of some £1·6 million. We look forward to receiving the recommendations of the Select Committee and the representations by the task force of the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), which was set up recently. The Scottish Office task force, which has 16 members, will give this matter very high priority indeed.

Mr. McAllion: Does the Minister accept that there is a link between drug abuse and the prevalence of poverty and housing deprivation? If so, when will he do something about the 423,000 houses in Scotland that are affected by damp, serious condensation or mould? In particular, what will he do about the fact that, in the main, these damp-ridden boxes are inhabited by pensioners, people who are sick or disabled and benefit claimants? Does he agree that it is tragic that, as opposed to the situation in Westminster, there will be no designated housing or social policy for these people? Unlike the people in Westminster who benefit from Tory policies, people in Scotland do not vote Tory and are therefore punished.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The targeting of resources to where they are needed most is absolutely necessary. I refer, for example, to the treatment of houses that are severely damp. We have submitted to local authorities' recommendations on this matter and on the question of housing that is below tolerable standard. I can confirm that the urban programme will include a very sympathetic look at applications relating to areas with an especially high incidence of drug abuse.

We need a concerted approach, not just by the police but by the social work, education and health authorities. Expenditure arising from drug-related problems is currently about £40 million a year. That is evidence of the fact that we take this matter very seriously indeed.

Mr. McFall: It is a step forward that we now have ministerial recognition that there is a serious drug problem in Scotland. Does the Minister realise that the main problem lies with young people aged under 24 who comprise 55 per cent. of the drug misusing population? Research from the Greater Glasgow health board and the Home Office shows without doubt that heavy drug abuse is most prevalent in areas that are characterised by high unemployment, low income and inadequate housing, giving rise to a situation of hopelessness with young people.

Does the Minister accept as a first principle that one cannot tackle the ever-increasing drug problem without dealing with its causes? Is not it time for a deprivation policy to be urgently included in the Government's timetable?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: What is absolutely necessary is to have a co-ordinated policy, and that is why we have had a national campaign using media publicity. That is aimed specifically at deterring young people from using illegal drugs. It is also directed at parents, because they can play a vital role in discouraging their children from engaging in that extremely undesirable and dangerous pursuit. Those matters, as I have mentioned, will be taken seriously.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any request from the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement about what seems to be a significant oil pollution incident in parts of Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland, including Wigtown? There appears to be marine diesel fuel and heavy oil involved, and it is crucial that we find out what has happened, because there seems to be no mention of the incident on *Lloyd's Register*. Can we have a statement on the matter?

Madam Speaker: No Minister has informed me that he is seeking to make a statement today, but of course those on the Treasury Bench will have heard what the hon. Lady said.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This afternoon, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) and the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) have returned to the smearing of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition in relation to Monklands district council.

It ought to be brought to the attention of the House that today's edition of *The Herald*, a respected newspaper——

Madam Speaker: Order. I should like to hear the hon. Gentleman's point of order for me.

Mr. Hogg: The point of order is this, Madam Speaker. The House is being constantly abused, and two senior Members of this House are being constantly attacked and smeared by Government Members. The Government auditor for Monklands has now given the council a clearance certificate from the Audit Commission, and there is no basis whatever for allegations of corruption or of improper behaviour.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I can deal with the matter. The hon. Gentleman is a long-standing parliamentarian, and I think that he is trying to prolong the debate. As to the hon. Gentleman's remarks on questioning, if the questioning had been out of order, I would have ruled it so. I should like the House to get back to debating policies, and not personalities.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. It does not relate to the previous point of order, does it?

Mr. Gallie: No, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I will take the hon. Gentleman at his word.

Mr. Gallie: Is it permissible for the hon. Member who represents one constituency to mention the name of an industrial complex in the constituency of another hon. Member? If so, was it in order for the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) to have hurled abuse at me from a sedentary position?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows the answer to his first question. As he heard me say earlier, the House should get back to policies and leave personalities out of debates.

NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 99(2) (Matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland).

CHILDREN (NORTHERN IRELAND)

That the Matter of the proposal for a Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, being a Matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

AUDITORS

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Auditors (Financial Services Act 1986) Rules 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Not fewer than 20 Members having risen in their places and signified their objection thereto, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).*

ACCOUNTANTS

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Accountants (Banking Act 1987) Regulations 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Not fewer than 20 Members having risen in their places and signified their objection thereto, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).*

AUDITORS

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Building Societies (Auditors) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. —*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Not fewer than 20 Members having risen in their places and signified their objection thereto, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).*

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Auditors (Insurance Companies Act 1982) Regulations 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Not fewer than 20 Members having risen in their places and signified their objection thereto, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).*

CULTURAL OBJECTS

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Regurn of Cultural Objects Regulations 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. —*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Not fewer than 20 Members having risen in their places and signified their objection thereto, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).*

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Not fewer than 20 Members having risen in their places and signified their objection thereto, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).*

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Not fewer than 20 Members having risen in their places and signified their objection thereto, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).*

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Not fewer than 20 Members having risen in their places and signified their objection thereto, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).*

BUILDING SOCIETIES

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Building Societies (EFTA States) Order 1994 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. —*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Not fewer than 20 Members having risen in their places and signified their objection thereto, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Noes had it, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).*

SHERIFF COURT FEES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the Sheriff Court Fees Amendment (No. 2) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 2957) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

Statutory Instruments (Debates)

3.35 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it perhaps correct to point out that Standing Order No. 101(3) was introduced by the Procedure Committee specifically to allow non-contentious statutory instruments to go straight into Standing Committee? As a result of the action of hon. Members today, we shall have a debate of perhaps 15 to 20 hours on non-contentious statutory instruments. If that is the case, the sooner we get Jopling introduced, the better for everyone.

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is commenting on the findings of a Select Committee. I assume that all Members here, by the individual action they take, know precisely what they are doing.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have noted the two interventions in the past week of the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure. Are you aware that some of us are disturbed by the way in which he is clearly backing the Government in his interventions while he remains Chairman of the Committee? Some of us believe that, if he persists in doing so, a resolution of the House will be required to deal with the problem.

Sir Peter Emery: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. If people listened, they might notice that I have tried to further a unanimous recommendation of a Select Committee of the House to introduce some modernisation of Standing Orders—I refer to Jopling. I shall go on doing so, because I believe that it is my duty so to do.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) suggested that statutory instruments should be sent upstairs because they are non-controversial. Is it not true that Statutory Instruments can often be as long as, or, indeed, longer than, major primary legislation, and that they affect millions of people? Is there not a good case for taking more statutory instruments on the Floor of the House, where they are subject to full scrutiny, rather than pushing them upstairs into a Committee? It is time that the right hon. Gentleman acknowledged that.

Madam Speaker: We are now entering into a debate on procedure. I shall not allow that to take place.

Leasehold Law Reform

3.38 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law regarding privity of contract and estate for future but not existing leases; and for connected purposes.

If the small—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) would be quiet, he might learn something for the benefit of his constituents. If the small business sector compiled lists of restraints and barriers to trade, it would not be surprising to find commercial leaseholds and the law relating to them, if not at the top of the list, almost at the top. It is for that reason that my Bill concentrates on how smaller businesses might be helped by changes to commercial leasehold law.

Part of my effort is motivated by the fact that I and all hon. Members have recently seen more and more boarded-up shops and vacant shop fronts standing out like blackened teeth, disfiguring the towns and villages of our constituencies, and contributing to the rundown of community life. My Bill will help to reverse that decline, by giving small businesses a fairer deal when undertaking commercial leaseholds. It will give confidence to small business men who take the plunge and start a new business.

My Bill will enable consideration of upward-only rent reviews, privity of contract and compensation if rates are found to be too highly assessed. It is normal for a small business entering into negotiations with a landlord to be faced with a gross imbalance of power. While that imbalance has been partially corrected by the recession, there is no doubt that normal service will be resumed once the property market recovers. It is not surprising that small business men find themselves having to sign contracts, which normally they would be considered insane to sign.

Big businesses are big enough and ugly enough to look after themselves. They can employ lawyers and accountants to argue their case on leasehold negotiations. Smaller businesses do not have that strength. It is because of that imbalance of power that I believe that the Government should go further to introduce leasehold reforms to protect the interests of smaller business. That is the purpose of the Bill.

My greatest concern is over privity of contract—whereby an individual taking a lease assumes liability for rents due many years later from organisations with which he may have had no connection and for which he has no responsibility. I have heard of cases in which, decades later, individuals have been presented with demands for tens of thousands of pounds and, as a result, have been subjected to personal bankruptcy. The hand of the landlord can reach out literally to the edge of the grave. That unfairness should be redressed.

In addition to the proposed limitation of privity to the immediate successor, I recommend that the sword of Damocles be removed after a reasonable but specific time. Lease lives have diminished—the average lease life here is about 15 years, and in the United States it is much shorter. That is still far too long for the individual to be liable for rents—he may have moved on, sold up or even retired.

Therefore, for smaller businesses of less than approximately 3,000 sq ft, there should be a five-year limit, after which responsibility is diminished. That would prevent some of the worst cases of personal hardship caused by privity of contract in commercial leases. Surely five years is long enough for the landlord to assess whether the new tenant is good enough or to find another tenant.

I am aware of the need to rebuild investor confidence in the commercial property sector, but I am concerned that such a consideration may override all others. As I said, commercial landlords are in a much stronger position than the smaller business man, which is reflected in the majority of leasehold agreements. The landlord has the ability to obtain agreements, not only on privity of contract, but on upward-only rent reviews.

It seems strange, to say the least, that landlords are content to set new rentals according to current market conditions, while future reviews remain blind to any change of circumstances that might affect property values. I cannot think of any other traded commodity that can only rise in price. Upward-only rent reviews should therefore be prohibited. Instead, rents should be adjusted according to market conditions.

The wholesale abolition of upward-only rent reviews would bring sense to a nonsensical practice. The commercial property market is not unique: other capital-intensive industries that have no plan for the long term. The fluctuations in the commercial aircraft industry make life in the property market seem almost secure. I do not accept, therefore, that commercial landlords need special allowances for their circumstances.

Together with privity, upward-only rent reviews inflict tremendous commercial and personal harm on small businesses and their owners. Even the industry's own representative, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, has acknowledged that

"real hardship is being suffered and that, in some cases, paying rents above market levels can be a contributory cause of insolvency."

Limited compensation measures should be introduced to provide some redress for a small business that is driven from a property by an upward-rent review, only to see the landlord let that property at a lower rental. That compensation would be offered within a specific period of two years. A compensation scheme would encourage flexibility, and would surely benefit all concerned.

I speak with some experience, because I know of a constituent who was charged a rent of £13,000 a year. That was too expensive for him, and he went into bankruptcy. Within a few months, however, his landlord, who had refused to agree to a lower rent, relet the property for only £10,000 a year. My Bill would introduce changes that reflect current market conditions.

I accept that a deal is a deal, and that what is past is past. The measures contained in my Bill would therefore not be retrospective. The small business sector is the one that will provide jobs as the economy expands. It is the acorn from which the oak can grow. I sincerely recommend the Bill to the House, because it would amend commercial leaseholds to give small businesses a better chance of getting started and a fairer deal.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Richard Page, Mr. John Fraser, Sir Michael Grylls, Mr. Peter Thurnham, Mrs. Angela Browning, Mr. James Couchman and Mr. Spencer Batiste.

LEASEHOLD LAW REFORM

Mr. Richard Page accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law regarding privity of contract and estate for future but existing leases; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 April and to be printed. [Bill 39.]

OPPOSITION DAY

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

Housing

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.47 pm

Mr. Jack Straw: I beg to move,

That this House, noting that investment in housing has more than halved since 1979, whilst housing benefit costs have rocketed, that homelessness has trebled, that for the one million who face negative equity the dream of home ownership has turned into a nightmare, and that half a million building workers are on the dole, condemns the failure of the housing policies of Her Majesty's Government, the latest proposals to remove the basic right of the homeless to a permanent home, and the mean and nasty consequence of government policies which led Westminster City Council to spend millions on designated sales schemes which have harmed tenants and owner occupiers alike; and calls for policies to secure real choice between tenures, which revive housebuilding through the phased release of capital receipts, which make more effective use of a socially responsible private rented sector, deal humanely with the homeless, and provide better advice and protection for home purchasers.

Britain faces a housing crisis unparalleled for four decades. In the past 18 months, the Labour party has published five separate documents setting out its proposals to tackle that crisis. If the Government had any sense, they would adopt them today. Those documents set out a clear strategy and a call for action to deal with that housing crisis.

The right to a decent home is fundamental in a civilised democracy. Without that basic entitlement, it is almost impossible to exercise all the other rights that we all take for granted. We now are faced with a Government, however, who see themselves as having little responsibility for ensuring that every one of our citizens has a proper home. We have a Government who, in the face of such a crisis, have decided to slash still further their pitiable capital investment budget.

The biggest problem is the lack of adequate housing supply. What makes the Government's response even worse is the fact that the resources are there to make a start on tackling that crisis. They exist in the form of more than £5,500 million of accumulated capital receipts, which are currently locked away in council bank accounts by order of the Government. We believe that those receipts should be used to buy up empty and repossessed homes and to build new homes. With the number of housing starts down by 100,000 on the level achieved by the Labour Government, before 1979, that emergency house building programme is desperately needed.

Only absurd Treasury dogma stops those receipts from being invested in housing now. How can the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction explain to the young couple who want to set up a home before starting a family that they may have to wait indefinitely, because his Government will not let their local council build homes with money which it already has, but which is locked in the bank by Government order?

It was difficult enough for the Government to justify their refusal to allow local authorities to spend their capital receipts before the 1992 autumn statement; it is virtually impossible now. In the 1992 autumn statement, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer—the right hon. Member for

[Mr. Jack Straw]

Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont)—conceded the exact principle for which we have argued: that councils should be able to use all their current capital receipts to rebuild houses and rehouse people. If the receipts could be unfrozen for 13 months, why could they not be unfrozen for another year? If current receipts could be reinvested in housing, why could not the same apply to accumulated receipts?

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that his proposal would add £5·5 billion to the public sector borrowing requirement? How does he square that with the assurance given by his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that the Labour party has no firm spending commitments?

Mr. Straw: This is the difficulty that the hon. Gentleman and all his hon. Friends faced last year. If it was right to unfreeze capital receipts last year—notwithstanding the way in which the PSBR is defined—why is it wrong this year, when the housing crisis is even worse?

What lies behind the Government's prohibition is an irrational hatred of council housing. They believe that there is only one legitimate form of housing tenure: home ownership. They have a one-club housing policy, which is as profound a failure as their one-club economic policy. Labour believes in real choice among different forms of housing tenure, which is why we have published proposals for flexible tenure.

Potential owners should be given more flexible choice in regard to home ownership. Shared ownership schemes should be offered by social landlords, allowing people to own as much of a home as they can afford while paying rent for the rest. They could then "staircase" up to full ownership as income and circumstances permit it; we believe, however, that they should be able to "staircase" downwards as well. Reducing the mortgage element that people pay and turning mortgages into rent is surely better than turfing families out of their homes when they cannot manage mortgage repayments.

If there is to be real choice between different forms of tenure, we need a healthy private rented sector. Conservative Members routinely pay lip service to that; yet the proportion of households renting private homes has halved since 1979 and there are more than 800,000 empty private homes. Since 1989, deregulation has been a profiteers' charter, just as deregulation in 1957 did not lead to an increase in the private rented sector—as Conservative Ministers then claimed—but led to a collapse in that sector, and to Rachmanism.

In a speech last week, launching what was described as

"a swingeing attack on the Government's housing policy",

the chief executive of the Halifax building society spoke of

"a polarisation of tenures between owner-occupation and housing association or local authority renting. Little choice exists."

Britain suffers from the lack of a viable alternative to social renting or owner occupation. Labour has presented proposals to encourage the development of a new, socially responsible private rented sector.

Home owners and potential buyers have not been helped by the Government's one-club policy, either. They have been given precious little protection against the unscrupulous and irresponsible behaviour of some mortgage lenders. Many thousands of households are trapped in homes that are worth less than they paid for them, with mortgages that they cannot afford. Labour wants tougher regulation of mortgage lenders, and better advice and protection for home purchasers.

The measures that I have outlined have been demanded for years by housing organisations, building firms, home owners and tenants alike. They are common-sense measures, which ought to be utterly uncontroversial. Not long ago, even a Conservative Government would have based their policy upon them. In 1924, the first Labour Government had to establish the basis for a common-sense housing policy, and it will be our job after the next election to re-establish it.

Although it was often a matter of intense debate, for many decades after the war a broad post-war consensus existed between the parties about the balance and purpose of housing policy right up until 1979. There were mistakes as Government and councils tried to make up the massive deficit of houses caused by bombing and slums beyond repair, but those mistakes were shared.

Today, almost every Conservative speech on housing is peppered with references to 1960s tower blocks, as though they were a Labour invention, but it was the 1944 Abercrombie plan agreed by the wartime coalition which had the idea of tower blocks, and the 1951-55 Conservative Government who began the error of forcing tower blocks and industrialised buildings on councils whether they wanted them or not. New subsidy arrangements by the Conservative Government in the mid-1950s encouraged tower blocks against the building of traditional homes by increasing the subsidy on buildings of six storeys or more.

Under pressure from private construction firms, the then Conservative Housing Minister, Sir Keith Joseph, became an evangelist for tower blocks, telling the House in November 1962 and again in December 1962 of the necessity

"to take advantage of industrialised techniques which make smaller demands on available labour in order to meet this larger programme".—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1962; Vol. 667, c. 22.]

At least at that time, both sides recognised the importance of a mix of tenures. Whilst the majority of people—an increasing number—rightly wanted to own their own homes for the rest of their lives, there would always be a need for affordable, decent homes to rent which had to be provided through councils and housing associations.

That broad consensus changed in 1979, with the first election of the present Administration. The Conservative manifesto of that date committed the incoming Government to legislating on the right to buy and to measures to revive the private rented sector. It was wholly silent on any positive role for the social housing sector.

Since 1979, council house building has been virtually abolished, but building by housing associations has only spasmodically reached levels attained by Labour. The overall consequence is that the number of social housing units being built each year has dropped from 100,000 a year with Labour to 35,000—or one third—under the Conservatives.

Nor has private housing fared much better. Overall starts are down 110,000, from 270,000 under Labour in 1978 to 160,000 under the Conservatives in 1992. During that period, public investment in housing has halved, at today's prices, from £13 billion in 1978 to £6 billion in 1991-92 and it is still falling, with a cut of £500 million imposed by the current Housing Minister on even the parsimonious plans for next year proposed by the current Home Secretary.

What is crazy about Government policy on public housing is that, as investment has been halved, personal subsidies, so derided by the Conservative party, have shot up. In the wake of massive and unjustified increases in rents, housing benefit costs have risen by 55 per cent. in real terms in just five years, now standing at £7·3 billion —£1·5 billion more than we invested in housing—while the social security bill for the payment of mortgage interest alone has risen fourfold in real terms in five years and now tops £1·1 billion.

The consequence is greater misery in all tenures than any of us can remember for owner-occupiers, tenants, the homeless and building workers, 500,000 of whom have lost their jobs. More than 1 million home owners are trapped in their own homes, unable to move because their houses are worth much less than they paid for them and much less than their mortgage. Some 35,000 people are more than six months in arrears; 60,000 families lost their homes in 1993 through mortgage repossessions; waiting lists have increased by 200,000 and number of homeless people has gone up threefold.

Council rents have been forced up at 2·5 times the rate of inflation, and housing association rents are now so high that, as the Environment Select Committee reported:

> "Welfare ghettos are now being created where only those on housing benefit can possibly afford to reside, and once there are forced to stay on the dole rather than to take lower paid work available."

The Government talk about rolling back dependency on the state, but they have increased dependency on the state with every policy. In 1979, only one in 12 people of working age was dependent on the state. It is now down to one in six. Many of those people are desperate to get back to work, but are trapped on the dole by the insane housing and social policies of the Government.

That situation is almost entirely of the Government's making. Had they established a system by which councils were able to reinvest the proceeds of council house sales in renewing and rehabilitating the social housing stock, a substantial part of this crisis would never have happened. Had they not switched from investment to personal subsidy, they would have saved the public purse millions of pounds and not created welfare ghettos.

Mr. Streeter: What about the £6 million?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman wants to know where the money will come from for investment. He must look at council house receipts, the amount that is being squandered year after year on housing benefit and other subsidies that subsidise the policy of excessively high rents.

The Government are not renowned for accepting their share of the blame. "The buck stops anywhere but here" is what should be inscribed on every Minister's chair. Never has there been a group of people more ill fitted to lecture the rest of us on individual responsibility than the collection of handwashers and scapegoaters on the Government Front Bench.

Seventeen years ago, the late and good Stephen Ross, the Liberal Member for the Isle of Wight, piloted through the House his Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, with the active support of the Labour Government and many Conservative Members as well. That Act brought in overdue reform. It ended the unfairness of the old law that allowed some councils—usually Conservative—to evade responsibilities for the homeless, and gave those who were homeless through no fault of their own some highly qualified rights of access to local authority accommodation.

That Act has all-party support and survived the test of time, as even Lady Thatcher recognised when she was Prime Minister. The 1977 provisions were consolidated by the Conservative Government in the Housing Act 1985 and were amended—only slightly—by the Government in the Housing and Planning Act 1986. The Act was the subject of a major review by the then Secretary of State, the late Lord Ridley, in 1988.

The conclusions were announced by his successor, Chris Patten, who, on 15 November 1989, said:

> "We believe that the Act remains important . . . The present terms of the Act strike a reasonable balance between the interests of the genuinely homeless and others in housing need. We do not intend therefore to change the law, but we have proposals—

which were sensible—

> to make it work better."

He went on to say:

> "The real and long-term remedies

to the levels of homelessness

> "are to be found in an effective housing strategy, based on the contributions of the private and the public sectors".—[*Official Report*, 15 November 1991; Vol. 160, c. 243-244.]

I could not have put it better myself.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the situation in my constituency, where the number of homeless people has fallen sharply over the past 18 months, the number of people accepted as homeless has fallen and the number of people in temporary accommodation has fallen, but at the same time 443 people on the council waiting list have been waiting for a long time? Of those, only one family was rehoused last year. Given the limited resources, are not the Government right to change the rules to ensure that people on low incomes, who have a normal family life, do not have to become homeless to get a council house?

Mr. Straw: I am glad that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. He has just damned himself out of his own mouth. He said that the number of people accepted as homeless has dropped in the past six months. I suspect that, in Eastleigh, that is not a very high proportion at all. He knows that there are hundreds on the waiting list and that only one was rehoused last year. Why is that the case? It is not because the homeless are jumping the queue, but because of the fundamental failure of the Conservative Government and his council in collapsing the house building programme.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to do something for the people on the waiting lists in Eastleigh or anywhere else, he should join us in the Lobby tonight—join us in unfreezing capital receipts and in giving his council and every other council the right to spend the money that they have raised from the sale of council houses on housing those who are homeless and those on the housing waiting list as well.

Despite the continuing squeeze on resources, councils and voluntary organisations have continued to support the conclusions of the 1989 review of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act. Many, especially Labour-controlled councils, have made sterling efforts to cut numbers in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, in some cases to eliminate bed-and-breakfast accommodation altogether—

[Mr. Straw]

as Camden has done, for example, despite worse pressure from the homeless, with three main-line stations in its area, than adjoining Westminster, which continues to have to house hundreds of the homeless in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: Not again: I shall spare the hon. Gentleman.

No council or voluntary organisation that I can identify, except, I think, Westminster and Wandsworth—the Minister can correct me if I am wrong—has made any call for a further review. There the policy, broadly accepted, rested until the Conservative party conference last October.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) once attributed the success of his right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) at Tory party conferences to, I paraphrase, the right hon. Gentleman's elegant anatomical knowledge of the body politic of the Conservative party. But no such skill is possessed by other members of this Administration. They know only where to find the cesspit of the Tory party, and their only appeal is to whip up the crudest, the basest, prejudices inside their party.

How they succeeded at the Conservative party conference. The Secretary of State for Social Security won the biggest ovation of the week, so *The Daily Telegraph* told us, with an attack on alleged foreign scroungers. The Secretary of State for Education launched what may now be seen as a rather injudicious attack on "parents who walk away". The Home Secretary roamed even wider. Single parents with more than one child could have their benefits capped, he mused, and their rights as homeless people severely restricted.

But the man who played the most disreputable role at the Conservative party conference last October, was the man who, until then, had enjoyed a reputation as the most liberal and humane man in this Administration—none other than the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction. His speech signalled that, not content with blaming the unemployed for being jobless, the Government were now going to blame those without a home of their own for being homeless. The specific target of his attack was single parents, especially younger single parents.

Since Christmas, the Government have recognised that the "back to basics" scam of last October has been a catastrophe for the Tory party. Hopeless denials have come from the Tory party that anything was ever said about private morality, while the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction sought to salvage his reputation by pretending that deliberate queue-jumping by single mothers

"was not the case I was making for reform",

as he told me in a letter.

References to single mothers have been excised from the consultative document. In addition, there is a most revealing omission which speaks volumes in the brief for this debate, presented and prepared by the Conservative research department, which a well-wisher in that extraordinary department has sent me.

The brief is of no more general reliability than the brief issued on Haringey recently, which alleged that two town halls in Haringey had been demolished, both of which are still standing. But if we trawl through it, we find endless extracts from the Minister's speech at the Conservative party conference, except the one extract that earned him all the publicity, the one extract that he wishes he had never said.

Let me remind the House what he said:

"How do we explain to the young couple . . . who want to wait for a home before they start a family . . . that they cannot be housed ahead of the unmarried teenager expecting her first, probably unplanned, child?"

Every prejudice one can think of is plumbed in every word. As it happens, single mothers of whatever age have never had priority in the homeless queue, and the right hon. Gentleman knew that when he made his disgraceful speech.

The 1989 review also made it clear that no homeless person had an automatic right to housing, whatever his or her condition. Indeed, the opening section of the review went out of its way to say:

"It is important to remember that the legislation does not require councils directly to provide homes for people. A council's task is to assess people's need, and then, if satisfied that they genuinely do need accommodation, to help them secure it. Authorities may use their own stock to do so, or may make arrangements for people to be housed by a housing association or other provider in the private sector."

It goes on to say that people presenting themselves as homeless must satisfy three separate tests, and that only if they meet the necessary criteria will they be offered any kind of housing, temporary or otherwise.

Last Thursday, the right hon. Gentleman published his so-called consultation paper, to universal condemnation from all those who have to deal with the homeless. That is no wonder, for, if implemented, its proposals will set back the clock 30 years or more. Fine words such as

"continuing to provide homes for families and vulnerable individuals"

trip easily from the right hon. Gentleman's lips, but Conservatives had better understand what the proposals mean.

The proposals mean that councils will no longer be obliged to provide accommodation for applicants while investigating their application. They will be obliged to secure accommodation for homeless households for a limited period only. They will have no responsibility to help people who have been asked by friends or relatives to leave not their own home but someone's else home if the council believes that they can reasonably continue to live there without what is called "undue strain".

The overall consequenced of the proposals is that many homeless families will not be eligible for accommodation unless they are physically on the streets—not only homeless but roofless. In addition, many families will be moved from one borough to another, from one set of accommodation to another. What will that do for the basic rights of those families, and especially for those of their children?

We must ask again where the demand for the change is coming from. It is not coming from those who have to deal with the homeless; nor is it a response to the facts. A leaked internal Cabinet paper showed that there was no evidence to link single parents with higher levels of crime or other social disorder. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that single mothers deliberately become pregnant to jump the queue, as the right hon. Gentleman insinuated at the Conservative party conference.

I now read an interesting quotation:

> "I have yet to meet a 'single mother' who has deliberately become pregnant in order to gain housing or financial advantage."

They are the words of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), the Minister for Roads and Traffic, as reported in *The Journal* in Salisbury last week. He was right, and the Conservative Members who have sought to scapegoat young single mothers for their own failure should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

The general household survey published yesterday revealed that the number of single families has altered little since 1990, shortly after the previous review was published. During Question Time only last Wednesday, the Minister of State was trumpeting the fact that the number of homeless acceptances had fallen in each of the previous six quarters. So where is the problem that requires the Government's extraordinary solution?

The problem does not lie with the legislation or its enactment. Of course, there is a reason that waiting lists have lengthened, and to near-infinity in Westminster, as I outlined at the beginning of the debate.

If, at a time of rising household formation, one halves investment in housing, stops councils building any new homes, cuts the total number of new homes in the social housing sector to a third of what it was under Labour, and forces hundreds of thousands into mortgage arrears through crazy economic and social policies, one will of course end up with a crisis—one for which not the homeless, those on housing waiting lists or those trapped in homes worth less than their mortgages are responsible but one for which the Government are patently responsible.

The Government's policy on the homeless has nothing whatever to do with housing need and everything to do with the desperation and political bankruptcy of the Conservative party. Yes, this is a "back to basics" policy, but it is back to the Victorian basics of the Poor Law and the Vagrancy Acts, when the homeless were chased across parish boundaries so that they did not become a burden on the ratepayers—a technique already applied, with disastrous social consequences, by Westminster city council, which sent housing officers scampering across the country to Wigan and to my constituency of Blackburn, offering those astonished boroughs £400 a head if they would take Westminster's responsibilities for its homeless people off its hands.

Yes, "back to basics" is a moral issue; a matter of public morality and of decency. That policy is amoral, indecent, and unworthy of any Government in the late 20th century—and worthy, above all, of the Minister.

Our motion speaks of the mean and nasty consequences of Government policies. That phrase comes from the formal instructions that were given by the Conservative leadership in Westminster to housing officers, who were told to be "mean and nasty" with the homeless.

What has been revealed in the district auditor's report on Westminster is not simply an embarrassment to the local Conservative association. It was central Government's neurotic hatred of council housing which created the climate in which Dame Shirley Porter could set about the social cleansing of Westminster. What started as Tory dogma has ended in the corrupt gerrymandering of Westminster city council's designated sales scheme.

The victims of that policy are, first, the homeless in Westminster, whose needs were mocked by watching decent council homes being boarded up for sale some time, maybe or never.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The hon. Gentleman complains about vacant houses in Westminster. Is he aware that, under the housing investment programme application in April 1993, 2 per cent. of the Westminster housing stock was empty, but in Hackney the percentage was 9·2 per cent., in Waltham Forest 4·6 per cent., in Tower Hamlets 4·6 per cent. and in Lambeth 3·6 per cent.? Should not the hon. Gentleman's motion tackle those Liberal and Labour councils and not Westminster city council?

Mr. Straw: I have been kind and gentle to Conservative Members. I warned them about not listening to or following Conservative party research documents. I have seen the same one. Unfortunately, I have here a Department of Environment "housing investment programme all items" print. It shows for Hackney, not that 9 per cent. of the homes are empty and available for letting, but 1·54 per cent. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Marshall *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I will not give way.

That 1·54 per cent. is way below the average for local authorities, and seven times below the level of the Government.

Mr. Marshall *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I will not give way.

Hon. Members: Do your homework!

Mr. Marshall *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I will not give way. I will spare the hon. Gentleman his embarrassment.

I was saying, Madam Speaker——

Mr. Marshall: On that very point——

Mr. Straw: No; I do not want a very point. The hon. Gentleman was wrong. If he has an argument, he had better take it up with the Department of the Environment, which provided me with those figures.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): It is upside down.

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) says, I think that the hon. Gentleman has read the figures upside-down—1·6, not 9·1.

The first victims of the policy followed by Westminster city council were the homeless. The second victims were the residents, whose council spent £21 million on what the district auditor said was an unlawful housing policy. Many former tenants were sold a false prospectus and are now stuck with maintenance bills they cannot pay, in homes they cannot sell.

Much attention has rightly been paid to the effect of designated sales on the homeless, who were treated little better than chattels, but many of the supposed gainers also ended up as losers.

The objective of the policy was obvious. As the district auditor said in his report, it was motivated by considerations of electoral advantage. The intention was to change the electoral base in 18 wards through the sale of council property to people who were likely to be Conservative voters.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: No, I have to get on.

The link between Westminster city council and the Government is not based simply on similar policy objectives and land deals. There is now overwhelming evidence that Westminster city council involved Ministers. Not only was the Prime Minister happy to commend the example set by Dame Shirley Porter to other local authorities, not only did the present Secretary of State for Employment describe Westminster's policies as a stunning success, but we now know that Ministers were present at key meetings in which Westminster Conservative councillors discussed the designated sales policies.

The right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), who is now a Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office—I told him that I would raise the matter today—has already admitted to being present to at least two seminars with Westminster councillors, in 1986 and 1988, at which the designated sales policy was discussed. He could hardly have denied being present, because one of those meetings took place in his room.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage has explained to me that he could not be present today because of a ministerial engagement, and I entirely accept that. The right hon. Gentleman was also present at the meetings, and in a statement to *The Observer* he said that

> "he was aware there was a political dimension"

to the policy. The right hon. Member for Westminster, North went further, and his spokesman said:

> "Of course he knew about the designated sales policy and supports it. This policy is fantastically popular in Westminster."

Mr. Booth *rose*——

Mr. Straw: No, many other hon. Members want to speak.

Perhaps it is the involvement of members of the Government in meetings with Westminster councillors which explains another curious aspect of the saga—the fact that the Government have fallen uncharacteristically silent about the whole affair. They are latter-day converts to the "due process" idea when allegations are made against councillors who are members of their party—a subscription which they did not exactly take out when the allegations were about councillors from other parties.

Ministers are now trying to say that a district auditor's report that took more than four years to complete does not provide sufficient evidence to enable us to make a judgment about the policy that Westminster council pursued.

Mr. Booth: Will my hon. Friend——

Mr. Straw: No—and I am not your friend, anyway.

Ministers are at great pains to emphasise the idea that the district auditor's recommendations are only provisional. That is true, and those named in the report are entitled to due process. However, Ministers conveniently gloss over the fact that the district auditor is in no doubt that the designated sales policy was

> "unlawful, unauthorised, and to the detriment of the interests of local taxpayers".

Westminster council has not felt obliged to restrict its discussions of the report, and now, notwithstanding the ludicrous leaflets that it was putting out a few days ago, it has decided to abandon the policy, because it recognises how wrong it was. It is high time that Ministers who were involved up to their necks in what was going on in Westminster had the guts that Westminster councillors have, and at long last admitted that the policy was wrong. They should understand that they can condemn the policies without in any sense prejudging whether those responsible for them committed unlawful acts.

What happened in Westminster was not an aberration, but the natural consequence of Conservative housing and social policy, bearing the indelible fingerprints of Conservative central office, of local Conservative Members of Parliament and of a succession of Ministers.

The pathetic brief put out by central office for the debate today gets up to the usual nonsense of trying to denigrate the record of Labour councils. I say "trying", and it is indeed very trying, because even that effort backfires. The brief contains a list of rent arrears as a percentage of the rent roll. Top of the list, with £16·8 million owing—more than one third of the total rent roll—is Brent, an authority which has been Conservative for the past four years.

We need no lectures from the Conservative party about efficiency or probity in housing, or in public life generally. If the Tory party wants to get back to basics, it should start examining the beam in its own eye before looking for the mote in the eyes of others. Of course what is owing should be collected. That is why Ministers should start with the £1·7 billion in uncollected tax, and the several billions of pounds in tax that the Inland Revenue says should come from the black economy.

Of course no public sector house should be empty a day longer than is necessary. So Ministers had better explain why there were 25,000 empty Government properties last March—seven times the empty property rate for local authorities. Ministers had better start applauding the record of councils, especially those such as Hackney, which, with less than 2 per cent. of its stock empty and available for letting, has the best record in any sector. Most such authorities are Labour.

If Ministers want to pick on a council, they would do best to choose that of the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the Secretary of State for the Environment. Again, if we consider figures from the Department of the Environment, we find that that council has only 40 properties left under its ownership. I would have thought that that would not be difficult to manage. Of those 40, 13—a third—are lying idle. According to figures from the Department of the Environment, that is the highest proportion of houses lying idle of any authority in the country. With 1,463 persons on the waiting list, surely it should not be difficult to fill those dwellings, but perhaps that is someone else's fault too.

Labour wants tenants to get value for money and affordable homes to rent to be available. That is why rents in Labour areas are much lower than in Conservative areas. The Tory party is trying to price up tenants in work out of their own homes. Of the six London boroughs with the highest rents, every one is Tory. The highest rent to be found anywhere in the country is in Conservative Ealing—the borough of the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction—where the average council rent of £66·06 a week is more than twice the national average.

Just as Labour Governments have had the best housing policies, so Labour councils have had, and continue to have, the best housing policies. Of the 25 most efficient housing authorities recently named, 11 are Labour-controlled, three are Labour-dominated and just four are Conservative. That list comes from none other than the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction.

The Government have failed home owners and tenants alike. They have created a crisis and sought to scapegoat others for their moral, financial and political failure. We need a Government who will end that crisis, provide for those in need and ensure real choice of tenure. The Labour party will provide that Government.

4.26 pm

The Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction (Sir George Young): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the fact that the Government is set to surpass its manifesto commitment to produce 153,000 homes in the first three years of this Parliament by 25,000; notes with approval the reduction in the number of families accepted as statutory homeless and temporarily housed in bed and breakfast accommodation; notes that the size of the nation's housing stock has grown faster than population growth over the last 15 years and its quality has improved and that the mortgage rate is now at its lowest since the 1960s as a result of the Government's economic policies; commends the Government's policies to secure decent housing for those in need, to provide a safety net for vulnerable people faced with losing their home and to provide more opportunities for home ownership; and calls on Her Majesty's Opposition to condemn the actions of those Labour-controlled councils who wasted taxpayers' money through mismanagement of their housing stock, failure to collect rents and the imposition of high council taxes."

It is a coincidence that, on the day after I had pointed out to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) at a public debate on housing that the Labour Front Bench had not held one Supply day debate on housing in the whole parliamentary session, the Order Paper should have shown a response to that suggestion.

I welcome the opportunity to set out our record on housing and to describe the wide range of initiatives which we are promoting to bring decent housing to those in housing need. I shall do so on a day when we have good news from the construction industry of a 14 per cent. increase in orders in the last quarter of 1993 and when new orders for private housing are 38 per cent. up on the same period in 1992.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will the Minister give way?

Sir George Young: Let me make some progress and then I shall give way. I want to contrast our portfolio of ideas on this side of the House—*[Laughter.]*—with the empty rhetoric of Opposition Members. In its latest editorial, the magazine funded by Shelter, "Roof", says about the housing policies of Opposition Members:

"perhaps the biggest change of all needs to come from the Opposition parties. There is a huge policy vacuum there, waiting to be filled with imaginative ideas."

Before I move on, I shall deal with the question of Hackney council. The hon. Member for Blackburn may have read, inadvertently, from the wrong line. The figures that we have in the Department from local authorities show that in Westminster the total number of management vacancies—*[Interruption.]* I shall give both figures. In Westminster, the total number of management vacancies as at 1 April 1993 was 92. In the London borough of Hackney, the figure was 1,091. There were 0·6 per cent. management vacancies in Westminster and 4·7 per cent. in Hackney. The total vacancies, not just the management voids, in Westminster were 331 and in Hackney, 3,750. The percentages are as follows: 2 per cent. for Westminster and 9·2 per cent. for Hackney.

Mr. Straw: I have a copy of the printout. I was quoting the figures—[HON. MEMBERS: "Apologise."] The person who should apologise is the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). He had the figures the wrong way around—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Seated interventions are not helpful.

Mr. Straw: The Minister is up to his usual tricks of trying to include, in his figures of empty houses available to let, houses awaiting demolition, houses awaiting major repair and those awaiting renovation. Let us consider the proportion of homes available for letting, in respect of which I have not misread a line. According to the printout, the percentage for Labour-controlled Hackney in Greater London is 1·54.

Sir George Young: The figures are clearly on the record and I read them out a few moments ago. Those figures were supplied to my Department by the local authorities concerned. The 1·9 per cent. is actually the figure below 4·7 per cent. and relates to Lambeth.

However, it is worth repeating the figures. Hackney has 10 times as many empty local authority properties as Westminster. There are 3,750 such properties in Hackney as opposed to 331 in Westminster.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Hackney has a greater percentage of its housing stock empty and available to be sold than Westminster? Should not the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) have pointed that out?

Sir George Young: The day the Labour party tries to shelter behind the efficiency of the London borough of Hackney is the day when Labour loses all credibility.

I want to place in a broader context some of the issues referred to by the hon. Member for Blackburn. Since we came to office, the housing stock has grown from just under 21·5 million homes in 1980 to 24 million homes in 1991. If we convert that into homes per 100 people, it is clear that in 1980 there were 38 homes per 100 people and that there are now 41 homes per 100. In addition, the condition of that stock has improved. The English house condition survey shows that there are an estimated 160,000 fewer unfit dwellings across all tenures than there were five years ago. There are more homes; they are better heated and have more standard amenities and better insulation.

Each year, more of those in housing need are being rehoused than when we started. We are making better use of the public housing stock, with lettings in 1992-93 running at more than 500,000 compared with 473,000 in 1979-80. New lettings, rather than new builds, are the currency that really matters for those on the waiting list and those in housing need. The right to buy has brought home ownership within the reach of hundreds of thousands of families.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Minister give way?

Sir George Young: No, I will not give way at the moment.

Nearly 1·5 million people throughout Great Britain have benefited from a policy which is so successful that Opposition Members have now been forced to accept it. Before the hon. Member for Blackburn lectures us about

[Sir George Young]

capital receipts, let him recognise that there would have been no capital receipts if we had taken his advice not to proceed with the right to buy.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister referred to the right to buy. Will he take this opportunity, as the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction, to condemn the actions of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) who used an intermediary to buy the council house next door to his home in Gayfree street at a £50,000 discount? Was not that an abuse of the scheme? Will the Minister responsible for housing condemn those actions?

Sir George Young: No, I will not. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister, and indeed any hon. Member who is addressing the House, is entitled to be heard, however unpopular the remarks might be.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Sir George Young: I am not giving way. I must make some progress.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Sir George Young: I am not giving way. I have given way twice to the hon. Gentleman. I want to make some progress.

The hon. Member for Blackburn touched on the private rented sector. I do not know how the hon. Gentleman had the face to talk about the private rented sector when Opposition Members' policies led to a decline in the private rented sector for 60 or 70 years. The Housing Act 1988 has arrested and reversed 70 years of decline of the private rented sector. The latest figures suggest that it has increased in size in recent years to more than 9·5 per cent. of the housing stock. I welcome the Labour party's belated conversion to the merits of making better use of the private rented sector and the abandonment of its dogmatic hostility to private landlords.

We are tackling rundown estates by creating new housing action trusts to begin the work of regeneration, working with tenants to secure a better future. Five housing action trusts have already been established, and residents at Stonebridge Park in Brent will vote shortly on whether to set up a sixth. Housing action trusts are yet another bright idea that Labour failed to welcome at the time. Elsewhere, we have promoted the redevelopment of unpopular estates with the private sector, diversifying tenure and creating a human scale environment with effective local management.

By harnessing the resources of the private sector to housing association development, we have added £2·6 billion to investment over the past six years, providing over 70,000 homes more than would otherwise have been possible. We look set to exceed by 25,000 the number of new homes to which we committed ourselves in our manifesto.

We are tackling the problem of rough sleeping on the streets of central London, where the problem is at its worst, with a closely targeted, practical package of measures in the rough sleepers initiative, which is significantly bringing down the numbers on the streets. As Shelter's magazine, "Roof", said after the initiative got off the ground:

> "Homeless people are finally beginning to disappear from the streets. And not into hospitals, prisons or cemeteries, as so often happened, but into good quality accommodation provided through a unique partnership between the Government and the voluntary sector."

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): If the rough sleepers initiative is so successful in London, why does the Minister not agree to extend it to other towns and cities where there is a problem of homelessness?

Sir George Young: Funds are available from my Department to help projects that bring direct help to the single homeless. Outside London, for example, we are helping Bristol with about £250,000 in grant. I urge local authorities outside London to look at the model that we have adopted in London and see whether, in partnership with voluntary organisations, it can be replicated elsewhere.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): My right hon. Friend should be congratulated on the rough sleepers initiative, which powerfully demonstrates his compassionate concern for the homeless. Does he agree that voluntary organisations have an indispensable part to play in the policy? Will he therefore consider further with colleagues in the Home Office how to ensure continuation of the funding which the voluntary services unit has provided for six charities involved in the rough sleepers initiative and the homeless mentally ill initiative? There is a question mark over the future of that funding. Will my right hon. Friend see whether he can secure its continuation?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I applaud him on his perceptive article in today's issue of *The Guardian*, which I read with great interest. The answer is yes, I am in close dialogue with my hon. Friends in the Home Office and in the Department of Health whose co-operation in the rough sleepers initiative I greatly welcome. I will pursue that matter.

As a result of the policies that I touched on a moment ago, the figures on homeless households accepted by local authorities for rehousing are now falling for the first time since the original legislation was set up in 1977. The figures for the previous quarter were the sixth in succession to show a decline in the year-on-year figures. The number in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has dropped dramatically by 41 per cent. over the past year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): As the representative of a south-east London constituency, I should like to say that among the things that local residents have noticed most are the programmes aimed at providing proper heating and proper insulation in some of the massive tower blocks and estates that were constructed 10 to 20 years ago. I want to convey to my right hon. Friend the thanks of those people, who are now able to keep warm on £5 a week instead of being cold on £20 a week. Thanks to the help of various Government Departments under schemes such as the EMMAUS project, people who are roofless, jobless and lonely have found what is almost a secular monastery, where they can rebuild their self-respect, enabling them to return to normal society.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend has rightly drawn attention to the heroic work done by many voluntary organisations and by some local authorities to help the homeless. I applaud, in particular, the work of the

EMMAUS project in Cambridge, which I look forward to visiting soon. My hon. Friend has also reminded the House of the estate action programme, which focuses on some of the worst estates, where properties are most difficult to let. Under that programme, homes have been renovated and life has been made more comfortable for tenants.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I should like to put a point to the right hon. Gentleman who, in better times, has given me some assistance with my arrangements. Let me give him a chance to extricate himself from the pack of ravenous Tory wolves whom he fell in with—inadvertently, I hope—at the Tory party's conference. What I understand him to have said on that occasion is not what he is reported as having said. He said that it was difficult to explain to a young married couple that they could not have a house because some young girl had unintentionally fallen pregnant. Will he confirm that he was not suggesting that young women were becoming pregnant intentionally for the purpose of securing a council house, and thus dissociate himself from some of the ravenous Tory wolves who have been peddling that cheap story for the past few months?

Sir George Young: I would not describe my hon. Friends in the language that the hon. Gentleman has just used. I hope that it will not be too long before normal relations between the two sides of the House can be resumed and the informal arrangement to which the hon. Gentleman referred is restored. I shall come in a moment to the question of access to social housing. In one respect the hon. Gentleman is right: I did not suggest that young ladies became pregnant intentionally in order to secure a council house. The principal advocate of that case is the BBC, which devoted an entire "Panorama" programme to support for the proposition. I believe that there are other grounds for reviewing the legislation on homelessness, and I shall deal with them when I have made some progress.

Against the background which I have just outlined, I can say that we have a good housing record. However, I am determined to do even better. Of course we need more good-quality homes. Of all our people, 78 per cent. want to be home owners. How do we help those people? Economic policies creating the right conditions for sustainable growth, low inflation and low interest rates have meant that the affordability of homes for purchase is at its best for many years. That means that more and more families will be able to buy their homes as the economic recovery gethers pace and as builders construct more dewellings.

The Labour party's motion, by referring only to public sector housing investment, demonstrates the Opposition's usual knee-jerk reaction of assuming that the state must always provide. It measures success only by public investment in housing and ignores the very substantial contribution that the private sector has made in meeting housing need.

I am happy to say that the latest figures for mortgage repossessions show a fall in the number of homes repossessed by lenders and show that the number of possession orders applied for by lenders is down—there were 10,000 fewer in 1993 than in 1992—and that the number of people in arrears on their mortgages has fallen by 10 per cent. Those figures are further welcome news for borrowers and are good for housing market confidence at a time when housing starts in the three months to November are up by 34 per cent. on the same period last year, when housing transactions in the last quarter are up by 24 per cent. on a year ago, when chartered surveyors forecast that the housing market recovery is set to continue through 1994 and when mortgage rates are at a 25-year low of just under 8 per cent.

We are determined to continue to work to improve the nation's housing. We are encouraging local authorities to make use of the planning system to achieve mixed and balanced communities, bringing more private investment into affordable housing, and we shall see the benefits of those policies even more as the recovery continues. For example, through our planning policy guidance note 3, we are encouraging local authorities to enable local people to secure affordable homes in the areas where they live, instead of having to move elsewhere. Local authorities are encouraged to include in their district plans obligations on developers to include in substantial new investments affordable homes for local people.

Large-scale voluntary transfers are giving councils the chance to transfer their stock to new owners, bringing in fresh capital and private sector management expertise. So far, 23 authorities have transferred—I hope to see many follow their lead—which will enable my Department to focus its resources on those authorities that have not yet transferred.

The right to manage, which will come into force in April, will give tenant groups the opportunity to take over the management of their homes, making an investment of their time and commitment in a better future for their communities and breaking free from intransigent and sometimes paternalistic local authorities.

Compulsory competitive tendering will also challenge monopoly control of council housing management, bringing private sector expertise into the day-to-day business of running council estates. I want tenants to be fully involved in that process. Tenants will, of course, benefit from the value-for-money improvements that flow from greater competition.

Then we have the new rent-to-mortgage scheme and the extra funds for cash incentives that were announced in the Budget. Those measures expand yet further the opportunities for home ownership, and cash incentives will help families in need by creating even more lettings in the social housing stock.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The Minister must not be allowed to run away from his review. Is it not the truth that the initiative for the review of the homeless came from Wandsworth borough council? It is contained in the paper that was put to the housing committee on 4 November, which says:

> "Once the private rented sector is fully regenerated, it should be possible for local authorities to move to an assessment and emergency housing role for homeless families, but not retain a responsibility for permanent housing. The local authority could be obliged to offer temporary accommodation for, say, three to six months, after which time the family would have to find private rented accommodation . . . this can only happen when the private sector is regenerated and provides a reasonable range of choice."

Does the Minister believe that the private sector is fully regenerated and ready for people to be pushed into a temporary situation?

Sir George Young: I regret having given way to the hon. Gentleman. As I said a moment ago, I shall come shortly to the question of access to social housing and the review of the homeless. At that stage, I shall gladly answer his question as fully as possible.

[Sir George Young]

I hope that over the past 20 minutes I have outlined a wide range of radical housing ideas being introduced to bring decent homes within the reach of more people. As usual, all that the Labour party can do is sit and listen while the policies are introduced, criticise them initially and adopt them later.

The Opposition have now embraced the concept of the right to buy and have gradually become more committed to tenants' rights, and more recently they have been won over to cash incentives. The Labour party's support for cash incentives—support that I greatly welcome—is tucked away in a document that the party produced last year, which is rather inaccurately entitled "A Moving Experience". On page 5, under the heading "Making Mobility Easier", tht document says:

> "We support 'portable discounts' which enable people to buy on the private market while freeing up a rented home for others. There should be no restriction on where families who receive such discounts buy a home, so long as the home is suitable for their needs and they genuinely required a discount in order to buy a reasonably priced property."

I hope that there is all-party agreement that cash incentives have a role to play in a coherent housing policy.

Ministers in my Department were aware of schemes run by the councils in Bromley and Brent—one of them Conservative-controlled and the other Labour-controlled—in the mid to late 1980s. Under those schemes, the councils paid grants to their tenants to encourage them to buy a home in the private sector. That released their council property for letting to homeless families. Following a study of their schemes, we decided to provide a specific power for local authorities. That was approved by Parliament, and it is now section 129 of the Housing Act 1988. That was extended in 1990 by allowing housing associations to pay similar cash grants under the tenants' incentive scheme.

The benefits of that policy are clear. It allows local authorities or housing associations to improve the supply of affordable housing for rent, and it is cheaper and quicker to secure those vacancies with a cash grant than with other forms of provision. It is also cheaper than keeping families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, and it encourages and increases home ownership. For every one home that can be built for rent, three could be released by a similar investment in cash incentives.

There has been some comment in the newspapers about grants to people who did not buy a home in the United Kingdom, but used the grant to move abroad. Councils and housing associations were allowed to formulate their own policies, and they could choose whether to place a geographical restriction on where tenants could buy a home with the grant. Both Labour and Conservative-controlled authorities have run cash incentive schemes without such a restriction, but to maximise the benefit to the United Kingdom housing market and to the construction industry, I have decided that all grants under the cash incentive scheme and the tenants' incentive scheme in 1994-95 should be restricted to those tenants who buy a home in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Blackburn made allegations about Westminster city council. I hope that the House will understand that it is not possible for me to go into the details of the auditor's report. I can say that a cash incentive scheme cannot and should not be run in isolation. Local authority schemes should tackle the housing problems of their areas and ensure that the number of grants paid is the same as the number of people who are rehoused in rented accommodation.

I will say a word about the designated sales policy, which the hon. Gentleman touched on. As for the principle of a local authority disposing of some of its stock of housing which was originally built or required for letting, that may be a perfectly sensible way of meeting aspects of housing need in an area. Selling at a discount enables people on the waiting list to buy, and that satisfies the wish that is shared by about 80 per cent. of householders who wish to become owner-occupiers. Such sales help to break up the monolithic feel of some local authority estates and can produce more mixed communities.

The local authority gets a capital receipt, part of which can be reinvested in its stock. All that is good for existing tenants and for those in housing need. Many authorities—Labour and Conservative—have decided that block sale policies have a role to play. I have seen some successful schemes involving the sale of hard-to-let blocks in which no one wanted to live and which the council could not afford to do up. Sometimes, those sales are to individuals and sometimes to developers; for example, at Minster court in Liverpool, and in Salford. The sales can be part of estate action schemes, such as the one on the Bonamy estate in Southwark. Buildings in Holly street in Hackney are being demolished and rebuilt to provide homes for sale and for rent. Disposal of local authority stock can be the right solution and it would be foolish to condemn it out of hand.

The homelessness review was raised by a number of Opposition Members. The hon. Member for Blackburn talked about a review of the homelessness legislation in the wild terms we have come to expect. The principles behind the proposals that we published last week on reforming the access to local authority and housing association tenancies did draw support from a wide audience. For example, the idea of having a review was welcomed by Shelter, and the London Boroughs Association has now welcomed the thrust of the proposals.

The hon. Member for Blackburn has asked where the idea for a review might have come from. Did he see the 7 July 1993 edition of *The Independent*? The headline for the article stated, "Labour slants homes policy against the single parent". The article stated that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who is the chairman of the Labour party, had talked of changing council waiting list systems to reward "responsible couples". The article said that there was a need to transform housing services so that more appropriate housing could be readily available. There was also a need for a housing waiting list structure which positively rewarded those who had tried their best to take responsibility and to have some order in their lives, such as people who were involved in a stable relationship prior to having children.

The hon. Gentleman went on to say in the article:

> "People . . . are not fools. If you can't get a house by waiting on the list, you present the maximum number of reasons why you should receive priority. That is not encouraging people to accept responsibility for their own lives and society."

Mr. Straw: The Minister has trotted out that cutting at least five times, to my certain knowledge. He knows that the last person in the world who would endorse either the review or its conclusions is my hon. Friend, who has called repeatedly for the type of policies which I spoke about this afternoon. Those policies include an extension of the numbers of houses that are built so that the housing crisis is dealt with. Will the Minister now say whether that is the total provenance for the review? Which boroughs called for it?

Sir George Young: The House will understand the hon. Gentleman's embarrassment at hearing that quotation. However, it is on record, and the article enunciates widely held views. I believe that the hon. Gentleman makes a mistake in trying to distance himself from those views.

If the hon. Gentleman does not accept what the chairman of the Labour party says, perhaps he will accept the views of a leader writer in *The Guardian*. Commenting on our proposals the day after they were published, *The Guardian*—not normally one of the Government's strongest supporters—asked:

> "Who should have priority? A 'registered' homeless family, in temporary but comfortable accommodation—or an 'unregistered' homeless family, stuck in two cramped rooms in the home of a relative."

The article continued:

> "Sir George Young . . . believes the criteria should be changed so that the individual needs of all families on the two separate routes to a rented home—homelessness and housing waiting lists—are weighed against each other. In principle he is right . . . In some areas the only available way to be rehoused is to make yourself homeless. That is simply absurd."

Those who have read the consultation paper will be in no doubt that we are ensuring that a proper safety net will remain——

Mr. Straw: Will the Minister give way?

Sir George Young: No, I am not giving way.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Sir George Young: I feel that I have given way a substantial number of times to the hon. Gentleman. There are many hon. Members who want to partake in the debate, and I propose to make some progress.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Sir George Young: I am not giving way.

Those who have read the consultation paper will be in no doubt that we are ensuring that a proper safety net will remain for families and other vulnerable people who find themselves genuinely without anywhere to live, in a crisis that is not of their own making. I want local authorities to do more to prevent homelessness and do more to enable an increase in the supply of housing. The consultation paper sets out a number of ideas on how local authorities can act more effectively to prevent homelessness, how to give more advice to households on how to secure their own housing and how to build better links with the private rented sector.

I want people to think positively about how the enabling role of local authorities can be strengthened. I find suggestions that we are somehow going back to the days of "Cathy Come Home" quite absurd. The BBC went so far as to suggest on "The World Tonight":

> "this plan may lead to families being split up if mothers and children are housed"—

as the report suggested that the Government had envisaged—

> "in special mother and children units, while the fathers are directed towards men's hostels."

That is a travesty. There is no question of families being split up, and no one who read the paper could possibly believe that.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): Does the Minister accept that removing the entitlement of homeless people to have emergency accommodation while their case is being investigated, removing the obligation to provide permanent accommodation and allowing local authorities to assume that, if people can be deemed to have accommodation in the private sector, there is no need to accommodate them will totally undermine the provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977? Will that not leave many families with children on the streets, in which case there is an obligation on social service departments to receive children into care? Will not that split up families?

Sir George Young: I reject that unequivocally. In a civilised society, there is no question of vulnerable people, which includes families with children, not having a home. I regret and deplore the scaremongering that many people have indulged in since the paper was published.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Will the Minister give way on that point?

Sir George Young: I have given way often enough. Other people want to take part in the debate, and I am conscious of the fact that I have taken up a substantial amount of time.

One of the other issues which was raised immediately after the publication of the document was the concern about the use of temporary accommodation. However, there is nothing temporary about the accommodation that authorities will be expected to provide in discharging their duty. I do not think that one can regard an assured shorthold in the private rented sector which runs for a minimum of six months, and often for many years, as temporary, other than in the sense that it does not guarantee the tenure of that property for life.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): A few moments ago, the Minister quoted an editorial in *The Guardian* headed "A policy where the roof leaks." As he quoted that editorial, does he agree with its conclusions? It said:

> "This is a sticking plaster reform when fundamental change is needed: unfreezing capital receipts, an emergency mortgage repossession package and a serious Whitehall crackdown on Westminster-style cleansing operations."

Sir George Young: I intend to say something about capital receipts. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that, on the specific question of the review, *The Guardian* said what I said it said, and recognised an anomaly in the present position.

I envisage local authorities finding good-quality accommodation in the private sector, which some families might prefer to council or housing association homes. We all know from our experience of private sector leasing that such homes can often be available for periods of three years or more. In some cases, that accommodation is of a high standard. It is sometimes more attractive than the stock that many local authorities operate.

Millions of people live in satisfactory accommodation which does not carry total security, but in which they can lead decent and comfortable lives. One should not assume that the only answer to homelessness is a home provided by a local authority or a housing association. At the same

[Sir George Young]

time, one has to do more to bring back into use some of the 800,000 properties standing empty—700,000 of them in the private sector.

Through accommodation agencies and other initiatives, I want to bring together landlords and tenants and ensure that there is real scope for developing the private sector yet further, providing good-quality accommodation for those who might otherwise be homeless. Already, in many parts of the country there are promising initiatives such as the Derby Landlords Forum, which actively promotes a partnership between the local authority and private landlords in effectively meeting housing need.

I am encouraged by the success of a commercial accommodation agency in my constituency that successfully places homeless families with private sector landlords and manages the property. I want to build on the best practice that is emerging and to encourage more local authorities to develop partnership arrangements and make faster progress in building links with the private sector.

The hon. Member for Blackburn touched on the Housing Corporation and housing associations. At a time when public expenditure restraint is necessary to secure sustainable growth, we have had to look squarely at what is possible and consider how best to use the resources at our disposal. We have done that with our proposals for housing associations.

In conjunction with the Housing Corporation, we have reorganised the investment programme to increase the output of new lettings from the cash available. We have done that by bringing in more private sector finance, taking advantage of reductions in development costs and increasing cost-effective home ownership schemes, which have the double benefit of the householder moving into owner occupation and a family getting a new tenancy as a result. At the same time, I have asked the Housing Corporation to increase the amount of its programme that goes towards rehabilitation of older properties, bringing new life to rundown areas and ensuring that we make the best use of the stock that is already available.

Unspent capital receipts are not simply stored in bank vaults, as one recent Labour policy document had it, lying around in piles of crisp fivers for a Labour Chancellor to get his hands on. Regardless of whether set-aside receipts have already been used to pay off debt or have been invested, to be drawn on later for debt repayment, the fact remains that they have reduced the overall level of indebtedness of local authorities and reduced the public sector borrowing requirement. Spending the receipts would increase indebtedness and hense the PSBR. The Leader of the Opposition seemed to appreciate that once.

A spokesman for the Leader of the Opposition was reported as saying before the last election:

> "We certainly have no plans to alter the PSBR in this way . . . You don't make new resources available by making new definitions. We have plans to change the way the accounts are presented, by making a distinction between investment and current spending, but that has nothing to do with taking receipts out of the PSBR."

I woke up this morning to the voice of the shadow Chancellor telling me that the Labour party had no manifesto commitments to increased expenditure. I come to the House of Commons and the first thing I get is a Labour party commitment to increase expenditure.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Does the Minister accept that, while it might be true that, under Treasury rules since 1990, capital receipts have been used for the repayment of debt, before then there was no such rule and, therefore, receipts generated before 1990 were accumulated by local authorities? Those receipts are sitting in treasurers' accounts and could be used without affecting any realistic definition of the PSBR.

Sir George Young: That is not the case at all.

In the past 15 years, the Conservative Government have devised, introduced and implemented a range of radical solutions to meet the nation's housing needs. They include the right to buy; housing action trusts to tackle the worst estates; tenant incentive schemes; shared ownership, bringing home ownership within the reach of more people; the right of local authority tenants to manage their own homes; the tenants charter; large-scale voluntary transfers; rough sleeping initiatives; housing associations as managing agents; the flats over shops initiative; private funding for housing associations; using the planning system to provide affordable homes for local people; and much more.

While all that creative work has gone on, Labour has sat back, grumbled, moaned, criticised and then agreed when it has realised that our policies work. Those who really care about housing need to ask themselves who is likely to promote and implement the radical policies that we need for housing in the 1990s. Who will promote the mixed economy in housing? Who will break down the barriers and bring in private finance? Who sees the private sector as a useful ally and not as an enemy? Who really believes in empowering the tenant against a recalcitrant Labour-controlled authority? Who has the policies to keep interest rates low and bring home ownership closer to reality for more people? Who is challenging the inefficient monopolies in local authority housing? The answer is that we are. I urge all my hon. Friends to vote for our amendment.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, I remind the House that there have been a number of requests to speak and unless those who speak early in the debate exercise some restraint, there will be some disappointed Members at the end.

5.6 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I hope that I shall be able to honour your request, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to focus my comments to some extent today, largely because in the past I have spent much time condemning the Government's lack of a housing policy and I cannot say much that is new about the failure of the Government's policy. However, I repeat one thing that I have said in the past. When there is a loss of 2 million homes from the rented sector, both public and private, and at the same time the Government slash benefits for young people, there are two consequences. One is a dramatic increase in homelessness; the other is homeless teenage children begging on our streets for the first time in 70 years.

The Government say that they have reduced the number of people sleeping on the streets in London. That is a sad claim to make in arguing the success of their policy. The Government put those people there in the first place. When I was a probation officer in King's Cross in 1979, I could always get someone under the age of 21 somewhere to sleep for the night. From the early 1980s onwards, that was no longer possible. It was the first time that that had happened in Britain for about 70 years.

Some 2 million homes have been lost and not replaced in the rented sector. If those homes are cut out of the rented sector, of course there will be long queues. Some people have been in bed and breakfast for years. That never happened before. It needs to be said loudly that the problem is not one of single-parent families trying to get ahead of the queue.

There is a desperate shortage of affordable rented accommodation. That creates a dog-eat-dog situation in the housing queue. People from all types of background who cannot afford any other form of accommodation will fight to get ahead in the queue. I understand people when they do that. But they are not the problem. They are a symptom of the problem. The problem is the loss of that rented sector. The Government could have done a number of things. If the Minister had wanted more initiatives, he could have mentioned them today.

The Minister talked about the slight revival of prices in the housing market. If the Government want the revival of prices in the private sector market, why do they delay it by dumping hundreds of the 30,000 empty homes in the Government-owned sector on to the private market for sale? They could transfer those homes to housing associations or local authorities so that they can be rented out. Homes at a former air force camp at Biggin Hill, a Conservative region, are empty and awaiting sale. The Government's policy depresses house prices and keeps people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It is lunacy.

The Government could also extend the use of leaseback so that local authorities can get rid of their final bed-and-breakfast cases. I warn the Government that, if they go ahead with their proposal to move the homeless from accommodation to accommodation and do not give them a permanent home, children will suffer dramatically. If children are moved from property to property while they are being brought up, they will suffer acute personal distress, their social development and educational achievements will be inhibited, and their health prospects will worsen. Umpteen pieces of evidence to confirm my argument are available to the Department.

The Government could also allow local authorities to buy in the private sector rather than use bed-and-breakfast accommodation, which, together with leaseback in certain circumstances, is by far the most expensive form of temporary accommodation. The Government should also consider the problem of residents in council blocks who bought their flats under the impression that they would not have to pay large lease costs. Almost inevitably, they face those costs—it is happening in a number of local authorities. I wrote to the Minister a couple of years ago on that matter. People are often trapped by enormous debts that run to thousands of pounds caused by a right-to-buy policy that was not thought out properly. They will continue to be trapped unless the Government help local authorities to buy them out.

The Minister knows my views on the subject. I have no objection to the right-to-buy policy if it is backed by a duty to replace. That would be a brilliant housing policy. From 1978-79, it was the policy of the Tory party, but it was dumped by Lady Thatcher. Hugh Rossi, the Government spokesman at the time, said that the money should be used to replace homes, but the Government then abandoned that promise. That was the cause of the problem. The right-to-buy policy without a duty to replace led to a housing disaster that was waiting to happen.

The problem is so serious that it needs a fundamental review. We must have a stable financial regime for housing. The lack of such a regime is the fundamental reason why we are in a mess. The Government do not have a financial policy on housing. The Conservative party needs to stop worrying so much about house ownership —the Labour party made that break some time ago—and start worrying about three factors: affordability, quality of management and tenants' rights. If the Government meet those three objectives, ownership will matter far less, although it will not be immaterial.

I made it clear some years ago that tenants with a bad landlord should always have the right to transfer from one home to another. A bad landlord who has been imprisoned for harassing and assaulting his tenants can still receive a Government subsidy through housing benefit, which might go directly to him in prison. That is a ludicrous feature of the Government's financial regime.

One good Government policy, although they do not boast about it much, is the phasing out of mortgage income tax relief. The bad part of that policy is that they are not replacing that tax relief. As a result, people who cannot afford to pay their mortgages are getting less and less subsidy. When the Government finally get rid of tax relief in a few years' time—they have never denied that it is their intention to do so—those who lose their jobs and have to live on low incomes will be evicted that much sooner. That is the problem that the Government must tackle.

The Government should by all means get rid of the mortgage income tax relief—an open-ended subsidy that has caused the decline of the private-rented sector. The rent laws had only a marginal effect on that decline. The key factor was the introduction of mortgage income tax relief at the turn of the century, when the decline started. The Government can get rid of that relief, but they must ensure that a subsidy is available to those on low incomes who are in danger of having their homes repossessed because they cannot pay their mortgages.

I argued some time ago that we needed to provide stability in the housing finance regime for all areas of the rented sector. That was a Labour party policy at the last election. One of my suggestions involved the establishment of a housing bank, which exists in a number of countries and in some states in the United States. I cannot overestimate the importance of such a bank. When I made my suggestion, the Government would have had to guarantee about 1 per cent. of the funds in order to make the bank a gold key lender on the market so that it could be seen as a safe investment.

I was told by bankers in the City of London and by two major building societies that such action would not be necessary as they would be happy to co-operate in the scheme. I suggested that capital receipts, which at that time totalled £7 billion, should be lodged in the bank and would generate an enormous amount of additional private sector money. One could allow local authorities to draw their receipts, which they would not lose, and invest them in housing over a period. I would have ring-fenced such funds for housing. It was an important proposal, because the private sector was keen to develop it.

Everyone knows that the problem with obtaining private investment in housing associations is that the figures do not stack up, because there is no guaranteed

[Mr. Clive Soley]

funding arrangement. Pension funds and insurance companies look for long-term safe investments such as housing. A number of other private organisations said that they would like to put money into such a bank. If we had done that, we could have started spending money in the council sector, on housing associations and, indeed, in the private sector.

I made it clear that the private sector should receive such funds and sensible subsidies to help them invest, while the daft subsidy of housing benefit, which goes to a landlord, no matter how bad, should be dropped. In exchange for that help, private landlords would have to be registered so that, if they were bad landlords, they could be struck off.

Nothing is more stupid than imprisoning for three months a bad landlord who has been chased into court by a tenant—with difficulty and often with great fear—but allowing him to become the tenant's landlord again when he is released from prison. That is bad news for the tenant. Bad landlords should not be allowed to let a property again and should be struck off, in the same way in which solicitors or doctors who engage in bad practice in breach of guidelines are struck off.

A subject that has always troubled the Minister—and me, to some extent—is the definition of the public sector borrowing requirement. My view is slightly different from my party's historical view on the subject. We turn the PSBR into an artificial constraint on us. I was never convinced that the Maastricht treaty was a brilliant treaty—it contained far too much about economics and too little about politics. It requires all countries in Europe to harmonise their definitions. The countries in Europe are not daft enough to define the PSBR as we do. If we in this country were to define the PSBR properly, all mortgage tax relief would be included in the PSBR. Tax relief is an open-ended subsidy that does not draw any income from the people who receive it. I receive it, which is nice, but I do not need it and I would prefer it to go to someone who does need it.

If the PSBR definition is right, the lump sum that I and probably every other hon. Member receives, should be included in the PSBR. Investment that generates income, however, should not be part of the PSBR. The other countries of Europe and those in North America exclude such self-financing loans from the PSBR as defined in this country. For that reason, the French were able to subsidise the channel tunnel express line across Europe. They and other countries in Europe can subsidise other projects in the same way because they make it clear that, if the capital investment attracts an economic return, it falls within the boundaries of the PSBR. It also represents good Keynesian economics. The Government, however, now seem unsure whether they are Thatcherite monetarists or Keynesians.

The good part of that Keynesian argument is that public money is used sensibly to generate an income that creates wealth. If a house is built and rental income which covers its cost is received on it, it represents precisely the same type of long-term investment as a house owned in the private sector. If the Government simply say that they will subsidise rents or mortgages, they are committing themselves, indefinitely, to taking money from the taxpayer in order to give it to someone else. That is the uneconomic part of the equation.

It is right that such a subsidy should be offered in certain circumstances, but anyone who knows anything about finance knows that one must generate taxation and wealth to pay for it. The other type of investment, which generates an income, is different. We need to treat it as such.

We must forget a lot of the garbage with which the Minister has tried to defend the indefensible. I know that he is trying to pick up the pieces after 15 years of housing disaster. The Tories have made a bigger mess of housing than they have of the health service, education or the British manufacturing base. Housing policy has a tragic history. The Duke of Edinburgh's report on housing, which was produced by the Rowntree Trust, says it all. It is a damning indictment of the Government's housing policy.

Since the Government came to office, 14 Ministers have been in charge of housing policy—roughly one for each year. As I have said to the Minister before, his colleagues were all on a short let. He is the first one on a medium-term let. If the Government stagger from crisis to crisis, the providers of housing will not know from one year to the next how many houses they can provide. That means that the supply of housing will not increase. Housing associations have only just overtaken their position in the mid 1970s, so they are unable to increase the housing stock.

The disastrous policy of the past must be put behind us. We should make sensible use of a housing bank and a sensible use of a redefined PSBR. We must adopt a sensible approach to ownership. We should not worry about whether someone is renting or owning. We should give an equal subsidy to each individual to create a level playing field in those sectors. Within the rented sector we should make it clear that we are not too troubled about ownership, but deeply troubled about affordability, tenants' rights and the quality of management.

If we get those three right, we will have a happily housed society. We will then be spared the horror, and I mean the horror, of seeing what I never dreamt I would live to see—homeless teenage children, stretching out their hands with a notice reading, "homeless and hungry". That problem is not as severe as it once was in London, but it still exists in other parts of Britain. It is a damning indictment of the Government.

5.22 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Croydon, Central): The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) has tried to blame the Government for the housing difficulties with which the Government have struggled—they have done so successfully, as my hon. Friend the Minister has pointed out—but his comments will not wash.

Those of us who worked in housing, especially in inner London, prior to and after 1979 have watched Labour local authorities struggle against the Government. We know that the blame should lie with those inner-London Labour authorities and other Labour authorities around Britain. In contrast, a Conservative-controlled authority—I choose Croydon for obvious reasons—which has followed good Conservative policies and has worked with the Conservative Government, has no housing crisis. Croydon, for example, has just 39 families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. They are now being assessed.

I accept that the difficulties encountered by Croydon do not compare with those encountered in inner London. It is worth considering some of them and the way in which Conservative policies can solve them.

It would be appropriate to choose a favourite authority of the Labour party, Conservative Wandsworth. It is worth comparing it with some of its Labour neighbours. The difficulty with making such a comparison, however, is that the relevant figures often are not available. London Labour authorities used to provide those figures for the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, CIPFA, but once they realised that those figures could be turned against them, they failed to present them. That has made life very difficult. It is clear that those authorities have something to hide.

Before 1979, Wandsworth was a leading Labour authority—the winning, red light Labour authority. It worked with the Labour-controlled Greater London council in blatant gerrymandering. Any Opposition Member who says that a Conservative authority has gerrymandered ignores the difficulties that were caused because of Labour party gerrymandering, particularly in London. That happened in the days before we had an Audit Commission to point out those problems.

In those days, it was called not gerrymandering or ethnic cleansing, but municipalisation. That sweet word covered the wholesale purchase of private properties, private land, the utilisation of compulsory purchase orders and the designation of entire areas as slums—which assisted the use of CPOs. In areas where such tactics were not possible, Labour authorities made individual purchases. I saw that happen in street after street in pre-1979 Wandsworth. After such a purchase was made, the most difficult tenant family that the authority could find was housed in the property. That family was used to apply pressure on other householders. Axes were put in neighbours' doors and windows were broken until those neighbours finally moved out. .

In those days, Labour authorities made no attempt to use small grants to assist home owners, tenants or private landlords to do up properties. They were simply designated as slums.

Mr. Booth: Does my hon. Friend accept that that practice is still going on in boroughs such as Barnet?

Sir Paul Beresford: By Labour authorities?

Mr. Booth: Yes.

Sir Paul Beresford: Quite.

Mr. Booth: I am sorry. I am so upset about that incredible practice that I did not make my point particularly well. In Barnet, Labour authorities, such as Camden and Hackney, are buying some of the best houses and housing some of their worst tenants in that Tory-held authority. That backs up my hon. Friend's argument.

Sir Paul Beresford: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification.

A recent article in *New Statesman and Society* described Wandsworth as a council that would "sell, sell, sell". In the pre-1979 days, the Labour authority practised the reverse policy of buy, buy, buy. It would buy at any cost and surveys of any property were rare.

One of the more notorious Labour housing chairmen caught what might be called a "Tebbit" habit, because he was renowned for riding the streets of Wandsworth, with notebook in hand, looking for "For sale" signs. The next day, the man from the council would arrive on the doorstep, with cheque book in hand, to purchase that property. Following purchase, however, those properties were not used to house tenants but were boarded up. If they were used, they were used by illegal squatters. The aim was to pool together a sufficient number of properties in order to bulldoze them. Wandsworth now suffers because of the shabby concrete tower blocks that were erected in their place. It was a straight scandal.

Additional scandals arose from that policy, although one of the Labour housing chairmen got caught by getting too close to T. Dan Smith—his accommodation was found for him. At one stage, Labour Wandsworth and Labour GLC proudly boasted that they were spending £1 million a month, mostly on house purchases. According to today's figures, that is equivalent to £15 million. Their policy was to buy, board up, leave to rot, bulldoze and rebuild.

The wastage involved is obvious when one considers what happened on a Battersea estate. It was made up of 600 good residential properties, but it was designated as a slum area and bulldozed. Five years later, the direct labour organisation finally finished building the new estate of 605 properties. Battersea lost housing stock for five years and the area was desecrated just to gain five additional properties.

According to the Labour party, a similar slum area was located next door to that estate. When the Conservatives took control, however, they used small grants to improve those properties. The owners, landlords and tenants were able to improve them, with the result that they are now classy, expensive properties, which house the same people who lived in them in the first place: hardly slums.

Labour's posture was that it was helping the homeless; in fact, it was leaving desolate areas boarded up behind corrugated iron and assisting squatters, while the tenants who were supposed to be looking after the estates were left to rot.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): In the 1960s, people like me—people on Tory-controlled councils such as Merton and Morden—were desperate for a change in local government to give us Labour councils that would do something about the current housing problems.

Sir Paul Beresford: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, he will learn that it is possible to turn the position around. When such estates are made acceptable to council tenants, those tenants will then support the council involved. That does not happen in deprived areas such as Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Lambeth and Islington.

That municipalisation—that gerrymandering—completely changed the nature of aspects of inner London. In 1957, Wandsworth had 10,000 council dwellings; by the time of the Herbert Morrison techniques, it had 44,000. In Roehampton, one of the wards in Putney where Labour was trying to build the Tories out, 95 per cent. of dwellings were owned by the council. In the Parkside ward, mentioned in a certain early-day motion, 70 per cent. of dwellings were council-owned after perfectly sound, lived-in properties had been bulldozed. Next door, in West Hill, 60 per cent. of dwellings were council-owned.

Labour's difficulty lay, and still lies, in its inability to recognise that council tenants do not automatically vote Labour.

Mr. Betts: That is because of gerrymandering.

Sir Paul Beresford: The gerrymandering failed, and early-day motion 353 shows the fallacy of it. The two wards that it mentions returned Conservative councillors. In one of them—which I have just mentioned—70 per cent. of dwellings were council-owned; in 1974, it returned two Conservative councillors. In the other ward—West Hill—the figure was 60 per cent. The flaw in the EDM is this: that ward has never been Labour-controlled, despite the attempt to build the Tories out.

As I said earlier, there used to be no Audit Commission, and no technique by which Labour could be brought up short. The council tenants did that themselves, however: they had had enough of Labour's mismanagement, and the lack of respect that allowed their properties to remain in such an appalling state. They threw Labour out. In 1978, we had a Conservative council, following the Conservative policies of central Government. The residents—including council tenants—had had enough. That was understandable. Wandsworth's last housing chairman, whom I met, had a reputation for throwing away tenants' letters of complaint about the state of disrepair in their properties without answering them. He left those council tenants to rot.

In 1978, the incoming Conservative council inherited an appalling inner-city problem, which is still found today in many Labour areas in London. Many private dwellings were in a poor state because of the lack of improvement grants. Labour's idea was to designate them slum areas, allow them to decline and then purchase them. In many areas, building firms had been driven out because the direct labour organisation took all the work available; meanwhile, the council estates were left in an appalling state of disrepair.

I visited an estate in Earlsfield, central Wandsworth. It had been built as a council estate before the war, and had subsequently been deserted by Labour. A good tenant living on the top floor would tell the lady living on the bottom floor to put the plug in her bath before flushing their toilet; otherwise, the contents would come up in the bath. The plumbing had been in that state for years—but Labour was spending its money on municipalisation and gerrymandering.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): My hon. Friend has mentioned the sorry state of properties in Wandsworth and Putney in the late 1950s and 1960s. May I take him back a little further? Those properties were put there by Lord Morrison of Lambeth, then leader of the London county council, when he was building in Wandsworth to a degree that was completely disproportionate to the area's needs. It had no requirements related to homelessness or medical problems. Lord Morrison should have been building in other parts of London—which some members of his party have mentioned today—but, instead, he was building in Wandsworth, and skewing the housing figures.

Sir Paul Beresford: Of course, it was not called gerrymandering then; but, by God, that is what it was.

When the Conservatives inherited Wandsworth, they found not only that the housing stock—expecially council housing stock—was in a disreputable state, but that the council was up to its eyes in debt. The area was full of rotting empty properties—and rotting full properties; a bit like Sheffield. Labour housing policy had failed. The rent situation was awful: rents were not being collected. The vacancy level was horrendous, the squatting figures were up in the thousands and the caretaking was non-existent.

Slowly, the Conservatives have changed that. They had to begin by selling two small estates and one tower block to the private sector; they used the capital receipts for pump priming. One of the estates was half-empty: its residents had been partly decanted out by the Labour party, which intended to carry out works using the direct labour organisation. Owing to the mismanagement of the DLO, the costs escalated and the council ran out of money; so it just left the estate. Two other estates—also built by Labour—were so riddled with asbestos that, after the asbestos was taken out, one of the tower blocks was a mere skeleton.

The capital receipts were turned around and reinvested. Good Conservative management was brought in: voids were filled, squatters were pushed out and the caretaking was vastly improved. The estates no longer resembled what might have been expected in the Dickens era; they had been brought into the modern world. They were given new roofs, central heating, decent security systems and decent plumbing: that lady living on the top floor could flush her toilet now without the contents coming up through the bath on the bottom floor.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): If Wandsworth is such a marvellous example of Conservative-controlled London boroughs, why does it contain more people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation than any other local authority in the country?

Sir Paul Beresford: I think you had better check your figures. You will find that that is not correct.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think the hon. Gentleman has forgotten that he should be addressing me.

Sir Paul Beresford: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman should examine the figures a little more carefully.

When the quality of those estates was improved, the right-to-buy measures introduced by the Conservative Government really took off. An added advantage was mixed tenure, which had an effect on many estates. As a direct result, certain estates across the borough were selected as "sales areas": properties that had become vacant through the normal transfer procedure were sold to people on the "housing to purchase" list. That was based on housing need. A homeless family in Wandsworth will be placed at the top of both lists: such families have bought as well as renting. That meant that the council was able to meet its housing demands on the basis of need through rent and sale. It was also able to obtain capital receipts for reinvestment. Latterly, the council decided to designate the poorer estates to speed up the positive effect of the mixed tenure.

Wandsworth council started with a stock of 44,000 properties. It sold 19,000—5,000 through designated sales areas—to people in housing need whom it would have had to house in any case.

The Conservative housing methods in Wandsworth are pretty widely accepted, not only by Conservative authorities up and down the country. Many of the methods have been accepted by Labour authorities. Lambeth council actually purchased the privatised caretaking scheme and the software that goes with it. I am not too sure whether it will be able to implement it, because it involves joined-up writing.

The techniques have also been accepted and utilised in Hong Kong, New York, Australia, New Zealand, Moscow and even Ireland.

The results have been quite dramatic. The vacancies among lettable properties in Wandsworth represent less than 1 per cent. There are 1,381 vacancies in Lambeth and 117 in Wandsworth.

Earlier in the debate we were given a figure about Hackney. On a like-for-like basis, there are 117 vacant properties in Wandsworth and 1,911 in Hackney. If we take into account the sale of properties—there has been a slowing down of sales on vacant property estates because of red lining—on a like-for-like basis about 400 were vacant in Wandsworth, compared with 3,900 in Hackney.

The average re-let period for vacant properties in Wandsworth is one quarter of that of Hackney. The Conservative sales policy in Wandsworth has raised more than £400 million. That has provided a total capital programme of £286 million in the past six years. It has also provided an opportunity to pay back debt and invest many of those funds in revenue-earning benefits for the ratepayers, the poll tax payers or the council tax payers.

The council has also worked with the private sector. Private sector management has been particularly successful. The savings on the privatised caretaking service which provided a 24-hour service that could be monitored and enforced were 18 per cent. of what Labour was paying.

There have been partnership schemes, renewal of properties and sales to people on housing lists on the basis of housing need. Mention has been made of rent arrears. in Wandsworth they are 3·6 per cent. of the gross figure, in Hackney they are 31 per cent. of the gross figure and in Southwark they are 27 per cent. of the gross figure.

Whenever anyone mentions Southwark, I am filled with horror. How the Labour party, with its headquarters in Walworth road, can preach about housing when it is based in the middle of one of the worst housing authorities in the country is beyond belief.

The gerrymandering in that borough has been such that, in 1978, 86 per cent. of the properties were owned by the council. Even today they are appalling, filthy and often squatted. The council even gerrymandered compulsory competitive tendering. I understand that the estate grounds maintenance went out in three geographical sections. The private sector won one and the other two were won by the in-house management. After three to six months there was regular reporting back, during which the direct labour organisation admitted that, although it was taking 100 per cent. of the fees, it was providing only 42 per cent. of the service. Yet the council kept it on.

I shall now touch on the homeless figures. Wandsworth council started with 44,000 properties; it sold 19,000 and has reinvested many of the capital receipts. It has worked with housing associations and the private sector, rented accommodation and home ownership. It has pioneered partnership schemes where the private sector provided the money and did the work and the tenants bought high-class, low-cost homes. It is all good Conservative Government policy.

As a consequence, since sales began, Wandsworth council has rehoused 9,000 homeless families. It has also reduced the waiting lists. Lambeth council next door has housed 6,000 families and sold 600 properties.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You called for relatively brief speeches. May I bring it to your attention that the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford) has now spoken for 23 minutes without any sign of reaching a conclusion? Although there is no time limit, it seems to me to be an abuse and goes directly against what you have urged hon. Members on both sides of the House to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I made my point in the form of a request as I have no powers to force anyone to make a speech of a certain length. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have noted it.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have noted it indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker.

When the Conservatives took over from Labour, the waiting list for rented accommodation in Wandsworth was between 12,000 and 13,000. Conservative techniques and housing policy halved that figure and it has consistently stayed at half that level.

The council tenants support the Conservative council because it is low-cost, high-quality management and because it recognised that the residents wanted different means of solving their housing difficulties.

In Wandsworth, 19,000 homes have been sold to families, many of whom would have continued to be council house tenants under Labour. In May 1990, the voters went against the trend and returned a council of 48 Conservative and 13 Labour members. The residents of Wandsworth, including the council tenants, voted Conservative. The council tenants in Wandsworth helped to put my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and my right hon. and learned Friend the member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) back in the House. The council tenants and residents of Wandsworth supported Conservative policies.

5.47 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The entire debate is based on one critical set of facts. Between 1982 and the present day, the total number of social buildings for rent in housing associations, new towns and the council sector is down from some 5·3 million to 4·6 million. At the same time, homelessness has doubled, and the use of temporary accommodation has gone up by a factor of seven. That is the problem, the difficulty, what has gone wrong; so what is the solution?

Only yesterday, I received a letter from a Mrs. Irons, who lives in Streatley in my constituency, who put the problem and its potential solution at its best. She also said that I could pass on her letter to a member of the Government, and I hope that a Minister will take the opportunity to reply to her.

She wrote:

"Why are local authorities not permitted by the Government to spend the money they have locked up from the sale of council houses on building more houses? We have thousands of homeless people living in bed and breakfast accommodation, or worse. Employment of builders would also presumably provide some sort of a kick-start to the recession and a good follow-on effect to other industries. This question may seem ignorant and naive"—

not in my view—

"but no one I know locally—including many staunch Conservative supporters—seems to know the answer".

I can confirm that many Conservatives in local government are furious about the way that the Government have insisted on not following the policy of allowing council

[Mr. David Rendel]

house receipts to be used. I am sure that they, as well as Mrs. Irons, would require some evidence of the Minister changing his mind.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will explain to Mrs. Irons that, if local authorities are debt-free—as are many that have transferred their stock under large-scale voluntary transfer—they can use their capital receipts in whatever way they wish towards investing in social housing.

Mr. Rendel: In Newbury, we are told that that is not entirely true. We can use some of our other receipts, but not necessarily the council house receipts, for that purpose. We can use only those that are not used to pay off the original debt. That is something that we have had to do, and we use a considerable amount on that.

However, the point is that the money is available, and that the policy would in effect kill two birds with one stone. As Mrs. Irons quite correctly points out, we need to solve not only the homelessness problem, but the problem of the recession that we have suffered for so many years. As we are all aware, the construction industry is one of those that has been worst hit. It could form a lever by which we could wrench many other industries out of recession as well. If we put more money into housing and got the housing market moving again, many other businesses would gain greatly.

I shall speak to the motion and then the amendment, because I have noticed that hon. Members do not always speak to the words of the motion. Having looked through the Labour motion, I would like to take exception with one small part of it. On the whole, I find it almost totally acceptable, but I am sorry that it includes a phrase about the

"phased release of capital receipts".

It seems that that is quite unnecessary. Anyone who has worked in local government knows that, if capital receipts were released now, it would not be possible for councils to use them all at once. They simply do not have the management staff there ready to do so. As they do not all need to use them, or are not capable of using all of them, there is no need to place a restriction on local government by phasing the release of capital receipts. I fear that that is merely a sop to Government propaganda concerning the potential inflationary effects, which I do not believe holds true.

There are a number of things in the amendment with which I cannot agree. First, the Government seem to be proud of the fact, believe it or not, that they have succeeded in producing some 178,000 homes over three years—under 60,000 a year. That is nothing to be proud of, and it nowhere near meets the need. It is true that that is more than was in their manifesto, but surely that just shows that they should be ashamed of what was in it, and not that they should be proud of exceeding those amounts.

Secondly, the amendment says that the

"size of the nation's housing stock has grown faster than population growth over the last 15 years".

So what? If they are saying that with their housing hat on, what they are saying with their planning hat on is that it is not the size of population growth that matters, but the size of growth in numbers of households.

In Berkshire, we were told that we would need 30,000 to 40,000 extra houses over the next 10 years simply to keep up with the growth in the number of households, even if our population did not grow. If the Government are trying to force those extra houses on us because of the number of households, surely they must realise that it is no argument in this amendment to talk about population growth. They must say the same thing with both hats on. They are certainly not doing that at present.

Thridly, the Government amendment says:

"the mortgage rate is now at its lowest since the 1960s as a result of the Government's economic policies".

That is a shameless thing to say. What they should have said, had they had any integrity, is that the mortgage rate is down as a result of the failure of the Government's economic policies. We are in a major recession—a recession that the Government tell us they never wanted and which they never thought would last as long as it has. The recession has brought down interest rates. They have come down as a result of the failure of Government policies, not their success.

Fourthly, the Government say that they wish to go ahead with a number of changes to housing legislation, and consult people on them. I do not believe that they can genuinely feel that, by housing the homeless is temporary accommodation, they can possibly solve the problem. They have recognised that there is a difference between supply and demand in housing. Instead of answering that by increasing the supply, they are simply trying to reduce the demand—not the actual demand, but that as shown in the figures—by putting some homeless people into temporary accommodation without the true security of tenure which they have had up until now.

As we are all aware, the problem of homelessness is traumatic. We have all seen, and have heard from, people about their problems. When they lose their homes and, so often as a result, their jobs, they often suffer considerable psychological damage and family break-ups. The Government are supposedly a Government of family values. Any Government who cherish family values and wish to keep families together should surely concentrate on the problem of building more homes for those who need them, instead of simply redefining the homeless when they put them into temporary accommodation.

There is a need to create stable communities and stable families. The Government are not even attempting to meet those two needs. The Minister is saying that there is nothing wrong with temporary housing. I hope that the tenants of Nos. 10 and 11 Downing street accept the fact that their housing may be somewhat temporary if the present Government's policies continue. There are a number of people who do not accept that there is nothing wrong with temporary housing.

Try telling that to those women who live in battered women's hostels. Try telling them that there is no means for them in future to get permanent accommodation again. Try telling those who have lost their homes through fires that the Government are simply not willing to provide any sort of permanent accommodation for them. They will not agree with the Government's new policy.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Has the hon. Gentleman had a chance to confer on this discussion with his hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)? His hon. Friend said last week:

> "It is an unacceptable position that a first time tenant, whether they are a conventional two children, married family, a single mum with three children or a single person with mental illness, goes . . . to what may, in many cases, be brand new housing stock, when over the other side of the road are people who have been overcrowded for 30 years, paid their rent on time and cannot be moved".

Mr. Rendel: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend on that point. I was just about to come to it, but, unfortunately, Conservative Members have a tendency to break in just before one reaches the point that would answer the question.

There is a need for change, not necessarily to current legislation, but certainly to the way in which it is implemented. Authorities up and down the country are avoiding the problem that the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) just mentioned. It is perfectly possible to use a cascade system for the allocation of housing, so that the newest and best housing goes to those who are waiting to move from perhaps rather less good housing. The slightly less good housing could then be used for those who are immediately homeless and are coming off the homeless list.

That is being done already in various local authorities, and there is no reason why it should not be done in all of them. If one uses such a system, one avoids the problems of envy that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Therefore, my hon. Friend is quite right to say that changes are needed to bring that system into effect wherever it is not being carried out now.

Some further changes are also needed. As has been mentioned already, we need to change the system for emergency accommodation, particularly in cold weather and particularly outside London. Far too many people who lie on our streets in shop doorways, cold and sometimes near to death, are not being given even emergency accommodation outside our great city.

There is also a need to look into the problem of 16 and 17-year-olds out on the streets, who are not thought of as vulnerable and therefore not a priority, and who, particularly if they are female, are liable to be dragged into prostitution. That is not a situation that the Government or any Government should allow to continue.

If "back to basics" in housing means anything, it surely means back to the basics of four walls, a roof and security of tenure. It is that last point that the Government have forgotten.

Interestingly, the Government got one thing right in their housing policy a year or two ago when they began to provide extra money for the purchase by housing associations of second-hand housing, a policy that worked well for a time. A number of houses were bought up, which to some extent stopped the slide in the housing market and meant that some accommodation was brought back into use much more rapidly than it otherwise would have been to house the homeless and those at that time on waiting lists.

That was a policy that we in Newbury commended, although we were not a Conservative-controlled authority at that time. It is a policy to which the Government would have done well to stick. Unfortunately, it has now come to an end. It does not work in all parts of the country, but it works in some.

It is odd that, in a sense, it is exactly the reverse of Westminster city council's policy. Westminster city council sells properties that were in the public sector to private owners. Under the other policy, housing associations bought properties that had been owner-occupied for those on the waiting lists who desperately needed them. How the Government can think that both policies were right I am not sure. It is similar to what I described a moment ago—when, wearing their planning hat, they reversed the policy that they had adopted wearing their housing hat.

The Government's amendment condemns the policies of Labour-controlled local authorities. I am interested to see that the Government have found nothing to condemn in Liberal Democrat-controlled authorities, such as my own, whose housing policy, I am glad to report, the Department of the Environment has frequently praised.

However, the Government's amendment is hypocritical, because they are responsible for the worst housing management. Let us look at the facts. In 1993, there were 864,000 empty properties. If we divide that up into the various sectors, 1·9 per cent. of council houses were empty, 2·4 per cent. of housing association homes were empty, 5 per cent. of the private stock was empty, but, worst of all, 6·8 per cent. of the Government's stock was empty. The Government are three and a half times as bad as local authorities at managing their stock. That shows the sheer hypocrisy of the Government's amendment.

This debate is about temporary accommodation and the homeless. Temporary accommodation is what we all like when we go on holiday. What the Government need to realise is that homelessness is no holiday.

6.3 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): A great plethora of figures has been bandied around tonight by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Naturally, the Opposition will not accept any figures with which they do not agree. I do not believe that the Department of the Environment produces one set of figures for Labour Front-Bench spokesmen and another for the Government, but if the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who sadly is not here at the moment, was trying to suggest that Hackney performs better than Westminster in maintaining its houses, he must be joking, because no one on this earth will believe that.

Rather than dealing with facts and figures, may I suggest something easier, particularly for those Opposition Members who do not know London very well because their constituencies are far away and they do not spend a lot of time in the centre of London? All they have to do is go out of the door, turn left, walk for a few minutes, cross Lambeth bridge and walk down to the imperial war museum. On a nice day, it is a pleasant stroll.

Across the road, hidden behind a tall modern tower block called Lambeth towers, they will see an old Lambeth-owned council estate. It is one of those estates built by the great gerrymander Herbert Morrison. At the time, they were well built, and, as he put it, he built them to build the Tories out. He did not say Tories; he used another word which would be unparliamentary.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): When I go home, I walk to Charing Cross tube station. If I walked a little further up the Strand, I would find, sadly, despite what the Minister said, a number of people sleeping in doorways. They sleep in doorways in very cold weather, and they have no other accommodation. That is quite a common

[Mr. David Winnick]

sight in various parts of central London, but it was not the case before 1979. It might be useful if the hon. Gentleman took a look tonight.

Mr. Atkinson: I too walk around that part of London. People have slept rough of their own volition in that area for many years. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen. For those who need them, beds are available.

May I continue my walk south of the Thames into Lambeth, where that Herbert Morrison block is to be found, which, in its day, was well built? I suggest that hon. Members wander round that block. When it was built, it provided ideal homes for families. It was low-rise and looked out over little gardens. The trees that once adorned the gardens of the 19th-century houses that were whacked down to build it were retained to make a nice backdrop for the families.

Look at that block today. Several of the flats are boarded up, no doubt awaiting maintenance. I went there today and spoke to a lady who said that the flat next door to hers had been empty for four years. Other flats were occupied but had boarded-up windows. Paving stones were broken and dangerous, and litter and cans disfigured the courtyards. From some flats, where I am told squatters still live, came the sound of deafening reggae music.

That block is 10 minutes away from the House. Hon. Members can go there and see the effect of bad management by a local authority. That little estate could be turned into a paradise if Lambeth council so wished. If it had been properly managed and not been allowed to decline over the years, families would have volunteered to live there. If it had been sold to the private sector, those flats would be advertised in *The Sunday Times* as 10 minutes away from the West End and the City. That is why they are desirable apartments.

In past decades, that estate has lacked proper and competent management. That property is owned by Lambeth council, which has spent its time and money on crackpot schemes, about which we all know. It is a shame that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), who speaks for the Opposition on transport matters and who was a Lambeth councillor, is not here tonight. She is responsible for shipping affairs, but God help the British Navy if she were in charge of it.

Lambeth council has squandered money over the years on its crackpot schemes. An investigation costing £20 million is under way into money allegedly unlawfully spent on civil engineering projects. It is alleged that £800,000 has been overpaid to some Lambeth teachers. That would have done up some of the flats on that estate. We have heard of housing benefit fraud involving 750 members of staff, and there is nearly £30 million of uncollected rent.

From a sedentary position, I heard the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) comment on London housing. I have had first-hand experience, because, like my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), I happened to be a member of Wandsworth council. I was pleased and surprised to be part of the team that had to sort out the mess left by Labour.

To recap one or two of my hon. Friend's points, the Labour party had a policy of municipalisation under which the chairman went about on a bike, writing down which houses the council should buy. Once we had chucked out Labour, I was given the job of chairing a committee to dispose of those houses. I could not go around on a bike, as there were too many houses involved—there were nearly 2,000 boarded-up houses in the borough of Wandsworth, many in the leafy streets of Putney, when we took over.

It was amazing that the council did not know what it had bought—we did not know to whom the boarded-up houses belonged. As chairman of the disposal committee, I was given the task of advertising in the local paper, asking anyone who lived next door to a boarded-up house please to get in touch with the council, because we were not sure whether it might belong to us. We found several dozen properties in Battersea and Putney which the council had purchased but then forgotten. We strongly suspected that the owner of one property had been paid twice for it—he must have thought that he had struck it lucky.

Labour spent millions on nutty schemes in Wandsworth and, as a consequence, was unable to do up its houses. It boarded them up and left them empty for many years, during which time they became eyesores. Labour had spent the money on buying the properties and did not have sufficient money to maintain its existing council properties. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central explained exactly what happened.

The Labour council's gerrymandering scheme went wrong, because the tenants rose up and chucked out the Labour party. I was standing in a ward in which nearly 80 per cent. of the voters were council tenants and, as much to my surprise as to anyone else's, I was elected, because the tenants were fed up with inadequate and poor maintenance.

It was not only Wandsworth's Labour council which had municipalised and sought to gerrymander—the Greater London council was also in the game, trying to help the Putney Labour party keep Putney Labour. Of course, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) was involved in the Putney Labour party in those days.

The Labour council built the Roehampton estate. Why? It is a tower block estate on the edge of Richmond park. It was not built to disfigure the skyline, which it ruined anyway; it was not built to provide convenient homes because the flats were high rise; and it was not built because of its convenient location. The council dumped thousands of people miles from any jobs, in an area with virtually no public transport. They were stuck in a wasteland because the council wanted to increase the number of Labour voters in that part of London.

When the GLC finally transferred all its Wandsworth properties to Wandsworth council, councillors were puzzled because no rent was forthcoming from two of the blocks. Eventually, someone went to see the two blocks that the GLC had given us and discovered that the blocks did not exist—the GLC had had no idea of what was going on.

It is easy to score points off loony left councillors in London—it is all good knockabout stuff—but Labour Members should take my advice and walk across the Thames. Despite the rhetoric and the jokes, I am angry that families have to live on the Lambeth estate in unacceptable conditions merely because of the idleness, ineptitude and corruption of a bunch of Labour councillors.

6.13 pm

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): I shall be brief and confine my remarks to my own city.

Housing in Manchester, as in every other major city, is under extreme pressure for the simple reason that, since the Conservative party took office, we have witnessed a decline in capital resources. That decline has brought in its wake a deterioration in housing provision and conditions the length and breadth of the city.

The central Government allocation for housing investment programmes has been severely cut and, as night follows day, the local authority cannot meet the needs of its citizens. In 1992-93, our housing improvement bid was £131 million and the allocation was £35·8 million. In 1993-94, the bid was 28 per cent. of the previous year's—we submitted a request for £40 million but received only £36 million. In 1994-95, the bid was treated in exactly the same way—a bid for £46·8 million was met with an allocation of £29 million. One does not need to be a mathematician to realise that the resources are not sufficient to provide decent living accommodation for the people of Manchester.

I stress the fact that there is a tremendous need for housing and housing improvements. It will be possible to rectify the situation only with investment from central Government and the private sector, as has now been acknowledged by Manchester city council. The Government must act as a catalyst, but I regret to say that they are failing miserably in that role.

The local authority in Manchester has stressed time and again that additional resources are essential if we are to get off the treadmill. If the resources are not forthcoming, things can only get worse. If we bear in mind that the council estimates that £300 million is needed for private sector improvements and £500 million for public sector improvements, we get some idea of the scale of the problem facing the providers of housing for those in need. Because of the widening gap between needs and resources, Manchester city council has had to take a long look at the problem and has come up with what is termed a corporate housing strategy.

The strategy recognises the need for a fundamental review of the council's own role in the housing market. It has taken cognisance of the limited resources and of the necessity to stimulate private sector investment. Its aim is to deliver an effective housing service. The Manchester strategy has also taken into consideration the changing tenure patterns and the trends which have led to the rethink of housing policy. Gone are the days when the direct works department built 1,300 houses, employed 5,000 workers and 1,000 apprentices, provided jobs for the disabled and saved the ratepayers money—we now have a new ball game.

The Government's financial controls have led to a severe reduction in local authority housing in recent years. Private investment has been directed towards houses for sale, not towards houses for rent. Housing associations, which once had a minor role to play in the provision of housing, were given a new status by the Government but, as their finances dry up, their properties in Manchester are boarded up, vandalised or used for the illegal dumping of waste or they become havens for undesirables. That is a sacrilege while people are waiting for a roof over their heads.

There have always been changes in housing. The mean terraced streets of houses at the turn of the century, which were all owned by private landlords, gave way to the great slum clearances which resulted in monolithic council estates. At one point in the 1970s, Manchester city council owned about 90,000 properties.

However, there have been rapid changes in the past 10 years. We have witnessed a decrease in the number of houses to rent in the private and public sector. The right-to-buy policy has taken the more desirable houses from the pool of properties on offer to waiting list applicants. People do not buy the flats that we are knocking down—the system-built rubbish. They buy council houses that overlook golf clubs, and so on. Those are the desirable properties.

Sir Paul Beresford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Litherland: No; I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman took 40 minutes of precious time.

We have witnessed the demolition of system-built obscenities that have blighted the city. That has also reduced the relets.

The city, in its strategy statement, welcomes the diversity of tenure and of choice, but I warn the city council that it must never lose sight of the fact that any change must be for the benefit of people.

The choice of increasing ownership is useless if a family cannot pay the mortgage payments, suffers repossession and has to turn to a local authority for help. We have witnessed the increase in homelessness. What choice do homeless people have? How does the council tackle that acute problem without adequate resources? The number of households who are admitted to be in priority need has more than doubled. The demand for specialised homes for the elderly and disabled has trebled.

The sharp increase in homelessness has led to a 22 per cent. increase in the number of households living in temporary accommodation. It is estimated that 618 persons become homeless every month in Greater Manchester and most of them gravitate towards the city. That is not one of the features that we are proud of. We do not show the International Olympic Committee the people sleeping rough in the streets of Manchester.

Patterns have changed, but not for the better. Whatever imaginative policies the council pursues in response to the ever-changing scenario, the financial resources must be made available to meet the needs. Those needs are great. The council points scheme alone, shows that 20,000 households from the waiting list are classified as being in housing need.

Different types of accommodation are needed to meet the demand from single parents and as a result of the break-up of families. Overcrowding is now estimated at 39 per cent., and that has coincided with the right to buy and the reduction in the availability of family housing. More than 13,000 good-quality houses have been bought by tenants, which has added to the problem of diminishing stock.

Manchester's structure and population change continually. The decline in population to about 400,000 does not mean that the pressure on housing has decreased—quite the opposite. We have more low-income families and more vulnerable and immobile households and the demand for affordable houses to rent is increasing.

[Mr. Litherland]

Poverty adds to the problem, as does unemployment, especially in the inner-city area. In the inner-city area of Manchester, unemployment is well above the national average. Male unemployment is 30 per cent. That should take the smirk off the face of the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford). There has been an increase in the number of households who receive free school meals and in the number of households who receive benefits.

Those are the people who do not have a choice. They are denied access to home ownership. Those are the victims of the Government policy. Demand outstrips supply at every turn and the providers are not providing.

When a city council's housing stock decreases by 3,000 in one year and the replacement is only 874, and those dwellings are built, not by the city council, but by a housing association, that proves that there is no support from the Government for a serious house-building programme.

The city council's ideas and aims are well-intentioned and thought out and they are enshrined in six key objectives. I will quote from its report:

> "1. To provide a choice of desirable and affordable housing to improve the quality of life for current residents and to encourage people to come and live in Manchester.
>
> 2. To make special provision for people who are homeless or inadequately housed and for people with special needs.
>
> 3. To offer tenants a wide choice . . .
>
> 4. To deliver a customer orientated, locally based, value-for-money housing service . . .
>
> 5. To prevent homelessness . . ."

Those objectives are commendable but, whatever the strategy undertaken to remedy the crisis in Manchester or any of the major cities, we shall always return to the dependency on the Government for adequate levels of funding resources. That is where the exercise is flawed. We have only to consider the Government's appalling housing record to realise that the objectives of the Manchester city council strategy for housing will remain just a well-intentioned programme of words and figures in a well-presented brochure and that none of the aims for decent housing will materialise for the people. If they have to rely on the Government to make them work, it will all remain a pipe dream.

The Government have lost credibility. The Government cannot be trusted.

6.25 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): We should consider why the market for housing, compared with other markets that meet people's needs, manifests such desperate mismanagement and terrible shortages. Surely that is so largely because the property market is bedevilled by legislation which has been passed by the House at different times in the past few years.

Planning controls are one type of legislation; they have limited the amount of land available on which to build housing. Secondly, controlled rents have meant that, for many decades, low rents gave no incentive to people in the private sector to provide or recycle property. Thirdly, the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, which was passed by the Labour Government, increased enormously the number of people who flooded into inner cities, especially London, and put enormous strains on the housing market there.

It is to the credit of the current Housing Minister that he has tackled many of those problems and introduced some imaginative policies. For example, when I was a member of Westminster city council, we identified more than 50 acres of land in the Westminster part of the central London catchment area alone which were derelict and could not be built on because, for one reason or another, planning consents were bedevilled by past legislation. There was a vast amount of housing which had fallen into complete disrepair and where no one wished to live; it accounted for some of the startling figures which we are often given about the number of empty houses. It was not so much that they were empty as that they were uninhabitable, in the centres of cities.

The world and his wife, coming to Britain, often ended up in Westminster, expecting to be housed by the city council, which already had to tackle an enormous demand from the British people and from people who were long-standing residents of Westminster or had family connections there. Children were growing up and wanted alternative accommodation to a room in their parents' house. That situation, coupled with the driving out of the private landlady, who has always in the past provided short-term accommodation for young people, many of whom are highly mobile and simply want accommodation on a short-term basis, has made the housing problem of places such as Westminster unique.

The policies that the Government have recently adopted, including that of making it possible for private individuals to take in lodgers without being bedevilled by half a dozen inspectors and to earn a modest amount of money—about £3,000 a year—without having to fill in complicated tax returns, have helped to free up accommodation for many young people.

It is a fact that 35 per cent. of all the people on waiting lists are under 25, and many of them are unmarried. Many of those people would have been willing to take a small flat or rooms in a private house if those had been available, but they resorted to the council because there was no alternative, especially in inner cities, as the cost of the housing available in the private sector was beyond their means. They turned to the council, not because they wanted council housing but because that was the only available housing that they were able to afford.

All those factors distort many of the so-called statistics that the Labour party likes to hurl at the Government as a testimony to their supposed failure to provide adequate housing. It is the responsibility of everyone in the House to ensure that those policies are reformed. The Government are determined, and their latest consultation paper continues to meet those problems head on, so they are to be commended.

The result of those restrictive policies has been that all sorts of palliatives, such as housing associations, have been adopted. Although housing associations provide low-cost housing, they do so at heavily subsidised rates. Those subsidies would not be necessary if we freed up some of the property suffering from planning blight, such as the enormous number of empty dwellings over shops. The dwellings cannot be let for residential use because, under planning regulations, the buildings are zoned for commercial purposes. They have stood there for years becoming derelict. I recall writing a paper on the subject back in the mid-1970s, long before I became a Westminster councillor. The Government, sensibly and commendably, are tackling the problem head on, so that is another plus for them.

We also introduced the right to buy—a sensible policy, but one that still deals only with those who wish to own a property. Many people are mobile and want not property to own but property to let.

No mention has yet been made of the deplorable policies of councils such as Camden and Islington, which in the mid to late-1970s bought whole streets of houses, boarded them up and then let them to what became known as SLUGs, pronounced "slugs"—short life user groups. The SLUGs in turn let the houses to their chums, most of whom were socialists, to judge by the number of red banners that appear down the streets at election times.

That was another distortion of the housing market, because those councils were buying up massive areas in the inner cities and deliberately converting them into housing for council tenants. Furthermore, much of the housing was sub-standard, and that made it difficult for people to find properties in the private sector.

I am familiar with the situation in Westminster, because I was on the housing committee of Westminster council for two years, and in that time I was party to the implementation of many Government policies, such as designated housing. I say straight away that I have no vested interest in council housing, because I have never lived in, rented, bought or sold council accommodation, under the right-to-buy scheme or any other scheme. However, I have suffered from a slur put about by Labour members of Westminster council, who deliberately asked council officers to present them with confidential files on Conservative councillors and Conservative Members of Parliament—I ask hon. Members to note the word "Conservative"—who have bought freeholds in Westminster.

The council owns, or did own, a great deal of land in Westminster, for which it obtained peppercorn rents. In an attempt to raise money to build a large leisure centre, the Queen Mother centre, the council examined its assets and decided to get rid of the freeholds of many of those dwellings.

One of the people who bought the freeholds was the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), but he did not feature in much of the material printed in the newspapers early last week, because he is a Labour Member, and the councillors concerned, Andrew Dismore and Gavin Millar, deliberately asked the officers for files on transactions involving Conservatives. That is a scandalous use of privilege to bring about the disclosure of confidential file material to a national newspaper, and those people may yet have to answer for it.

Incidentally, I must point out that the Transport and General Workers Union bought the freehold of its building, Transport house, as did many other commercial organisations—at the market rate.

The Labour party may feel that the report about Westminster council gives it the opportunity to run another smear campaign. The report was leaked; none of us has yet seen it——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is in my office.

Mrs. Gorman: We should consider carefully the people who prepared the report. One of them, Mr. Tony Childs, who is now with the Audit Commission, is no stranger to controversy, because he was the solicitor and adviser to the hard-left Greenwich council for several years. During that time, the council was ill advised enough not to set a rate and it was eventually overruled by the district auditor. In the end, Greenwich ratepayers had to pay much more than they needed to pay. Greenwich council was also advised to have the temerity to take the Department of the Environment to court, because it did not consider that it was getting enough in its grant settlement.

That individual, whom I maintain is highly politically motivated, helped to produce the report, which we are given to understand is peppered with emotive language. That is what has given rise to the quotable quotes in the initial report supplied to the press. We have heard the case for the prosecution; I am waiting to hear the case for the defence.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: No, I shall not give way, because I am obeying the request from the Chair to be as brief as possible.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a precise point. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is putting into the mouth of the person to whom she referred the comments of Mr. Magill, the district auditor. I know, because I was the objector, all the reports are in my office and I have read them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is certainly not a point of order for the Chair.

Mrs. Gorman: While we are on that subject, Mr. Magill was put into the job by Touche Ross, a firm that, by prolonging the inquiry over many years, has been claiming £250 an hour for every hour served by him. Westminster people have also had to fork out for that.

I have dealt with the difficult problems of Westminster council, and I shall now deal with its extremely credible record both of housing homeless people and of dealing with the unique problems of the area. Only 20 per cent. of the people of Westminster own their own homes, compared with 60 per cent. nationally. That means that there was an enormous gap between the people who could afford to buy their homes and people who could find only rented accommodation—low-income people in either council housing or housing owned by associations such as the Peabody Trust and the Guinness Trust.

It was to deal with that deficit of middle-class, middle-income people who could not afford to buy property in Westminster that the council decided to implement the designated sales policy, for which there was total Government approval. Through designated sales, many people who did not wish to buy council property in an area that was not congenial were allowed to choose to exercise their right to buy within a designated block, which did not have to be in the area in which they were living.

There was also the cash incentive scheme, to which the Minister has already referred. That allowed residents who wanted to move out, especially people who were retiring, to use the equivalent of the rebate that they would have received had they bought their apartment or house—but only if they were purchasing property elsewhere. The money did not go into their pockets; there was no giveaway. It had to be used to find accommodation in areas where there were properties that they found more congenial. That again is part of Government policy.

[Mrs. Gorman]

As a result, council tenants, housing association tenants and people from the waiting list were able to find accommodation under designated sales. Of all the sales under that scheme, 96 per cent. were to people whose original residential area was in Westminster. It is not true that hundreds of people came from outside Westminster and bought flats from the council at cheap prices.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: I will not give way.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before the hon. Gentleman begins his point of order, let me say that I hope that it is about something on which the Chair should rule in relation to procedures before the House. I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I shall certainly reflect on that matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is not it clear that in refusing to give way, the hon. Lady recognises that there is a counter-case that she does not want to be put?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is a senior Member of the House and has shared with me years on the Public Accounts Select Committee. He knows that that was not a genuine point of order. I hope that in future he will be a little more responsible.

Mrs. Gorman: If the hon. Gentleman can contain himself and not keep interrupting me, he may get a speaking spot himself.

Westminster council, with its unique problems of large numbers of people coming into the area and the difficulty, because of high property prices, of its own residents being able to buy property, took part in the London mobility scheme. It was a scheme operated between boroughs so that if people were waiting to be housed in one borough and another borough had empty properties, boroughs could do a swap and enable people to find accommodation.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mrs. Gorman: It was extremely unpopular——

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Twice, we have had examples of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) trying to make a point of order when he could not. There is a constant run of sedentary interruptions making it difficult to listen to the speech. I should be grateful if hon. Members would listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) because what she is saying should be heard on both sides of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for that helpful suggestion.

Mrs. Gorman: It seems that the hon. Member for Workington is slightly agitated about the fact that I am telling truths about which his party does not wish to know and does not wish to go on the record.

Under that scheme, relatively few people were rehoused outside the borough. Most of the boroughs did not want to take other borough's residents. Unfortuntely, fewer than 2 per cent. were, in the emotive language used by the Opposition, "shunted out". In fact, few people were housed outside the Westminster council area during the period covered by the report.

Last, but not least, we must deal with those homeless people who live on our streets. It is true that the number of people who are sleeping rough has increased enormously since the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 was introduced. That is partly because people were attracted to the city and thought that they would find accommodation, which, unfortunately, was not available.

Of the people housed temporarily by Westminser, none of them stayed in temporary accommodation for more than a year and, at present, the waiting time is down to under six months. That is a creditable record, not matched by many of the boroughs around Westminster that deliberately put people in extremely grotty hotels and often basic accommodation in and around the central Westminster area.

Camden currently has 295 people in almost sub-standard accommodation and does not seem to care that people are living in poor accommodation. Hackney pays for 430 temporary households in Westminster. The story of temporary housing in Westminster is largely one of other boroughs putting their residents into temporary accommodation there.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Would the hon. Lady clarify a point in which she referred to my local authority of Camden? Is she saying that there are 295 families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation or 295 individuals, because there are no families who come under Camden's remit who are in bed-and-breakfast or hostel accommodation and there have not been for more than a year.

Mrs. Gorman: I accept the hon. Lady's intervention. I am dealing with official figures which have been provided by Westminster council—*[Interruption.]*—on privately leased units in the city of Westminster. I make no bones about that. Camden has 295 units which are currently leased in the City of Westminster. The situation in Westminster is not one of failure to meet its obligation under the housing responsibilities laid on it—far from it. It is dealing with an extremely difficult and almost unique set of circumstances and doing it responsibly and with admirable zeal.

Another scheme that the council adopted, which was enormously successful in improving the quality of housing, was the housing improvement area scheme, in which Westminster co-operated with the private sector—individual or commercial landlords—and put up half the money under Government schemes to improve areas. Places such as Pimlico benefited from that scheme and improved out of all recognition, as did parts of Paddington in north London.

By improving the general tone of the neighbourhoods, the council made the opportunity to buy more attractive in places where formerly tenants wanted only to get out. Again, the council was both stabilising and assisting the population with sensible policies. All those policies, Government-backed and legal, were undertaken by Westminster to deal with its unique circumstances.

I shall briefly and finally deal with accusations of gerrymandering on the grounds that the council deliberately planted people in marginal wards or Labour wards with a view to influencing their political representation. At the 1990 election, which is discussed in the district auditor's report, five Labour wards returned Conservative councillors. Not a single council flat was sold in two of them—West End ward and Maida Vale ward. There was not a single council house sale to a yuppie or a local or anybody. In the marginal ward of Victoria, which covers this area and where Labour has always thought it might win, not a single council flat is available for sale. So there is no question of gerrymandering.

In another one of those five wards, Little Venice, only 26 units of accommodation were sold, but the Tory majority was much greater than that. The Labour party was wiped out. In Churchill ward, only 35 units of accommodation were sold. Again, that was nothing like the overall majority which the Conservative party had and it was certainly not influential. In Bayswater ward, 105 units were sold. In fact, sales in Westminster under the designated sales scheme and the cash incentives are still not as high as the council wishes. Only about 1,000 properties are affected under those schemes.

Westminster council owns 20,000 units of accommodation, which gives one some idea of how influential or otherwise the sale of properties was likely to be on changing the voting results in any one of those wards.

Mr. Rendel: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: No; I shall not give way because I am winding up my speech.

The reason why the council did so remarkably well in the 1990 election was its splendid record on low community charge, which was introduced at the second lowest rate in the country. Naturally, that meant that the sensible people of Westminster turned out in their thousands to vote for the Conservative party, knowing that if there was a Labour council, they were likely to get rates of the proportions in Lambeth, Southwark or Peckham or any other high-spending, poor-level accommodation Labour housing authority.

The last thing to which I wish to refer, because it is brought up time and again, is——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: No. I will not give way.

We keep hearing about houses that are boarded up. Westminster city council, just like other boroughs, occasionally boards up houses. If hon. Members want to see boarded-up houses, they need only take a walk around Lambeth. It seems that someone has cornered the market in corrugated iron in Lambeth, because so many of the houses are boarded up. Those properties are boarded up because of the threat of squatting. The only way in which squatters can be kept out is by boarding a property up until it is refurbished and tenants can return.

At the moment, there are only six squatted buildings in Westminster. Lambeth council has several hundred such properties. That is a measure of the success of Westminster council's policies. The allegations about boarding up property and empty property are nonsense.

I end with an anecdote. When I was a councillor for Millbank ward, we decided that properties on the very old-fashioned Rose street estate immediately to the west side of Horseferry road which had baths in the kitchens should be refurbished quickly. We devised a scheme whereby we offered the residents the opportunity to take another flat temporarily or to receive money for the cost of entering temporary hotel accommodation of their own choice for the period. The tenants co-operated. We boarded the flats up and refurbished them in six weeks flat. The tenants returned to their original properties, which now contained brand new kitchens and bathrooms.

If one had toured that estate and counted the boarded-up doors, one would have found whole blocks which were boarded up. However, they were boarded up for the very sensible reason that we wanted to carry out the refurbishment not around the tenants, as that might have taken 18 months, but quickly, cleanly and with the best interests of the tenants at heart.

When we consider those points, and read the report in its entirety, I am sure that the accusations laid at Westminster's door will be refuted.

6.51 pm

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): I am glad of the opportunity to make a contribution on a very important issue for which we have responsibility—housing. There can be no doubt that good housing is a fundamental in a decent society. However, we must remember that it involves more than shelter and a roof over one's head.

Housing is crucial to good health, to good education and to good family and social relationships. Wherever we look, the evidence is clear. If one is badly housed, one is more likely to suffer ill health. If one is badly housed, one is less likely to continue in full-time education. If one is inadequately housed, one is bound to be subject to more pressures in one's family and social relationships.

All Opposition Members—and, if they are honest, many Conservative Members—can tell stories of constituents whose lives have been blighted by the Government's failure to provide adequate housing for everyone. During the months that I have been here, colleagues have told me about the problem of housing in our inner cities. I do not argue with them that poverty is greatest and housing worst in our inner cities.

However, I do not want to consider the housing problems of the inner cities. Instead, I want to address an issue which I feel very strongly receives far too little attention in Parliament. That issue, which is becoming more important in our nation and is a festering sore in many of our cities, involves our outer-ring areas.

What is happening in the outer-ring areas of our cities? What is happening on the housing estates which once offered a new start for a previous generation of inner-city residents? The Government's policies have consistently led to housing problems in those outer-ring areas being ignored. That is causing great resentment among the residents in outer-ring areas.

The Government's approach to housing finance is almost obscene. They allocate money not on the basis of housing need, but as prizes for competitions which they have invented. Prizes for the estate action competition take up 20 per cent. of the 1993-94 capital spending budget. Two thirds of the £40 million worth of prizes for the housing action trusts went to just two locations.

In the city of Birmingham, the recent housing investment programme bid for £92 million saw £41 million top sliced for estate action, leaving a mere £22 million for all the council housing in the rest of the largest city in western Europe. With regard to the urban renewal scheme,

[Ms Estelle Morris]

four areas of Birmingham each receive £3 million, while the private housing stock in the rest of the city shares £19 million.

The situation is clear. The way in which the Government's housing policy operates means that the little money available for housing, both in the private sector and the rented sector, is concentrated in a few mainly inner-city areas. As Government policy intended, that money acts as a magnet for other resources from the council's own budget and from elsewhere.

Over the years, there has been a proliferation of dedicated schemes and special projects and the continued allocation of funds on a competitive basis. The result of that is clear. There has been an increase in the division between housing winners and housing losers. That is not the fault of local authorities. The figures to which I have just referred are not the fault of Birmingham city council or the way in which it would like to allocate its housing resources.

Mr. Baldry: Does the hon. Lady accept that no one obliges Birmingham to bid for estate action, for housing action trusts or for any of the other initiatives she mentioned? All those decisions, including what bids to make and how to make them, are decisions for Birmingham city council.

Ms Morris: The Government's guidelines encourage city councils such as Birmingham to make HIP bids with regard to other resources which might take the form of city challenge or estate action funds. Does the Minister accept that it is his Department that asks city councils to focus attention on areas of greater housing need and to focus resources within those areas? The Minister should consider the directions in the HIP bid guidelines for local authorities.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that Birmingham city council's HIP bid, which Ministers considered, set out very clearly—and the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction attended a presentation in Birmingham in this regard—the housing needs across the city in the public and private sector totalling £200 million? However, the council was allowed to bid for only just under £100 million and, of that, the council received an allocation of less than £50 million. Does not that show the ridiculous way in which the Government allocate housing finance and how that does not in any way match the housing needs in Birmingham and other cities?

Ms Morris: My hon. Friend is right. We both have constituents who suffer as a result of the way in which the Government allocate housing money. I also attended the presentation when the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction heard Birmingham's HIP bid. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) was as delighted as I was by the compliment that the Minister paid Birmingham city council for the way in which it runs its housing stock and the way it acts as a housing authority.

If local authorities want money, they must play the Government's game. However, the way in which the rules are written mean that many areas and many people never stand a chance of winning. According to the Government's guidelines:

> "Estate Action will increasingly focus on the re-generation of larger, more run down estates."

Housing action trusts are offered for larger inner-city estates. City challenge draws together initiatives in urban and inner-city areas and urban renewal money is allocated on the basis of an area strategy. It is obvious that local authorities are constantly under pressure from the Government to focus resources in a few areas and usually in inner cities.

While Ministers tour the country for photo opportunities in successful projects, whole chunks and swathes of our housing estates receive absolutely nothing, and they are often outer-ring areas.

My constituency is one of the areas that the Government choose to ignore. Constituencies such as mine and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield attract very few of the scant housing resources. But we too have housing need. We have pockets of deprivation; I know that they are not as large as those in other constituencies. We have unfit houses; I know that the situation is not as bad as it is in some neighbouring wards. We have homeless people; I know that the problem is worse elsewhere.

Two in every 100 constituents in one of my wards have houses with outside bathrooms or toilets, or share such facilities. Despite the fact that the number of elderly people in my constituency is in the top seventh nationally, 44·2 per cent. of houses have no central heating. It is the 14th worst constituency in that respect.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): When dealing with her constituents, does my hon. Friend encounter the same problem that I find time and again when dealing with mine? They ask, "Why is the council's priority this rather than that? Why has it spent such a huge amount on that estate when it cannot even provide me with a date for something that is basic and fundamental?" Does my hon. Friend also find that, every time, she effectively explains that the rules about housing finance have been imposed upon the local authority by central Government 90-odd miles away? The quality of decision taken in Whitehall cannot be equal to the quality of decisions that could be taken nearer to the problems locally.

Ms Morris: My hon. Friend is right. We have seen massive centralisation in respect of decisions affecting very local matters such as a house in a street or a street in an area. I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents also ask him, "How bad does my house have to become before it falls into the category that the Government think need assistance?"

There is no doubt that constituencies such as mine have great housing need, but they are made to compete with areas that have even greater housing need. The 2 per cent. of my constituents without indoor facilities have to compete with the 4·6 per cent. in the neighbouring Sparkhill ward. The 44 per cent. of my constituents without central heating must compete with the 62·5 per cent. in the nearby Washwood Heath ward. The result if obvious—constituencies such as mine lose, and need is unmet.

Just as the proposed new Government guidelines for homelessness attempt to pit the homeless against the inadequately housed, so the Government's obsession with competition pits people with poor housing against people with even poorer housing. The Government should be under no illusion about the potentially devastating consequences of making the needy compete against the more needy.

The statistics show that outer-ring areas, constituencies such as mine, are often the losers when it comes to housing allocation, are where unemployment is increasing the most and where crime has risen the most. People in outer-ring areas have a growing feeling of isolation and community breakdown, and they consider that the Government are ignoring their needs and leaving them out.

I do not question the need of areas with city challenge and estate action status. I would be the first to welcome an attempt to regenerate those areas, but let us be clear about why special projects exist. The Government did not choose their strategy because it is the best way of meeting housing need; it is born out of the need to concentrate resources because there is not enough to go round. Their strategy is born of the political objective of eventually handing over publicly renovated houses to the private sector. That strategy is driven by the desire to take the role of social landlord from local authorities.

The Government have singled out my local housing authority as being one of a high standard, yet its housing investment programme allocation has fallen from £67 million to £62 million, £53 million and £49 million in recent years. The Government leave it with little discretion as to how to spend its money. The Government's policy has turned it, just as it has turned every other local authority, into a city of housing winners and housing losers. Conservative Members expect millions of citizens to live in conditions which none of them or their families would tolerate.

The housing crisis now extends far beyond the inner areas of our great Victorian cities. It is at the root of many other problems which we have discussed in the Chamber. Saddest of all, it is a crisis that the Government have never, and certainly not today, shown any ability to solve.

7.5 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): I am grateful to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). I hope that he will listen carefully, because it might enable him to get some of his facts more accurate than he did when we had a discussion on Radio Leeds on Thursday morning.

During the radio phone-in, the hon. Gentleman told listeners that not one penny of the money that had been raised from council house sales could be spent on housing. Perhaps on further reflection he will accept that that is not the case. Furthermore, the hon. Gentleman stated that the number of houses is getting "smaller and smaller" all the time. That is a quote from him. I hope that he will further reflect on the fact that that is not the case. As he knows, there are 2·5 million more houses in Britain today than there were in 1979.

Mr. Battle: I kept a note of what was said. I shall show the hon. Gentleman the transcript, because he seems to have a selective memory. I said that we were short of houses to rent. Under the Conservative Government, since 1979 the number of homes to rent in Britain has decreased by 2 million. Now tell me about the facts.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He worked himself up into his usual hysteria slightly more quickly than he normally manages, but I will gladly look at the transcript with him.

It appears that the misuse of facts is spreading to all opposition parties. On housing, we have a tremendously positive story, and it is not just the fact that there are 2·5 million more houses in Britian today than there were 14 years ago, but the encouraging construction figures, particularly in the private sector. Also, the year-on-year number of families who are accepted as homeless has been dropping for 18 months.

Is it not slightly unfortunate that, if we have two months of bad news, the Opposition and the pressure groups who talk about housing say that that is a trend, but, when we have 18 months of good figures, they say that it is too early to tell and we cannot judge the figures yet?

Elsewhere, the figures are looking better as well. Figures on the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation are immensely encouraging and must be welcomed. As my right hon. Friend the Minister said, today's figures on repossessions, showing a further substantial drop, are good news indeed.

Also useful are figures recently produced by the Bank of England on the extent of negative equity. They show that, between the first and third quarters of last year, the number of households with negative equity dropped from 1·8 million to 1·2 million, and that the total negative equity involved dropped from £11·7 billion to £7·3 billion. All hon. Members want the amount of negative equity to go down further, but that is a much more dramatic, impressive drop than was expected.

As joint chairman of the all-party group on homelessness, I find particularly encouraging the dramatic drops in the number of people sleeping rough. Independent figures collected by the London Homelessness Network suggest that the number of people sleeping rough in central London has dropped by two thirds over the past two years. All hon. Members would expect those encouraging figures to continue.

On this optimistic note, it is worth pointing out that there is more good news to come. Indeed, it is already in the pipeline. The new right of repair, which will come into force in April, will enable thousands of tenants in all parts of the country who have had to wait endlessly for basic housing repairs to have the work done privately under a certain cost ceiling, and to pass the bill to the local authority.

As has been said already, we have seen encouraging progress in terms of the reduction in the number of empty properties owned by the Government. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) gave a figure that he must realise is completely out of date, as it includes a huge number of individual units in nurses' hostels. If the suggestion is that each of those could be used to house a homeless family, that is a very worrying prospect. Such accommodation is clearly unsuitable for homeless families, and such an arrangement would be unsuitable for the nurses living on site.

The figures have been revised, and we now find that the proportion of Government-owned houses currently empty is much lower than was previously estimated. More important, the Government are taking a direct lead. Here I should mention the pressure that was announced in the Budget—especially the pressure on the Ministry of Defence, which, I willingly accept, has been the worst

[Mr. Hendry]

offender in this respect. If the Ministry of Defence is to maintain its defence budget, it will be expected to make better use of its housing stock. That is a move that I hope the whole House will welcome.

I also welcome the changes to be made under phase 2 of the rough sleepers initiative. I accept that there is concern about this matter. Last week, at the request of John Bird, the editor of *The Big Issue*, I looked at McNaughten house, which, under these proposals, may well be closed. Within a few hours, I spoke to the Minister, and an assurance was given that the Government fully accept the need for off-the-street accommodation and are committed to keeping it. In the case of an establishment like McNaughten house, the main question is whether the owners are seeking an extension of the lease.

I welcome the consultation paper on the review of homelessness legislation, which was published last week. It is vital that the Government take action to remove some of the distortions in the current housing structure. Like all other hon. Members, I receive many letters about housing. Most of these come not from people who are homeless. *[Interruption.]* I probably get rather more letters about general homelessness than does the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), as, being chairman of the all-party group, I am contacted by people in all parts of the country.

In my constituency, I receive a few letters from people who are homeless, but a much larger number from people who want help to secure a council house as they are in inadequate accommodation. Those people wait their turn, but never seem to make progress up the waiting list. One does not wish to discriminate against anybody, but the situation must be put into more balance.

Not everybody seeking a council house is in need of permanent council accommodation. Some people's needs would be met by short-term provision. Providing someone with a house for 20, 30 or 40 years—some council houses are passed on to other family members—is not necessarily the best, or even an appropriate, solution.

I object to the hysteria that has greeted the publication of the consultation paper to which I have referred. My right hon. Friend the Minister has referred to the suggestion that we could see a return to the "Cathy Come Home" situation. The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) referred to this matter on BBC Radio Leeds last week.

It really is unmitigated drivel. Since "Cathy Come Home", we have seen the introduction of income support to ensure a degree of social security for families——

Mr. Battle: It replaced family income supplement.

Mr. Hendry: And family income supplement was not in place in those days. More important, we now have housing benefit—introduced by a Conservative Government, of course. This benefit is available for use either in the private sector or in the public sector. Thus the extreme cases of homelessness depicted in "Cathy Come Home" simply could not exist today, and nothing proposed in the consultation document would result in the return of such a situation.

I should like to express some concern about three aspects of the consultation document. First, I hope that my right hon. Friend will assure us that those who are forced to leave home and are vulnerable will not find themselves on the street. This point was made forcefully by Centrepoint in a briefing that was sent to hon. Members.

Centrepoint does tremendous work in this field, as do other charities. One of its particular anxieties is that an abused mother should go to a housing office on a Friday evening only to find that, because she cannot be assessed immediately, she is left on the street over the weekend. It is important that we should be assured that such vulnerable people will be treated as urgent cases.

Sir George Young: I can give my hon. Friend a categorical assurance that circumstances such as he has outlined will never arise.

Mr. Henry: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for that assurance. Most of us believed that such would be the case, but my right hon. Friend's categorical assurance will be comforting to the charities in this field.

The second key element of the consultation document concerns the fact that the role of the private sector must be enhanced. I am certainly encouraged by the fact that the proportion of houses in the private rented sector is beginning to grow. That could be accounted for partly by the current housing situation, in which people who cannot sell their properties seek to rent them out, and those who are not ready to commit themselves to purchase go for renting in the meantime. However, I am not convinced that the changes proposed in this document will, by themselves, bring about the necessary growth in this sector. We need to go further.

I am encouraged by the extension of the tenants incentive scheme to become the cash incentive scheme. However, there is also a strong case for looking at the incentive scheme for tenants who move out of the public rented sector into the private sector. We need an assurance that provision will not be for a period of just six months, after which the people concerned will again be homeless, but will be for a significant period. There will be considerable scope for introducing such a scheme.

I encourage my right hon. Friend to talk to his colleagues in the Treasury about the proposal to extend the tax-free element of rental income. It seems to me quite reasonable that, if a person can rent out a room of his home for £60 a week, a similar income derived from the letting of a private house should be tax-free. This matter was eloquently dealt with in a pamphlet that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) produced last year. The principle could be applied to newly available properties.

We also need to move towards a strategy for vulnerable young people leaving home. Many such people going to university live in halls of residence. They are housed, fed, clothed and given social support.

Mr. Battle: The hon. Gentleman is quoting me.

Mr. Hendry: I have been saying this for a long time, and it is very similar to things that have been said by my right hon. Friend the Minister. I am grateful that, for once, the hon. Member for Leeds, West and I are in agreement.

We must consider the needs of people leaving home at the age of 16 or 17. Youngsters coming from backgrounds other than those from which they might well go to university are more vulnerable and need more help in the early stages. It is not enough to say that they can move into flats and fend for themselves—budget, cater and provide for all their own needs.

There is very encouraging evidence of the success of the Foyer scheme. This is a national network that concerns itself with the accommodation, training and work of young people. I hope that the Government will continue to provide backing in this area, and will move towards a national strategy to cater for the needs of young people leaving home.

I will touch briefly on only one other point before sitting down, as I recognise that a number of other hon. Members wish to speak. I believe that too much emphasis in the housing debate can be put on the need for new build accommodation. Figures such as 100,000 or 200,000 houses are bandied about, but too often those figures are unsubstantiated. In particular, I do not think that we should talk the whole time about new build when there are over 750,000 houses which currently lie empty in this country.

The Government are setting an example in terms of their housing stock. They are trying to help in the private sector—by far the biggest sector, with nearly 700,000 empty private houses—through the encouragement of housing associations and of managing agents. They are also trying to help through the flats above shops initiative, but I want them to go further. If, for example, a house is kept empty by a private individual, that individual is relieved of half his council tax bill on that property.

If it is a commmercial organisation which is wilfully leaving an empty flat above its premises, it should not be entitled to get the half rebate on the council tax. Therefore, where properties are owned by corporate organisations, those organisations should pay the council tax in full, so the costs of keeping those buildings empty are brought home to them.

Local authorities remain big offenders in the matter of empty houses. We heard earlier from the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland). Last year, I took part in a BBC television programme from the Moston estate in central Manchester, where 18 per cent. of houses are empty. Since then, the estate has been given a vast amount of money under the estate action programme to help bring some of the empty houses back into use. However, there will continue to be a problem until local authorities can prove themselves better wardens of the public interest and until they start to look after council stock better.

I am sympathetic to suggestions that, if councils do not make good use of properties, or do not bring them back into use quickly, those properties should be made available to individuals, who will bring them back into use as quickly as possible.

My final point relates to empty offices. We have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) talk about the volume of derelict land in London. A huge amount of that derelict land has been designated for office development. There are already the equivalent of 25 empty Canary Wharf towers which have been built in the central London area. The Government have said that they will encourage and support moves to change those buildings into living accommodation where it is appropriate and possible.

Such properties may be suitable for short-term accommodation for students, and for young professional people who want to live in the city rather than be forced further out into the suburbs. That is an idea whose time has come. I am not talking about every building, but there are a significant number where it is possible that that approach could be widely used.

There has been a significant improvement across the board in the statistics relating to housing and to homelessness. That is something which all hon. Members should welcome. The Government's policies are producing results, and are very much on track. I encourage my colleagues to reject the motion tonight, and also to make sure that sensible views are expressed as the consultation document moves forward. My hon. Friends must make sure that the views of our constituents, who have overwhelmingly backed that consultation document, are heard widely.

7.23 pm

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): This debate on housing is overdue, and I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends for using this Opposition day debate to place on record our criticisms of the Government's policy on housing, which have persisted since 1979.

If the Minister needs evidence of the Government's gross neglect, he need do no more than look at my town of Wolverhampton. In 1979, there were approximately 2,000 people on the waiting list; today, there is a waiting list of 13,000. Hon. Members should just consider the misery and the frustration which lie behind those statistics.

In the few minutes which I have allotted to me, I will make a few comments on housing co-ops. As a Labour Co-operative Member, and proud to be so, I wish to point out that housing co-operatives are an ideal way of harnessing personal responsibility to meeting housing need. They are important in terms of maintaining choice and diversity, as well as accountability to users.

Recently, the chief executive of the Halifax building society acknowledged that little choice exists in Britain between owner-occupation and local authority/housing association renting. What is needed is a recognition of the distinctiveness of co-operative housing, and the role it could play in a comprehensive housing strategy. More could be done to support innovations such as self-build for rent, and many different types of co-operative housing schemes.

When one considers that homelessness has increased by more than half since 1979—from just over 56,000 to over 148,000—and that homes needed for rent outstrip supply by 100,000 homes, the case for housing co-ops is overwhelming.

Unfortunately, the Housing Corporation's response to the substantial cuts—cuts of £320 million, as the Minister knows—to its approved development programme has been to reduce the share of that programme that is devoted to housing co-operatives from a promised 3·4 per cent. to 1·3 per cent. That commitment to housing co-ops of 3·4 per cent. was promised me by Sir Christopher Benson in 1992 when, as we know, he was chairman of the Housing Corporation. I was then, as I still am, the chairman of the all-party group on housing co-operatives. The Minister was a founder member of that group, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth).

Given that the percentage of all public spending on housing has been reduced from 6·1 per cent. in 1979 to 2·5

[Mr. Dennis Turner]

per cent. in 1993, I am sure that all hon. Members will recognise that that is a severe reduction of housing co-operative support from the Housing Corporation.

The Minister has supported tenant management co-operatives, and I understand and welcome the basic principles of the right to manage introduced in the Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. However, I fail to see how that makes up for the increase in housing provision, given that it is a right for existing tenants in existing homes. Indeed, local authority housing starts have fallen from 100,000 in 1979 to 2,000 in 1993.

With the current levels of homelessness, with 60,000 people in temporary accommodation, with 1·5 million people on waiting lists, and with 500,000 people in mortgage arrears and in the trap of negative equity, will the Minister and the Government admit that what is needed is not the tinkering that the latest document represents? Changing definitions does not change the underlying reality of the problems which those figures manifest.

Will the Minister admit that what is needed is a comprehensive strategy that recognises, and fully and equitably supports, a mix of tenures and ownership? That, as I have suggested, would harness the energy and the innovations which have been shown by all involved in co-operative housing.

7.29 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): I am delighted to be called to take part in this important housing debate. I should start by declaring my interest as a parliamentary consultant to the Institute of Housing, although our views do not always coincide.

My right hon. Friend the Minister will be delighted to know that I do not propose to talk about local housing companies, about which I have bent his ear on many occasions. I still say that it is an idea whose time has come. They increasingly could become the vehicle to deliver cost-effective, well-managed social housing.

We heard from the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) about his regrets that there is no longer a consensus about social housing. It is difficult to have a consensus with people who, rather than come into the 1990s and embrace radical ideas for the delivery of social housing policies that work and of quality services to tenants, prefer to remain in the 1950s and stick with policies with which they feel comfortable and safe.

There are occasions on which there is consensus between myself and Opposition Members and other people with whose views I do not always agree. For example, on 15 May 1992, *Tribune* magazine commented as follows about Labour's performance in the 1992 local government elections:

> "It would be wrong to blame the debacle of May 7th entirely on that of April 9th. In several of the councils where Labour did worst, it did not deserve to do any better, simply on the basis of its dire record in office . . . in many areas . . . Labour local government is lacklustre and incompetent. In a few it is simply corrupt. This is nothing new. Ineffectual or rotten Labour councils . . . have been a feature of political life for as long as anyone can remember".

I agree with that.

I also agree with the comments made by Councillor Simon Matthews, a Labour councillor in Hackney council. In May 1993, he said:

> "That we have failed many of the people of Hackney is beyond doubt. The sole objective of housing management in Hackney seems to be 'muddling through'—buying off tenants and councillors with short term expedients and gimmicks. Complacency is rife; incompetence is widespread . . . . Our figures for rent arrears and empty properties are the worst in the country. There totals are massaged . . . to show bogus improvements. With nearly 5,000 empty properties we have 4,000 homeless families in temporary accommodation—most headed by women, most of them black, an appalling record.

I agree with Labour Councillor Simon Matthews. There is consensus on some issues.

I also agree with the former leader of Liverpool city council, Mr. Keva Coombes, who said:

> "we are the worst landlord in Liverpool, probably in the country. All the new building has taken place and been run by a central unit and all despite the housing department. It takes genius—voids gone up, rent arrears soared . . . the breaking of the law on racial equality . . . I think the fundamental cause is frankly we've put the interests of the providers of the service, the workforce, above the interests of the tenants".

I agree with him on that.

I also agree with the director of housing in Hackney, who produced a report recently which said:

> "By April 1990, there was a massive backlog"

of cases of arrears

> "which was distributed as follows:
>
> Approximately 9,000 on the Estate Manager's Action List with arrears in excess of £13 million.
>
> 5,000 under investigation by the Rent Recovery Teams in the 6 District Offices with arrears in excess of £3 million;
>
> Another 4,000 in the DoLs or in the County awaiting Hearings or eviction warrants with arrrears of about £3 million."

The report stated that the whole process of recovering arrears was a series of built-in delays.

So there can be a consensus in social housing. I agree with the remarks that I have just read out. It is a consensus that we should welcome. For is it not true that too many Labour-controlled housing authorities are incompetent, corrupt and stuck in the past? They abandon the people who elected them in the first place. Is it not, therefore, the height of hypocrisy and humbug for Labour Members to protest about the conduct of one Conservative housing authority when they have so many skeletons in their cupboard?

Why do not Labour Members clean up their record and their back yard? I should like to ask the Labour housing spokesman, the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), the following questions. What has he done to force Labour councillors in Lambeth to collect their rent arrears—a staggering £22·7 million, or 30 per cent. of its rent roll as at March 1992? What has he done to persuade Labour councillors to get their act together in Lambeth? What has the hon. Member for Leeds, West done to persuade Labour councillors in Southwark to collect their rent arrears—a breathtaking £29 million as at March 1992? What action has he taken to clean up the incompetence and corruption of Hackney council?

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Streeter: I will give way to the Labour Front-Bench spokesman so that he can answer my questions.

Mr. Battle: What has the Minister done about those Conservative authorities which have the highest rent arrears in Britain—Brent, which has been Conservative for some time, and the Minister's constituency borough of Ealing, which has the highest rent arrears in Britain? While the hon. Gentleman is on about housing and Conservative councils, let him tell us why the list of top rent increases includes 17 Tory authorities.

Mr. Streeter: The House will notice two things. First, the hon. Member for Leeds, West cannot tell the difference between a council which has been Labour-controlled for decades and two authorities which have recently changed to Conservative control, which must now deal with the mess that Labour councillors have left behind. Secondly, the House will notice that the hon. Gentleman singularly failed to answer my question.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): While we are quoting councillors, may I quote a councillor in Plymouth? I am reading from a document put out a few years ago. It says:

> "The Tories clung to power in Plymouth by just one seat and their policies on education, the health service, the poll tax and many other things are hated. They have had their day."

That was a comment by a Social Democratic party councillor who was the housing spokesman for the SDP, who was the hon. Gentleman who has the floor.

Mr. Streeter: I anticipated that. The hon. Gentleman should realise that there is great rejoicing in heaven for every sinner who repents.

The truth is that Labour Members do nothing to sort out the corruption and incompetence of Labour authorities throughout Britain. They speak like lions in the Chamber, but like lambs when they go back to their constituencies. They are incapable of cleaning up their own back yards.

Mr. Rendel: If it is true that the local authorities to which the hon. Gentleman refers are so incompetent, why does he not mention that the Government's own housing policies are so bad that they as landlords have a worse record for housing vacancies than the local authorities?

Mr. Streeter: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, I will come to a part of my speech in which I shall urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to maintain the pressure on the Ministry of Defence to release empty houses in Plymouth. I urge the hon. Gentleman to be patient.

I wish to deal briefly with the Government's proposed changes in access to local authority and housing association tenancies. Again, I want to find a consensus with people with whom I do not usually agree. I should like to read an extract from an article written by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). It has already been quoted, but it bears repeating. He said:

> "We need . . . a housing waiting list structure that positively rewards those who have tried their best to take responsibility and have some order in their lives . . . a stable relationship before having children. We need to encourage them rather than punish other people. They need to know it's worth waiting . . . People . . . are not fools. If you can't get a house by waiting on the list, you present the maximum number of reasons why you should receive priority. That is not encouraging people to accept responsibility in their own lives and society."

That was from *The Independent* in July 1993.

On 21 January 1994, *The Guardian* reported:

> "Sir George Young . . . believes the criteria should be changed so that the individual needs of all families on the two separate routes to a rented home—homelessness and housing waiting lists—are weighed against other. In principle he is right. The proportion of new lettings going to homeless families has swelled to 45 per cent. In some areas the only available way to be rehoused is to make yourself homeless. This is simply absurd."

I agree.

The truth is that the Government's proposals are intended to produce a fairer system of access to local authority and housing association properties. They have nothing to do with bashing single parents; they have nothing to do with them.

It is worth considering what might happen to two couples in my constituency. The first couple may wish to leave the parental home or the home of friends with whom they are currently staying. They want local authority housing to raise a family, when they can afford to do so. They want to be settled in that long-term home before they raise their family. All young people should be given that advice.

Why should they have to wait longer for the home of their choice than another young couple who have no settled home or financial resources, but who have gone ahead and had a child or children anyway? Why should they get priority over that first couple? What kind of signal does that send to young people who want a council house? The only way to get such a property is to make oneself homeless. One way of being classified as such under current legislation is, of course, to have a child.

I am not suggesting that women are deliberately getting pregnant to get council property. Opposition Members should read the article that I recently wrote for "Roof" to discover my view on the subject. We should encourage young people to plan their family once they have the resources to raise it properly. Our welfare system must encourage responsible behaviour, as the hon. Member for Brightside has suggested, and discourage irresponsible behaviour. If the Opposition fail to recognise that, they have no solution to offer.

Mr. Rendel: Will the hon. Genlteman give way?

Mr. Streeter: No. I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

We must maintain a safety net to prevent children from suffering. That is offered in my hon. Friend's proposals, because young people, whether single or in a couple, will be rehoused as homeless by local authorities if they have children. They will not, however, necessarily be offered long-term accommodation. If even *The Guardian* can accept that that is reasonable, surely Opposition Members can.

The Government's proposals are worthy of support. They are fair and they will encourage responsible behaviour. It is true that many local authorities are already implementing such a sensible approach to housing the homeless, and I pay tribute to them. I also pay tribute to the many local authorities, Conservative and Labour, which have done an excellent job in the past few years in difficult circumstances. Many have got their act together by reducing costs and carrying out repairs efficiently. Many have entered partnership deals with housing associations for the benefit of their citizens. Many are seeking to improve the services that they deliver to their tenants—helped by the compulsory competitive tendering arrangements. Many Conservative and Labour-controlled authorities are getting their act together, helped by Government legislation.

The Ministry of Defence is being far too slow in releasing houses in Plymouth for the use of local residents. I urge my hon. Friend to exert whatever pressure he can bring to bear on his colleagues at the MOD to ensure that

[Mr. Streeter]

those properties are released at the earliest possible moment so that local people can enjoy the benefit of them. I hope that my hon. Friend will take up that matter.

The one abiding truth is that too many Labour authorities, especially in London, are incompetent and corrupt. That is why those Labour Members who refuse to put their own house in order and who point the finger at one Conservative authority are not just an example of the pot calling the kettle black, but are guilty of the ultimate hypocrisy.

7.44 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Housing is the subject that most people come to our surgeries or write to us about. The shortage, indeed the acute shortage, of affordable rented accommodation causes immense hardship and misery. That was not recognised, however, in the rather complacent speeches that we heard today from Conservative Members.

If the Government really were interested in the welfare of the family, as they always claim, they would ensure that adequate, affordable housing was provided for those people unable to buy. At times, I find it heartbreaking to listen to the genuine accounts of housing hardship that are recounted at my surgeries. Those people are often in desperate need. If they were able to buy, they would not come to my surgery, but it is precisely because they cannot afford to service a mortgage, or are unable to obtain one because of their low incomes, that they look for local authority accommodation.

I do not pass judgment on their family circumstances, unlike some Conservative Members who believe that one should do just that. The one thing I know is that many people, often with children, need housing and should not have to put up with their current living conditions. Everything should be done to resolve their problems.

I write to my local council about such cases. I know full well that, in most cases, the response will be that the constituent is on the list and that an offer will be made in due course. That is understandable in view of the acute housing shortage locally and the very long waiting list, but it does not show when that offer will be forthcoming.

The reason for the housing shortage is obvious. In 1978, the last full year of the Labour Government, there were nearly 80,000 council house starts. Last year, there were fewer than 3,000 throughout the country. In my borough, Walsall, not a single council dwelling has gone up since 1979.

I make no excuse for the existence of any vacant properties. Of course all local authorities, be they Labour or Conservative, have an obligation to get vacant properties back into letting as quickly as possible. That obligation is all the more pressing at a time of acute housing shortage.

I know that my borough—for the moment, it is no longer Labour controlled, but that will soon change—has few vacant dwellings. Some dwellings are vacant because work needs to be done on them. Even if they were all returned to the housing stock for renting, the housing shortage would not be relieved, because since 1979 there has been a fall nationally of nearly 45 per cent. in investment in housing.

Bearing in mind the figures I have quoted, is it any surprise that council house building has virtually come to a stop? Is it any surprise that we have so many homeless people and such long waiting lists? Is it any surprise that we have families living in furnished rooms and many couples with two children, not just one, living in high-rise blocks of flats?

Many of those couples ask me how much longer they will have to wait before they are transferred to a house. But some of the best council housing stock has been sold off. We predicted that that would happen when the right-to-buy policy was introduced. In the main, it is those high-rise blocks that have been left unsold.

Today's edition of *The Birmingham Post* draws attention to a problem faced by people who bought flats, rather foolishly in my view, in such blocks. Those properties are virtually impossible to sell now, because no one will give a mortgage on them. Those people are prisoners in their own homes. They are willing to sell at a reduced price, but there are no buyers.

From 1979, the Government were determined virtually to stop council house building—and, moreover, to reduce existing stock substantially. When I returned to the House in 1979, I was put on the first Select Committee on Environment, to which evidence was given by senior civil servants and the then Secretary of State for the Environment—the present Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It was made clear then that Government policy would be to stop the continued building of council dwellings.

No one should be surprised about what Westminster council has done. Of course, Tory Members who have served on that council, and others who wish to act as apologists, want to present a different picture. The fact is, however, that Westminster council tried as hard as it could to reduce its housing stock substantially and offered council tenants bribes to get them out of the borough. How could anyone take seriously the claim of some Conservative Members that those actions had no political implications?

Although he has not made a statement in the House, the Secretary of State for National Heritage has admitted that discussion of the political implications took place at some meetings—understandably, he said. Westminster's political aims were clear: to ensure that the council remained Tory-controlled and to ensure that the more marginal parliamentary constituency was also retained by the Tories.

Responding to questions last week, the Prime Minister spoke of "allegations" about Westminster council, but these are not allegations. They are the provisional findings of the district auditor, following an exhaustive inquiry. One hon. Member said that the inquiry had been very costly. Does she suggest that it should not have taken place? Surely the district auditor's findings have justified the cost. It is interesting to note that, even when all this was happening, one or two Conservative members of Westminster council were courageous enough to argue that it was wrong; I consider what occurred to be one of the most shameful episodes ever to take place in local government.

A few years ago—much to the annoyance of Conservative Members—I said that Lady Porter's conduct over the cemeteries should have disqualified her from serving on any local council, or in the House of Commons. I hold that opinion even more strongly now: Lady Porter has no right to take part in public life. I hope that the time will come when she must explain her actions in person, but she seems somewhat reluctant to return to the United Kingdom.

In a long speech, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford) gave us a list of justifications for what had happened in Wandsworth. In my view, however, Wandsworth was trying to do exactly what Westminster did, and its behaviour was equally shameful.

In some respects, there is no difference between the parties—*[Interruption.]* I hope that Conservative Members will listen to what I am saying. The parties agree that most people want to buy homes of their own. That is entirely acceptable, and there has never been any dispute about it. Labour Members are owner-occupiers—*[Interruption.]* The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), seems to wish to intervene from a sedentary position. Let me repeat that there is no difference of opinion on this point——

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Winnick: No, I will not.

In the late 1960s, a Labour Government introduced the option mortgage scheme, whose purpose was to encourge people on relatively low incomes to become owner-occupiers. Such conduct would be strange, coming from a party that supposedly opposed owner-occupation, as Conservative Members claim that Labour does.

Mr. Thurnham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is clearly suffering from severe amnesia.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not for the Chair to assess hon. Members' state of health.

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) has just suggested that I repeat what I said earlier, so I shall do so. It was a Labour Government who introduced the option mortgage scheme in the late 1960s, to encourage owner-occupation among those whose income would otherwise have posed difficulties. It is not my fault if Conservative Members do not wish to be reminded of that.

A substantial minority—not 5 per cent., 10 per cent. or 15 per cent., but 25 per cent. or 30 per cent. of people—will never be in a position to buy their homes, because of their relatively low incomes. That is where the party difference occurs. My hon. Friends and I believe that most of those people should be able to obtain affordable rented accommodation, which should be supplied by local authorities or genuine housing associations.

It should not be forgotten that local authority accommodation was provided in the first place precisely because of the state of private dwellings, which had become slums or near-slums. We would not think it from what Conservative Members say, but local authorities began to play a dominant role in housing provision because of what was happening in the private rented sector. I make no apology for my view that local authorities should continue to play a major part in the provision of rented accommodation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) admitted, local authorities have made some mistakes, as a result of the pressure imposed by Governments of both parties to keep costs low. High-rise blocks are an example. None the less, there is much to be proud of in local authority housing—certainly in my borough, and in many other parts of the country. There is also a role for genuine housing associations, as there always has been.

Unlike Conservative Members, I do not believe that the private rented sector can supply adequate accommodation for those who are unable to buy; I do not believe that it can be brought back to any large degree, and I do not think that it can provide the secure accommodation that is needed now. The people who write to me and visit my surgeries do not want to be housed just for six or nine months, with no form of security; what good is that to them? Nor do they want to pay exorbitant rents. Conservative Members should realise that those people want decent homes. They cannot afford to buy; they want to live in secure accommodation, knowing that they can live there for a long time. What is wrong with that? Because of Government policies, however, it is not possible.

Labour Members have always said that the two essentials are jobs and decent housing. The Government have done much to undermine the provision of both. They have brought back large-scale unemployment, which has affected many people who could be working in the building industry. They have implemented the same policies continuously since their return to office in 1979. Because they have not allowed local authorities to build as they used to, many people now live in misery and hardship.

If we, as Members of Parliament, want decent housing for ourselves, why should that not be possible for our constituents who are unable to buy? Why should we punish them for their low incomes? We are right to engage in today's debate, and to continue it subsequently. At the next election, we shall explain to people why there is a housing shortage—a housing crisis—and why so many people have been punished in the way that I have described.

We require a Government who are determined to ensure that those who cannot afford to buy are not punished, but can live in decent accommodation. That is the purpose of a Labour Government in housing matters, and that is the right policy.

7.59 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I came to the Chamber today unprepared to speak, but then I heard the extraordinary speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

Having been involved in the fringes of housing policy in the Cabinet Office for many years, and having written a considerable amount about the subject, I felt that the extraordinary statements that he was making were divorced from facts, filled with cynicism, horrific in the use of dismissive words such as "disgraceful", and designed to whip up dissension in the Chamber. His speech was wholly unhelpful to an important area of national policy.

For many years, we have tried hard to help people to reach some consensus about these crucial issues. I have been involved in inner-city policy, and there have been partnerships all over the country—in Leicester, Teesside and South Wales. When I inadvertently, in my youthful inexperience, called the hon. Member for Blackburn my hon. Friend, he said quickly, "I am not your friend," dismissing at a stroke the partnership history of housing in which I had been involved for all those years.

It was horrific that his speech contained no praise for the housing action trusts and no reference to the marvellous

[Mr. Hartley Booth]

number of people to whom we have managed to give real rights in council housing. There was no reference to the charter that we gave council tenants in the early 1980s.

I met council tenants in Hackney, where I worked. They were filled with praise for the policy. They had been council tenants for many years, and they were at last enfranchised and could treat their houses as their own homes. They were able to paint their own front doors thanks to our policies. Was there any reference to that by the hon. Member for Blackburn? Not at all.

Dismissing for a moment those who have been hurt by negative equity, was there any reference to the hundreds of thousands of people who, since the rise in home ownership from 55 per cent. in 1979 to 67 per cent. now, enjoy the freehold ownership of their own homes? Was there a reference to that in the balanced and mature speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn? Not at all—there was only cynicism.

Was there a reference in his speech to anything that we had done correctly? He made no reference to the new rental options that we have provided, or to how we have helped so many people to maintain and look after both council houses and their own homes by providing insulation and other assistance. None of those policies had the slightest mention in his speech.

Instead, we heard one of the most gall-ridden speeches I have ever heard. How could a leading Labour spokesman have come to that Dispatch Box to tell us that we were responsible for so much gerrymandering because of Westminster, when the central tenet of Labour policy since the 1930s and since Herbert Morrison has been to build the Tories out of town after town? How could the hon. Gentleman come to the Dispatch Box and not once mention that fact?

In Putney, that policy returned a Labour Member of Parliament for many years, and we have heard the Wandsworth story this evening. Even in Norwich, the Labour party used the same gerrymandering Morrison policy. Labour councillors in south Norwich were using the same device in Eton ward. They put the worst council houses and problem families there in order to destroy the best Tory ward. We have heard that story time and again.

Even today, the Labour spokesman has the gall to say that the Conservatives are manipulating people. Even in my borough of Barnet, houses have been brought up by Camden council in a cynical attempt to destroy a Conservative area.

When Labour councils buy houses in Barnet and other Conservative areas, they put their very worst problem families into those wards. If that is not an exploitation of ordinary, good people I do not know what is. It is quite preposterous for the Labour party to say that we are cynical about human nature.

Last year and the year before, I was involved in a survey of what constituted the vacant, void property in Britain. When I was in the civil service, I constantly met the proposition that there were void properties but they were all in the wrong places. It was suggested to me that we had empty cottages in the highlands of Scotland that were no use for the homeless people in London. We looked into where those empty void properties were, and discovered that there were 83,000 void properties owned by councils, 18,000 in London.

If, as hon. Members have rightly suggested, we discount those that will soon be repaired and those that will be filled in a short time, and if we are pessimistic about all the discounting, there are 20,000 empty houses in council ownership that could be used for the homeless today. They are all or nearly all in Labour or Liberal-controlled areas. The honours are shared in London between Tower Hamlets and Hackney among others. Parts of the list have been read out today.

It has been said that Conservative Members came armed with bits of paper from Central Office. I have not seen any bits of paper from Central Office. I have learnt from many years' experience. Housing policy in those places is cynical. It is part of the old empire-building process that Morrison began.

Having found all those void properties, I made a proposal that was eventually published in a book called "Into the Voids", suggesting that ordinary homeless people could use those properties. I have had nothing but negative responses from many Labour council leaders around the country. However, I have had endless requests for interviews, and tremendous support from homeless people. I received a petition from hundreds of homeless people wanting to use my proposal.

What was my proposal? It was that those empty properties could be accessed by homeless people. If they spotted that a house had been empty for three months, they could slap a notice on the door of the council saying, "We will be your tenant in 14 days if you cannot show that you use it." If the property is used within 14 days, everyone wins, because someone has a home. However, if it is not used, the homeless person can use the property.

What reaction did I get from Labour councillors? What do they say about the proposal? They say that it will never work, because we cannot trust homeless people to do all the necessary renovation work.

All over the world, people of ordinary abilities are building their own homes, not just renovating them. Today, the largest sector in housing in Britain is not Barratt, Taylor Woodrow—which was referred to earlier by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) from a sedentary position—Laing or any of the others. It is self-build. We have 6 per cent. self-build in this country. The figure is 20 per cent. in Germany, 6 per cent. in Scandinavia and about 10 per cent. in America.

We should trust ordinary people to renovate houses themselves. If they can build, surely they can renovate. The Labour councillors around the country said, "But these people do not have any money." The Conservatives, through good, sensible policies, have given homeless people the money to use. We give them a dowry. The moment they become tenants, they can use housing benefit, if they are homeless and unemployed.

My suggestion has had a marvellous response from the Department of the Environment, from Ministers who have been open-minded and encouraging, contrary to the proposals and the negative response from the Opposition. The sensible proposal is to commit that sum of money —the dowry for homeless people—to pay for the renovations that they cannot do themselves.

Mr. Rendel: Given the encouragement that the hon. Gentleman has had from Ministers at the Department of the Environment, has he persuaded them to persuade the Ministry of Defence to start the policy with its empty properties?

Mr. Booth: It is probably a matter of consensus in the House that the 10,000 or so homes owned by the Ministry of Defence should be used as soon as possible. I thought that I heard an intervention earlier from the Front Bench saying that they will be used as soon as possible. I hope so. It is no part of my contribution to the debate to defend the failure of the Ministry of Defence to dispose of those houses even sooner.

The Government place tremendous store by a successful housing policy for all our people. We have the right policies and will go on having the right policies, because the Ministers have imagination and listen to new proposals. They have been listening throughout the debate. I encourage the House to support Ministers.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I understand that the winding-up speeches will begin at 9.20 pm. Six hon. Members are hoping to catch my eye. With a bit of co-operation from all hon. Members, I may be able to call them all.

8.12 pm

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I shall try to keep my comments brief so that other hon. Members can get in.

My interest in housing started as an elected representative back in 1970, when I was elected to the Solihull county borough council. Immediately, my talents were noted, because I became the Labour party spokesman on housing on that council, which is hardly surprising as I was the only Labour Member on the council at the time. I remember the people who came to see me. They made the same points: inadequate housing; the houses were too small for their family needs; they needed to move on medical grounds; or they had no decent home in which to live.

Coming to the House 22 years later, I hoped that I would hear something different after 19 out of the past 24 years in which Tory Governments have been in power. What is different now is that the situation is somewhat worse than it was in 1970. Why has the housing situation not improved?

We listened to the Secretary of State for Social Security at the Tory party conference—a normally mild-mannered man, or he likes to give that impression. But he suddenly found his bark at the conference last year. He blamed single teenage pregnant women for causing the problems of homelessness. He intimated that young teenage women were rushing out to get pregnant to qualify for a council property. It is probably not in the briefing from Tory central office, which has been circulating with some controversy on the Conservative Benches, but if he reads his Department's documentation, he will see that it says that only 2 per cent. of homeless households are headed by single people in the public sector.

Some of that 2 per cent. have no children and have been housed for special reasons, usually because of their vulnerability. The fact is that only three out of 1,000 public sector households are headed by a single teenage mother. But that did not stop the right hon. Gentleman making his attack on that most vulnerable group—single mothers. Those women are coping on their own, often in very difficult circumstances. Yet, to get cheap applause at the Tory party conference, the right hon. Gentleman managed, with others in the Cabinet, to blame them for the housing shortage.

There are empty houses all around Plymouth, Devonport. Many are former council houses that have been repossessed. During the heady 1980s, people were encouraged to buy their houses. Now they are being plunged into the Tory recession. Many people have lost their jobs. There has been a massive loss of jobs in the dockyard. In the 1987 and 1992 elections, we were told that that would not happen. Those people have had very little help from the banks and building societies, contrary to what we were told about a year ago by the Prime Minister.

What happens when those people's homes are repossessed? They find their way on the road to the city council and are then rehoused by the city council. The city council has now lost access to two properties: one that sold and is lying empty, often derelict and boarded up; and the other which is occupied. In and around my constituency, many private properties have been repossessed and are lying empty.

Contrary to the many speeches that we have heard from hon. Members on the Government Back Benches, many of whom are not in their places, the situation in Plymouth is good, because Labour-controlled Plymouth city council is not only working hard to maintain high standards and keep rents low, but has one of the lowest records of voids in the country—0·7 per cent. That means seven in every 1,000 properties are void at any one moment. They are mainly short-term between transfer of tenancies or are in need of repair.

Many other houses are empty. In my constituency, more than 200 properties are lying empty. Who owns those empty houses? Who has left those hundreds of homes lying empty? Often, whole estates are empty. Who owns those hundreds of vandalised houses? Who must pay to have security guards to guard those boarded up properties? Who is not collecting the rent? Who is ensuring that no council tax is collected from those houses? Which feckless uncaring landlord is destroying communities of people who have to live surrounded by boarded-up empty homes? Who has 675 empty properties in Devon and Cornwall?

The answer is the Government themselves. The large faceless bureaucracy of the Ministry of Defence has row on row of empty properties in my constituency. I must take issue with the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth), who said that there was a consensus on this matter, and that we all agreed. There may be a consensus among those sitting in the Chamber today, but it is certainly not shared by the Secretary of State for Defence.

Over the years, hon. Members on both sides of the House have tabled questions about empty properties. In October 1988, the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) asked about empty properties in Plymouth and he was told that a total of 486 housing units were in the ownership of the Ministry of Defence. The reply continued:

> "Over the next 12 months it is expected that 164 will be offered for sale to service personnel under the discount scheme, 278 will be sold on the open market".—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1988; Vol. 139, c. 62.]

After waiting a year to see what happened, in April 1989 my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), who spoke extremely well in the debate, asked how many

[Mr. David Jamieson]

Ministry of Defence properties were empty. He was told at that time that 14·4 per cent. of Ministry of Defence properties were empty. Mr. Neubert went on to say:

> "Some of these vacant properties are in the process of disposal, others will be undergoing major maintenance or refurbishment, and yet others will be allocated and awaiting the arrival of families to the unit."—[*Official Report*, 20 April 1989; Vol. 151, c. 277.]

What has happened in that time? What urgent action has been taken by the Ministry of Defence? In June 1989, in reply to a question about a report on empty Ministry of Defene houses, Mr. Sainsbury, the Minister said:

> "The report to which he refers recognises that measures are being taken to improve performance in the future."—[*Official Report*, 13 June 1989; Vol. 154, c. 693.]

By February 1980 we were certain that things had changed. In reply to a question, again put by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith, Mr. Hamilton said that some of the vacant properties were in the process of disposal. So it goes on. The same dreary answers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. On three occasions the hon. Gentleman has mentioned Ministers by name. That is not done in the House. The hon. Gentleman must refer to them by their titles.

Mr. Jamieson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I stand corrected.

I received a letter from the Ministry of Defence dated 17 January and that is why I take issue with the hon. Member for Finchley when he says that there is consensus on the matter. When I asked how many dwellings were owned by the Ministry of Defence and how many were vacant I was told:

> "The majority of the vacant quarters were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, already allocated to service families who were due to move in shortly".—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1994; Vol. 235, c. 443.]

For six years the Ministry of Defence has been telling us that families will be moving in shortly or that houses are under repair. The one thing that does not change is the number that are empty.

When I asked my question last year, 9,291 properties were empty. The Minister will recall that six months ago I asked him to make representations to the Secretary of State for Defence on the matter. I am sure that he did so, but as a result of his actions, in December 1993, 10,112 properties were empty—14·4 per cent. of those properties are still vacant. Plymouth city council with 0·7 per cent. vacancies is 20 times better than the Ministry of Defence.

What is the effect of those empty properties on the taxpayer? No rent is collected and no council tax is paid, maintenance costs are high and the Ministry of Defence has to pay security guards to protect them. At the same time, local councils throughout the country, including Plymouth, are paying for people who could easily occupy those properties to go into bed-and-breakfast accommodation. The taxpayer is paying for those empty properties and for the temporary accommodation.

There is a further cruel irony in all this. Last year in Plymouth, 75 of the families that were deemed homeless were former service personnel; people who had come to the end of their time with the services and left or been made redundant. Those 75 families of service personnel were given six months and then received notice to quit their properties. They then became homeless and Plymouth city council became responsible for housing them. The houses that they formerly occupied then stood empty and boarded up. The Minister must take up that matter with the Secretary of State for Defence so that urgent action is taken and we do the best by the homeless and by the taxpayer.

There is a road to success. We have had success with a few homes in Plymouth that were owned by the Ministry of Defence. Eight months ago, in one small cul de sac, Mantle gardens, each of the 26 properties had their windows boarded up after being broken by vandals. One property had lost its roof after people had broken in. Now, with the excellent partnership between Plymouth city council and Devon and Cornwall housing association, I am pleased to tell the Minister that most of those houses are occupied by families who, exclusively, were living in temporary accommodation or in the most appalling cramped conditions. There is an answer to the problem, but we need urgent action from the Ministry of Defence so that those houses are released.

When the boards were pulled off those houses it was not just the homeless and the taxpayer who benefited. A number of young men and women were given jobs repairing the houses, so jobs were created. Instead of being unemployed, 10 or 12 people are doing useful work in the community repairing and rebuilding properties.

I hope that when the Minister replies to the debate he will address this important problem which is particularly acute in my constituency in the south-west. Its solution will be a partial answer to the serious level of homelessness in my part of the country.

8.26 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I am pleased to participate in the debate. I apologise for missing the first part of it but I had to attend a meeting of the Select Committee on Social Security at which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State commented on housing benefit and on the housing market. I am sorry to have missed the opening speech by my right hon. Friend the Minister, but I look forward to reading it. However, according to the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth), I do not seem to have missed any enlightenment from the Opposition, so I doubt whether the contributions of Opposition Members will be worth reading.

I have enjoyed hearing the speeches by my hon. Friends. My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley made an excellent speech, particularly when he said that we should trust the people. I can see why it has taken so long for the Labour party to have a debate on housing. I cannot remember how many years it is since a debate on housing was initiated by the Opposition, but the Labour party's housing record is appalling.

The latest ombudsman's report on local government says that much the single largest group of complaints related to housing, about which there were 5,037 complaints, of which 2,257 related to the management of council houses, 1,155 to council house repairs, 210 to the right-to-buy policy, 721 to housing benefit and 240 to housing grants; and that is just a selection. There are plenty more and I recommend hon. Members to read the pamphlet entitled "Choose Your Landlord", which I produced recently.

Previous speakers have outlined Labour's appalling record in London. Lambeth, Hackney and Southwark councils alone have cumulative rent arrears of some £70 million, and on the latest figures, vacant houses total 3,400. I was sorry that the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland), who was speaking when I came into the Chamber, but who is not in his place now, did not allow any interventions.

There are many more points to be made about Manchester's housing record. I recently received a letter from a former councillor, Ann Carroll, which drew my attention to incidents that occurred during her service in Manchester between 1987 and 1991. She served on a number of committees, including the housing committee. She mentions the actions of the Labour-controlled council which she says

> "purposely kept council properties unoccupied for periods of up to one year and then moved in their own supporters, and . . . bought votes by allowing rent and rate arrears to become completely uncontrollable, as well as giving massive grants to minority groups and any left-wing organisations . . . After the hard left took control of the City, wards with Conservative Councillors were targeted. Council property was used as was the Council's nomination on housing association lettings . . . In 1990 rent and rate arrears were in the region of £30M with £2·6M written off from tenants who had moved. Hundreds of tenants owed up to 2 years' rent and whilst in arrears were allowed to move to larger premises."

Mr. Straw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thurnham: May I please finish the point that I was making? I shall then be glad to hear an intervention from the hon. Gentleman.

The letter continued:

> "Amongst those in arrears were council employees and an illegal immigrant who was in receipt of a weekly grant from the council. There were approximately 6,000 empty council properties, yet homeless families were accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation . . . The wards with the highest rate arrears were with Labour Councillors."

I shall now be glad to hear the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman has made a serious allegation about Manchester city council's policy. He has alleged that it maintained a designated sales policy. Was the issue referred to the district auditor? If so, what was the result?

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Gentleman will know that a number of matters were referred to the auditor. I have here quotations from the *Municipal Journal* of 30 July this year, from *The Daily Telegraph* of 5 January 1991, from the *Manchester Evening News* of 16 November 1990 and from the *Local Government Chronicle* of 21 September 1990, all of which deal with Manchester city council's work.

The council had to order an independent inquiry into its housing accounts after a series of multi-million pound accounting mistakes was uncovered. A council report concealed the fact that there had been major subsidy miscalculations and accounting errors. In the past, Manchester city council had rented out one house for £25 a week while renting the neighbouring property for £296 a week. The tenant in the latter was entitled to full housing benefit.

The *Manchester Evening News,* which revealed the case, repeatedly asked the local authority to justify its actions but the council failed to respond to suggestions that it had been ripping off the Department of Social Security and, therefore, the taxpayer. The newspaper story was published less than two weeks after private landlords had been warned that they could be taken to court for overcharging poor tenants on benefit.

In 1990, the ombudsman issued 15 further reports against Manchester city council over unreasonable delays in dealing with right-to-buy applications that affected thousands of tenants. Ombudsman Patricia Thomas said that the council's actions fell a long way short of providing a satisfactory response to her findings that an injustice was caused by maladministration.

An apology on its own is not enough. Manchester decided not to follow Mrs. Thomas's suggestion that it should compensate tenants for the extra costs that they had incurred or scrap demands for payment of the discount. The council had caused delays of between 18 and 60 weeks on applications. That is not a record of which any Labour Member should be proud.

Bolton council, my own authority, has dragged its feet over the years on the right to buy. A former Labour spokesman on housing, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) who was my predecessor in Bolton, said that she would allow the right to buy only over her dead body, if I remember rightly. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) was clearly suffering from a severe attack of amnesia if he thought that there was common ground between the parties on the question of ownership, because that was clearly not the case at that time.

I was elected in 1983. Of a total of 100,000 houses in Bolton, 26,000 were council houses. After 10 years of the right-to-buy policy, which has been successfully applied in most parts of the country, the number of council houses in Bolton has been reduced to 23,000, a reduction of a mere 3,000. Bearing in mind the average number of council house sales elsewhere in the country, it is clear that Bolton should have sold at least a further 2,500, which would have benefited the council to the tune of £25 million. The council could have used the money to repay its debts or for investment elsewhere.

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) was the author of the Labour party's latest housing document, but it states that the private rented sector badly needs a boost. One sees that that is only too true when one compares the privately rented sector in this country with that in other countries.

Of the countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, we have the lowest proportion of housing in the privately rented sector. In fact, our privately rented sector is less than half the average of the OECD countries. Let us consider the position of some of our competitors: West Germany's privately rented sector is four times the size of ours; and Switzerland, which has one of the highest standards of living, clearly has a much more successful housing policy than virtually any other country—its privately rented sector accounts for 56 per cent. of its housing; the private owner-occupied sector is 30 per cent., thus leaving a mere 14 per cent. as socially rented housing.

In the United States, 30 per cent. of property is privately rented, only 5 per cent. is socially rented and 65 per cent. is owner-occupied. In Japan, the privately rented sector accounts for 23 per cent., the socially rented sector for 15 per cent. and the privately owned sector for 62 per cent. It is only in this country that the socially rented sector is more than twice the size of the privately rented sector. There is clearly a major imbalance.

[Mr. Thurnham]

The Housing Act 1988 was described by Mr. Philip Gibbs, the president of the North West Landlords Association, as a brilliant piece of legislation. I have no doubt that it has changed the climate in which we can develop the private rented sector. *[Interruption.]* I do not know what the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) is laughing about. Surveys of tenants' attitudes reveal that tenants are more satisfied in a privately rented house than in social housing because in the latter they are faced with complaints such as those mentioned by the ombudsman. I recommend the report to the hon. Gentleman.

The 1988 Act provided the foundation on which to build a larger privately rented sector. I should like existing legislation to be amended to enable council houses to be sold to private landlords. The Housing Act 1980 established secure tenancies which provided the model for the successful assured tenancies. Under the 1988 Act, a council house can be sold to a private landlord only if he is approved by the housing corporation. I see no need for such an approval.

Mr. Pike: The hon. Gentleman is speaking about the growth of the privately rented sector but does he accept that, as a large proportion of housing in that sector will also depend on housing benefit, it will also in effect be socially rented housing? Should he not therefore be very careful about the context in which he uses the term "socially rented"?

Mr. Thurnham: If the hon. Gentleman cares to wait, I shall deal with that issue. He makes a valid point and I hope to be able to answer him in due course.

I should like the legislation to be amended so that a council house can be sold to a private landlord and so that the tenant can have full choice about who that landlord should be without the landlord having to be approved by the housing corporation. If the tenant has chosen the landlord, what can be wrong with allowing him or her to go ahead? I should like an extension of the right-to-buy policy—one could call it right-to-buy round two—to allow a much larger sale of council houses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) talked about the Institute of Housing for which he acts as parliamentary consultant. He mentioned the institute's interest in housing companies. I do not know whether I could go along with that, because I do not like such corporatist intervention in the housing market. I should prefer private landlords to take initiatives and make investments of their own accord rather than wholesale transfers.

The Institute of Housing has valued existing council housing stock at £40 billion or more. I think that that was a modest valuation but it shows the sort of sums that could be raised and which would go some way towards repaying the enormous debts of local authorities across the country. It could also provide a means for investment elsewhere.

If the Government are serious about promoting the private rented sector, I hope that they will extend the remit of the existing agencies—the priority estates project, or PEP, and the tenants participation advisory service, the TEPAS project—because both agencies do little or nothing to promote private rented housing. It is somewhere in their scope but I do not see it mentioned in any of the leaflets that they have produced. The Government should give those agenices a better remit than they have at the moment or introduce a new agency to carry out that function more effectively and to issue a code of good practice for landlords and tenants. A certain amount has already been done, but I would like it to be done more openly.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), who spoke very well during the debate, talked about the rent-a-room concession of £60 a week and called for it to be extended. I support that. In a parliamentary question which was answered today, I asked how many people benefit from the rent-a-room tax relief. I received the answer that information about the number of people who benefit from the scheme, introduced in the Finance Act 1992, is not yet available. I do not know when we shall obtain that information, but I hope that we can extend that concession to include a tenant under another roof and not only under the roof of the landlord himself.

A number of new tax benefits should be considered. We have seen the end of the business expansion scheme, but we could consider new extensions of it—son of BES. The firm of Johnson Fry, with Mr. Owen Inskip, has done an enormous amount to secure investment through the previous BES schemes. Many hundreds of millions of pounds have been invested—in fact, as much as £900 million has been invested through that route. The Government therefore need to consider new routes for continuing to attract investment into the market.

That is the argument that I would like to make in reply to the intervention by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). We need sufficient tax incentives to encourage new investment. That is what has happened in West Germany, where the private rented sector constitutes more than 40 per cent. of housing. The situation has been brought about by very strong tax incentives. Then it is possible for new housing to be built for rent without it having to be subsidised in other ways, through housing benefit, to the extent that it would have to be if it were done at full cost. That is the way in which I would like the market to develop —that is my answer to the hon. Gentleman—so that the whole load is not taken by housing benefit but by housing being built with every type of encouragement.

Those incentives should be focused on individuals to encourage them to invest. I do not think that we should expect pension funds in the City to do that. Why cannot people see their pension fund sitting there as a house? They can own their own house and then, as they develop any wealth, they can use that wealth to invest in a house for their own pension.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Does my hon. Friend agree that the thinking behind the Labour party's philosophy is that it wishes to retain municipal landlordism as an oasis of social deprivation and that in those ghettos they see political advantage, which is demonstrated in his arguments about Manchester?

Mr. Thurnham: My hon. Friend is right, and it has not done the Labour party any good. *Tribune* said after the 1992 general election:

> "It would be wrong to blame the debacle of May 7"—

the local government elections—

> "entirely on that of April 9"—

the general election.

> "In several of the councils where Labour did worst, it did not deserve to do any better, simply on the basis of its dire record in

> office . . . in many areas . . . Labour local government is lacklustre and incompetent. In a few it is simply corrupt and nepotistic".

So it has done the Labour party no good and my hon. Friend is right.

I would like the private rented sector to develop through encouragement to private individuals to invest. I would like sales of rented property to be exempted to some degree from capital gains tax, perhaps one sale a year, because that is what is allowed for an owner-occupier. Capital allowances should be introduced in the way in which they are in other countries, at a rate of perhaps 3 per cent. a year, and then, through VAT and corporation tax and inheritance tax, reliefs could be given to reduce some of the distortions that now exist in the market.

The hon. Member for Burnley, who intervened, mentioned housing benefit. Of course it has soared and is projected to increase to £9 billion and perhaps more. The way in which the benefit has grown is unsatisfactory. We need to consider it in a different way, not just as a personal entitlement but as an area entitlement and localised. That has happened with care in the community.

It would give local authorities an opportunity, if they were competent, to bid to be the agency to administer housing benefit, hopefully in a better way than they administer it at the moment. It would be a local entitlement which could be viewed as a limited benefit instead of a totally unlimited benefit. One could then live in the real world instead of a world in which all those things are unlimited.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Is it ideal that an area has a fixed amount of housing benefit and if that runs out the residents will be shifted to another local authority which perhaps has some housing benefit left over?

Mr. Thurnham: I told the hon. Lady earlier that we have an area entitlement with care in the community. I do not think that she is proposing that elderly folk and other people who need care in the community should be moved round from one area to another.

Ms Jackson: But they are.

Mr. Thurnham: I do not think that it is any more relevant than that.

The amount of housing benefit that is provided in any case could be judged much more than on the merits and needs. At the moment there is no incentive for a tenant to economise on a house. If a tenant could live in a smaller and more economical house than he or she is in at he moment, there is no incentive to do so because 100 per cent. of the rent is paid. Provided that the house meets the requirements of the assessment officer as far as the value of the rent goes and it is not so grossly large that the tenant can be asked to move on that account alone, there is no incentive for him or her to move. I do not accept what the hon. Lady said.

Conservative policies are obviously the right policies. Right to buy is an exceedingly successsful policy. My hon. Friend the Housing Minister has been responsible for administering Conservative policy in an excellent and fair way. The new policies of compulsory competitive tendering and right to manage are excellent. Those will make great changes. Rents-into-mortgages is now taking effect. We have the strength of the 1988 Housing Act to build for the growth of the private rented sector. The new consultation document is just coming out. I am delighted at the proposals there that the private rented sector can provide housing for the homeless. That has already been pioneered by Derby city and Wandsworth and I am sure that it can be applied successfully elsewhere.

In conclusion, I hope that the Government will consider amending the 1980 and 1988 Acts to allow sales to private landlords and consider tax breaks to help the private rented sector to build new houses for rent.

8.47 pm

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): Perhaps understandably, the debate has centred around public sector housing, but I want to mention some issues of concern regarding people who live in their own homes and who have been rather neglected, not just in the debate, but by the Government.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Litherland) say that he considered a decent home to be a basic human right. I endorse that. It is disappointing, if not surprising, that neither the Housing Minister nor any of the members of the Wandsworth and Westminster fan club who have spoken from the Government Back Benches has endorsed it. They will not endorse it, because in my constituency thousands upon thousands of people are being denied the basic right to a decent home.

The Minister spoke about the aspirations of people to own their own home. He said that about 80 per cent. of the population would like to own their own home. That proportion was achieved in my constituency many, many years ago. The culture of home ownership was entrenched in east Lancashire years before it became fashionable with the Conservative Government. Well over four out of five of the population in my constituency own their own home. Only one in eight lives in a council house, only one in 17 lives in the private rented sector, and only one in 33 lives in housing association properties. In short, we are the Government's dream of a home-owning democracy.

However, of the 33,000 houses in my constituency, 8,500 are unfit for people to live in, another 8,500 require serious renovation work, and another 500 lack even basic amenities. What was the Government's reaction to the crisis in the private sector in my constituency? They cut the money that the council could spend on mandatory grants and clearance from £3·5 million in the current financial year to less than £3 million next year—a cut of 14 or 15 per cent. If it were not for the tragedy of the people who have to live in those appalling houses, the figures would be a joke.

The estimated total cost of renovating the 17,000-plus sub-standard houses in my constituency is more than £210 million, yet the council will be allowed to spend less than £3 million next year. At the currrent rate of expenditure it would take more than 60 years to renovate and to deal with all the houses. Yet almost all the houses date from the 19th century, and many of them will not last another five years, let alone another 60 years.

The Housing Minister was kind enough to meet me and representatives of my local authority last year in Accrington to discuss the problems. As the House might expect, he was sympathetic, spoke kind words and was his usual urbane self. Unfortunately, his sympathy and kind words did not extend to ensuring that we got the year-on-year increase in resources that would prevent people in my constituency from having to live in unfit houses.

[Mr. Greg Pope]

I wrote a letter last summer on behalf of a constituent of mine who lives in Great Harwood. She and her husband and children are living in appalling conditions; among the many other problems that they have to endure, the two children share a bedroom with no external window. There is no question but that the family is entitled to a mandatory grant, yet the council has hundreds upon hundreds of similar applications.

I wrote to the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Strathclyde, asking for his comments on the situation, and his reply was interesting:

> "responsibility for the renovation grant system rests with local housing authorities . . . local authorities are under a statutory duty to provide mandatory grants . . . .
>
> There is no provision which allows an authority to make the award of grant subject to the availability of resources, or to operate a waiting list for grant applications."

The letter went on to say that if a council did so it would be open to legal challenge and could be referred to the local government ombudsman.

When he replies, perhaps the Minister will advise me and Hyndburn council which law he thinks the council should break. It has mandatory grant applications far in excess of the resources that the Government are prepared to make available to meet them. Should it pay the grants anyway, in contravention of the Finance Act, because it is under a statutory obligation to do so under housing legislation? If councillors did that, doubtless they would face surcharge. Or should the council accept that the Government have not allocated sufficient resources to the problem and defer the payments, in effect operating a waiting list? That is what the authority does. Whichever course of action the authority chooses, it will end up either in court or before the local government ombudsman.

That situation is not unique to Hyndburn; it is common across the whole of east Lancashire. In the boroughs of Blackburn, Pendle, Rossendale and Burnley local authorities are in exactly that situation. My local council is in some ways an excellent housing authority. It is innovative and works well with the private sector; it has declared housing renewal areas, in line with Government policy.

Housing renewal areas are intended to be the flagship of urban renewal, and were much trumpeted by the Government in the late 1980s, but in my view they are a complete con and a sham. They build up the expectations of people living in sub-standard and unfit housing that extra resources will follow, yet there are no extra resources. Councils cannot even clear unfit houses to provide space for new developments by the private sector or by housing associations because they have not got the money to do so. In my constituency it is estimated that over the next five years more than 600 houses will fall into dereliction because the council does not have the money either to do them up or to clear them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) will be aware of the plight of residents of Langho street in Blackburn, which was suffering from clearance blight when I was a member of the housing committee on Blackburn council. The local authority, desperate to clear the houses, does not have the resources to do so. Even if we could clear the houses and demolish them, where would we rehouse the people who live in them? There is a desperate shortage of decent low-cost housing in east Lancashire. There is virtually no private rented sector there, and the council house waiting lists are as long as your arm. Of course, there has been no council new build in my constituency for years. The Minister cannot even say that the local authority is inefficient, because the voids are less than 1·5 per cent. of council stock.

In Accrington, in the heart of my constituency, people are now sleeping rough on the streets. The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) is not in his place now, but earlier he suggested that people who sleep rough on the streets do so out of choice. I am sure that at 9 o'clock, when it is dark and getting cold outside, many young people on the streets of Accrington are having a chat and deciding whether to stay at the Savoy or at the Ritz and finally, on balance, deciding to sleep in the bus station. Those are the people whom the Minister thinks should not have priority on the council waiting list, as he said in his nasty little speech to the Tory party conference—it is fair to say that he sank to the occasion.

Only a few years ago, in the early 1980s, at the beginning of the Government's time in office, it was completely unheard of for people to sleep rough on the streets in towns such as Accrington, Blackburn and Burnley. If it had not been for organisations such as Nightsafe, a charity dealing with young single homeless people in east Lancashire, the situation would be a lot worse. Only yesterday a new initiative started in Hyndburn called the Stable project—another night shelter for young single homeless people. It was started by church leaders, who were sick of having to step over kids sleeping in doorways in towns such as Accrington. What a damning indictment of 15 years of Tory housing policy.

Housing underpins everything else in society. If, as a society, we cannot even provide every person with a decent home and a roof over their heads, I do not know what we can provide. We are dealing with a Minister who, for the first time ever, has prevented local authorities from bidding for resources on the basis of housing need. From now on, local authorities are to bid, as does my local authority, on the basis of resources that are allocated in the current year. The current year's allocation forms the basis for the consequent year's allocation, rather than in previous years, when bids were made on the basis of what councils felt that they would need to spend.

The Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction caved in to the Treasury in advance of the spending round this year. He knows full well about the acute difficulties that my constituents face and he chooses to turn his back on them. We have a Housing Minister who cares more about cutting the public sector borrowing requirement than he cares about the 17,000 families in my constituency living in housing need, and it is time that he went.

8.58 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) as I, too, represent a constituency in which a high proportion of people own their own homes. I have heard all my hon. Friends talk about the importance of good-quality housing and it is because of that importance that there are such things as grants to assist people who own their own home and to assist them in renovating their home.

Having a similarly high proportion of home ownership in my constituency to that of the hon. Gentleman, contrary to him I find people come to my door and say that they want to carry on owning their own homes. Others say that their desire is to buy their own homes. The hon. Gentleman will find that he hears the same if he asks similar questions in his part of the country.

The issue of home ownership has not had as much airing in the debate as it should have had, because it is one of the great successes of the past 14 years and one of the many successes which my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) listed in his excellent speech. For many years, I was a member of a local authority and I was on its housing committee. When the right-to-buy legislation came in, every impediment possible was put in the way of people who wanted to buy their council properties. I was therefore astounded by the comments of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) when he spoke on that issue. In practice, Labour councils were thinking of every possible excuse to prevent people from legitimately purchasing their own home.

Mr. Winnick: The reason why the policy was adopted at the time and why we expressed concerns and reservations was that we knew that the Conservative Government would not allow new council building to replace those houses sold off. If the Government of the day had decided to allow new building, there would have been no reason to object. The Labour-controlled local authority in my area was selling off council accommodation, rightly so in the circumstances, long before the Conservative party took office.

Mrs. Knight: The houses that were sold off did not, somehow, go away from the housing stock; they did not disappear. They were sold to the people who were the tenants and would have stayed tenants anyway.

If the hon. Gentleman looks at some of the housing estates, he will see the massive transformation that has taken place. In the part of the country where I was born and brought up, there were large monolithic council housing estates which were drab and uniform. The people who lived there could not even paint their own door the colour that they wanted, let alone get repairs done. As soon as those properties were sold, and those tenants were able to purchase their own homes, they did the renovation that they wanted and they painted their doors and windows.

All of a sudden, one went back to those same estates and saw a transformation in streets and in squares. Great proportions of what was the old, municipal, dull, drab and gray housing stock in the north of England has become mixed housing. The improvements are fantastic, which I hope the hon. Gentleman welcomes.

Council house sales were opposed all the time. I was sorry to see that opposition. The opposition to that policy was not just in delays or in slow sales, but in such rotten practices as trying to pass over to those who purchased their properties a whole series of other costs which those home owners were then told that they would have to continue to pay year after year. That is the truth of what has happened and the Labour party's policies on right to buy and home ownership.

I recognise the importance of the public sector rented accommodation. During the years that I served on that council, and when I was a member of the housing committee in Sheffield, at any one time there were between 1,600 and 2,000 empty council properties. That was a disgraceful state of affairs. Whether it shows it in any list that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has or not, I do not know, but those were the circumstances that arose in that city for many years.

Mr Campbell-Savours: I wonder whether the hon. Lady would be courageous enough to do what the Minister failed to do and condemn the conduct of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) for buying through an intermediary the council house next door at a £50,000 discount? Does the hon. Lady have the courage to stand up and condemn her colleague?

Mrs. Knight: I will not condemn my colleague. He has made his own statement. However, does the hon. Gentleman have the courage to condemn a city council which retained between 1,600 and 2,000 empty properties? Those empty properties affected far more people than the circumstance that he described.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) referred to estate action and housing action trusts in a somewhat derogatory manner. It is a sad fact that one reason why those initiatives exist is that local authorities failed to fulfil their duty to the housing stock that they control. Instead of condemning those initiatives, one should visit estates which have benefited from estate action. Where housing action trusts have started—and are increasingly being voted for by the people who live in those properties—it is clear that a great change is taking place which will benefit the residents.

Housing association property has not received the airing in this debate that it deserves. Housing associations are contributing to the new build accommodation. However, it seems that Opposition Members consider housing association property to be second class. They seem to believe that councils should be the only providers of public sector accommodation. I do not accept that.

I represent an area which is away from the major cities. It comprises small towns and, as a result of that, housing associations are a relatively recent arrival in the area. They are doing an excellent job. They provide special accommodation which meets the needs of specific sections of the population. Those needs were not met particularly well by so many local authorities.

The future of local authorities and councils will involve them in being enablers and in determining their housing plans. There is an opportunity which I hope councils and all authorities will grasp at least in respect of the preparation of their district plans—that is taking place in every area of the country. Within those district plans, it is possible for a local authority to ensure that its housing plan involves a mixture of home ownership and public sector accommodation through housing associations. If that happens, we will get away from the estates in the part of the country where I have spent most of my life. We will return to a far better and more preferable mixture of housing which will also bring great social benefits.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) referred to capital receipts. As I listened to him, I wondered seriously whether he had discussed the subject with his colleague the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). The hon. Member for Blackburn seemed to disagree totally with the points made yesterday by his hon. Friend.

The hon. Member for Blackburn referred to £5 billion of frozen capital receipts as though those receipts were locked up in a box hidden beneath a Treasury desk only to be brought out and, if he had his way, spent. He forgets that

[Mrs. Knight]

only a handful of local authorities are not in debt. The vast majority owe millions of pounds. As council house sales have occurred, a great proportion of that money has rightly been used to pay off such debts.

If one has a mortgage, as most of us have, and one sells the property, does one pay back the building society or double the debt when one buys another property? Of course one does not do the latter. If individuals and local authorities do not repay their debts, they will have to be paid by subsequent generations. It is misleading to talk about capital receipts as the hon. Member for Blackburn did. It would have been far more honest of him to say that he really wants to increase public expenditure by another £5 billion.

I should like more emphasis to be placed on private rental accommodation. My hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) and for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) made valuable points about the growth of housing stock, the fact that it has grown faster than the population has grown over the past 15 years, and the need to ensure that some empty private housing is let. Far too many properties are empty—about 700,000 homes in the private sector. If only a relatively small proportion were rented to people on housing waiting lists, we would quickly resolve many problems.

There is a greater awareness of the need for housing in cities. In areas such as mine there is still housing need, and housing need and available properties do not coincide. Housing associations can now be involved in letting properties for private owners. I welcome that practice and I would like it to be extended. I would also like housing associations aggressively to sell their services. There is greater awareness of private sector rented accommodation in cities in which there are colleges and universities than there is in smaller areas such as mine, Erewash. In such areas, I would like housing associations more aggressively to approach private landlords to assist in renting accommodation.

I now refer to my right hon. Friend's proposals and consultations on homelessness. People come to my surgeries to talk about their housing problems. There is great concern—indeed, in some instances there is anger—at the way in which council accommodation is rented. There is grave concern in my constituency at the way in which the allocation system sometimes works. It is seen to work unfairly and against the prudent. In many instances it is seen to work against families who have been helping themselves to the best of their ability. Often, I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making his proposals.

When I was a councillor, a case was brought to me by the parents of a young man aged 16. That young man had left home. Without making any inquiries, the council housed him, while his parents were contacting the police and everybody they could think of to find out what had happened to their son. I felt then that that was disgraceful and that the authority should have checked first. That is the only specific incident that I wish to bring to my right hon. Friend's attention. From this case, however, spring a whole range of issues. It was the tip of the iceberg. The individual in question was given priority over many others on the list whose needs were in many ways much greater than his.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his initiative, which will be welcomed by everyone who thinks clearly about these matters. People who come to my constituency surgeries to express concern about the pressure on housing and who see themselves as never, be housed will regard this intiative as the best way forward.

9.15 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I do not intend, in the couple of minutes available to me, to go over ground that was covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) in his splendid contribution. Many of the problems that afflict Hyndburn afflict my constituency too, as well as Burnley and Blackburn. I want to say a few words about Westminster.

Eleven years ago, in 1983, the Conservatives, in their election manifesto, promised to make Britain the best-housed nation in Europe. I shall not mention the Conservative party's 1992 manifesto because it contains no promises—just aspirations. During yesterday's debate on the Finance Bill we learned about Conservative instincts. I should like to say a few words about what people in north-east Lancashire think about Conservative instincts. They were outraged when they learned that the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) had arranged to purchase a council house next to his home in Westminster. The house was reported to be worth £300,000 and was occupied by a man of 78. The hon. Gentleman regarded the purchase as a long-term investment.

The staggering thing is that, this evening, the Minister responsible for housing could not bring himself to condemn that action; nor could the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) condemn the manipulation of the system by a Conservative Member of Parliament. If that is not manipulation of the system, what is? The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) had the gall to say that people should act responsibly. Conservative Members have no right to tell people that they must act responsibly. People out there do not want to listen to such things from Conservative Members.

The outrage to which I have referred turned to blind anger when people in my area heard the auditor's provisional findings in the case of the homes-for-sale scandal in Westminster. This policy is noxious. I go further than the auditor, who merely described the actions of Dame Shirley Porter and the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) as disgraceful, wilful, unlawful, unauthorised and improper. The auditor said that what had been done was improper and disgraceful gerrymandering. I say that the Conservatives were just following their instincts. I had to listen to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) smearing the auditor. She said that he was a partner in Touche Ross, and she alleged that the four-year investigation had been strung out for the purpose of increasing his fees. What a preposterous allegation.

I should like to say something about contacts between Westminster council and councils in my area. Westminster council approached councils in north-east Lancashire. It offered councils in Burnley and Blackburn £400 a head to take homeless people from Westminster as part of the plan to make Westminster fit for Conservatives to live in. That is what it was all about. What the Conservatives have failed to do since 1983 is make Lancashire—in particular, north-east Lancashire—a decent place for people to live in. Our housing stock is crumbling. Even the Minister has said that we have a unique cocktail of problems. *[Interruption.]*

There is no point in the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford) sniggering. We have a unique set of problems, which the Government have not addressed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn said, we have amazingly high levels of owner-occupation—86 per cent. However, the housing stock is decrepit, falling to bits and collapsing around people's ears. The Government are doing nothing to rejuvenate that stock and to support local authorities in their quest to improve housing conditions for the people who live in their areas.

I hesitate, as I have had to junk [illegible] per cent. of my speech. Let me finish by saying that when it comes to the instincts of the Conservative party on housing, they stink. Conservative Members just could not bring it upon themselves to condemn the actions of Members of Parliament who use the system to featherbed their own positions. The idea that the Conservatives could preside over the best housing in Europe is nothing less than a sick joke.

9.20 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): What is clear to everyone except the Government and the Minister is the sheer scale of the housing crisis which has been rejected by the Government. Britain is far from being able to claim to be "a well-housed nation". Every Conservative manifesto at the past three general elections has made that claim—it is far from the truth.

Why is it that everyone now, except the Government, accepts that this country faces an unprecedented and increasing housing crisis? The crisis affects people who face the extremities of homelessness on our streets, the people who are waiting for decent and appropriate housing conditions and the people who live in conditions of severe overcrowding. There is the pressure on families to split up, and on young parents who are imprisoned in high-rise blocks. There are pensioners without proper heating who are living in damp and cold homes, who now face VAT on fuel. That is the reality.

The speeches in the debate have highlighted the fact that there is a distinct difference of approach to housing between Labour's positive strategy for tackling the housing crisis and the Conservative Government's complacency and neglect. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) spoke of the need to address not the symptoms but the causes. He pointed out that there has been a loss of 2 million homes from the rented sector under the Government, and that that was one of the primary causes of the problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) spoke of how demand has outstripped supply, and of how Manchester city council has been deliberately starved of resources by the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris) spelled out how the Government's policy of competition at a local level has turned people into winners and losers, and has pitted the badly housed against those who are housed in even worse conditions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) suggested that we ought to support co-operatives more positively. However, the Minister has undermined support for co-ops and has cut housing budgets for them. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) spoke of the actue shortages that people in desperate need are facing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) has carried on a sterling campaign to try to persuade the Government to do something about empty Ministry of Defence homes in his constituency. Yet the Government have done practically nothing about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) spelled out what was right at the heart of the Government's policy. Here is a Government who claim to support the private sector, but what did they do in the Budget last November when they were faced with the problem of bad conditions? They undermined the renovation grants which enable local authorities to tackle the problem.

As for Government Members, the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) called for a real free market in housing. She wanted the abolition of planning constraints and of the homeless persons legislation. "Let's get rid of all the distortions in the housing market," she said.

The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry)—the chairman of the all-party homelessness group—told us that there could not be a problem with homelessness because not many homeless people are writing to him. We then heard what was perhaps the most revealing remark of all from the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), who said that he was previously the chairman of Wandsworth's —perhaps appropriately named—disposals committee. He said that the homeless people he meets on his way home are there of their own volition. May he stand condemned from his own mouth. That is the real Tory view shining through again: it is not the Government who are the problem; it is always the people who are to blame.

It is crystal clear that the Conservative party's policies still pull towards the notion of owner-occupation for everyone and leaving housing to the free market. In stark contrast, we argue for tackling the causes of the housing and homeless crisis. We campaigned for national policies and strategies that increase the number of desperately needed decent and affordable homes to rent. We demand that the Government call off their petty vendetta against local councils and allow them to play a positive role in housing provision.

Under each of the four Conservative Governments in recent years, housing investment has taken the brunt of Budget cuts. The amount spent on housing is down from 4·7 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1979 under Labour to a mere 1·5 per cent. In the Chancellor's November Budget last year the housing budget again was hammered. Little wonder that the amount of empty accommodation has increased by seven times under the Conservative Government. Little wonder that the number of homeless families has trebled since 1979. Yet the Government's Treasury press release on Budget day positively crowed that housing was a key area of "significant savings". That is what the Treasury had to say.

The Housing Corporation budget was cut by £313 million. As a result, it will approve between 10,000 and 13,000 fewer homes in the coming year. The Government and the Minister are pulling the plug on housing associations as the providers of affordable housing for rent. At a Budget stroke, local authorities have had £193 million, or 11 per cent., cut from their plans for capital investment next year. The reimposed restrictions on capital receipts will mean a loss of £500 million of housing investment resources next year. Yet yesterday the Government's own figures from the Department of the Environment pointed out that construction orders in

[Mr. John Battle]

housing for local authorities and housing associations showed a 13 per cent. drop—a further loss of another £500 million of housing investment.

Mr. Thomason: Has the hon. Gentleman noticed that the cost of construction has fallen, and that the cost of land acquisition has fallen, so that an equal amount of resources will now provide far more properties and a smaller amount of resources will provide the number that was originally anticipated? Does he accept that the position would be much better if Labour authorities collected rents?

Mr. Battle: If that is the case, why are local authorities not building more homes? Let the hon. Gentleman ask them why.

Who pays the price for the cuts in housing investment under the Conservative Government? The net result will be fewer homes built for rent, housing associations cut back, councils still not allowed to build and a further loss of construction jobs.

I remind the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) that in October last year, before the Budget, the Institute of Housing and the National Federation of Housing Associations warned the Government:

> "Cutting the Housing Budget would be economic madness. Building homes is labour intensive, putting construction workers back to work, increasing tax receipts and reducing social security expenditure. Since 1990 480,000 construction workers have lost their jobs. Reducing the Housing Corporation's capital programme by £300 Million could mean that another 6,000 construction workers are made redundant and as many again in related industries. This would add an extra £100 Million on the PSBR in unemployment benefits".

Now let the hon. Member for Bromsgrove and the Minister tell us about economic common sense. They are the ones who are economically inefficient. They fly in the face of common sense. The cuts go on regardless.

Tory housing policy all fits in with an age-old Tory obsession with tenure which came out during the debate today. The Tories believe solidly that our society should be divided according to whether one buys or rents. The Government are even skewing this year's housing programme to even more initiatives to promote home ownership. With 69 per cent. of the housing stock in owner-occupation, the imbalance in tenure in our society is proving unsustainable.

Why? Because there are insufficient homes to rent. There is an absolute and acute shortage of homes to rent. Even the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), in his pamphlet entitled, perhaps appropriately, "An End to Illusions", complained that in the 1980s easy credit enabled

> "too many house buyers and owners to treat their house not as a shelter or a form of saving but as a speculative investment or store of wealth which they could raid at will."

Mr. Hendry: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) to produce a photocopy of a copyrighted pamphlet? Is he not in breach of copyright law? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) was not out of order. If he had been, the Chair would have so ruled.

Mr. Battle: When I hear comments by Conservative Members, I sometimes think that the important message in this place should be, "Don't adjust your brain, there is a fault in reality."

I shall quote further from the pamphlet of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton. He said:

> "But with more than two thirds of the housing market now under owner-occupied, the economic consequences of home ownership are becoming increasingly ambiguous"

We agree with him on that and so will at least 70,000 council leaseholders, primarily in London, who are unable to sell their bought council houses and face huge repair leases. They have been effectively abandoned by the Government, despite the efforts of my hon. Friends the Members for Hammersmith, for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and for Walsall, North. Despite their representations, the Government are still doing nothing.

In the Harry Simpson memorial lecture in May last year, the Prime Minister suggested that we should push home ownership up to 75 per cent. What are needed, however, are more homes for rent to combat the record level of repossessions—higher under this Government than ever before. The latest figures are higher than when the Prime Minister came to office.

The Government's response is to atempt to sustain the image of competence with a daily Department press release. They introduce piecemeal initiatives, acronymic schemes and competitions; they pit one estate against another for ever diminishing resources. The Government tinker, but they still weight the housing tenure structure further towards owner-occupation and buying. The Government give residents incentives, as long as they move out., That is hardly a long-term policy or a national housing strategy. It is a short-term substitution for a policy. The Government short-change residents and bring in short-term measures such as a housing market package one year and a capital receipts holiday for a year. They promise that their proposal will deliver nearly £2 billion, but when we consider the figures we find that it produces less than £1 billion.

The Minister was moved to decide what to do with the homeless figures. I get the impression that he is trying to do to the homeless what the Government have done already to the unemployed—turn them into disappeared persons by changing definitions, fiddling the figures, blaming the victims for their plight and pitting the desperately homeless against the poorly housed.

The proposals in the Minister's consultative document mark a fundamental move from the basic and fundamental right to a home. That right is not mentioned in the tenants charter. The Government are going to replace the duty on local authorities to ensure a permanent home with a limited duty to provide temporary accommodation. They will restrict even temporary emergency assistance to some homeless people. They are effectively shredding the so-called safety net. People will not be eligible for homeless assistance in Britain if there is a single notice for private let in a newsagent's window.

At the "Roof" debate, the Minister condemned families to a recurring cycle of temporary accommodation in shorthold assured tenancies. The message from the Government to parents with children is, "Live with grandma". People face a life of built-up disruption in schooling and health care as they are shunted from short-term temporary let to short-term temporary let. The

Minister still gives succour to the policies of Westminster and Wandsworth councils. He gives the green light to local authorities to offload their homeless [illegible] other boroughs, turning them into internal exiles, wandering around their own country.

What about the document that referred to housing the homeless "anywhere in the region"? So much for the back to the value of basic communities in Britain. How can people feel secure if they can never settle in their own community? Rather than attack the cause of homelessness by building and repair, the Minister now plans to attack those on the homeless list.

We should not forget the hidden agenda. It was the Minister who came out with the most critical, moralising attack on single parents at the Conservative party conference on 7 October. He it was who referred to the unmarried teenager

"expecting her first probably unplanned child."

It is tempting to ask the Minister how he knows that. Perhaps he and his hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), instead of holding constituency surgeries, as we all do, hold family planning advice sessions. Perhaps they give planned pregnancy advice such as that now on offer from the Government. The rest of us, councillors and Members of Parliament, know that queues of people at our surgeries are asking why there is a shortage of decent and affordable housing. They want to know why the council cannot help to provide them with accommodation because they have been repossessed. They want to know how long they must endure cold and damp conditions. Those conditions have been caused by the cuts in local authority investment income.

When the Minister was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment—the last time that he was in charge of housing—he declared:

"too many people are living in bad conditions"—[*Official Report*, 13 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 1128.]

I must tell the Minister that those people are still there, because 137,000 local authority properties are still unfit for occupation and a further 213,000 require renovation and repair. What have his Government done about it? They have cut the budget year on year.

This is the Minister who has failed time and again to stand up to the Treasury. This is the Minister who has let the Chancellor cut spending on local authorities and housing. His Government have presided over a remarkable fall in the number of rented homes available.

The Tory party, which we all now know is the party of high taxes, is also the party of high rents. It has been the Government's policy for years to force up rents deliberately across all tenures to market levels. That has priced people out of their homes. Working people are unable to accept a new job because rents are too high. If they receive housing benefit, they will lose it if they take a low-paid job.

Local authority rents have been forced up this year by a national average of £36·63 a week. I must remind the Minister that housing association tenants are facing a 75 per cent. rent increase by 1996. That will be imposed because the amount collected must match the 27 per cent. drop in housing association grant to fit the Government's objective of a 55 per cent. grant by the year 1995-96. The average private sector rent registered in the second quarter of 1993 is £46·50 a week in London.

This is the Government who are still chasing the chimera of the free market. They should make that clear to the thousands of people who belong to the London Campaign for Fairer Rents, because every time they go before a rent assessment committee their rent is then pushed up even further. They are suffering because of the Government's pro-market rent policy. The Minister should try telling the thousands of people who are having to pay those high rents that the Government are operating a policy of fair rents. In practice, the housing benefit bill is going through the roof.

The Government cannot grasp the fact that a high rent policy cannot go with a high unemployment and low incomes policy. Private sector rents are now subsidised to the tune of £2,500 a year per housing benefit claimant. In the meantime, the Minister goes through his subtle sleight of hand. In his review of housing and homeless persons, the Minister claims five times that council housing is subsidised. He should check his own figures, because it is not. Council tenants are now contributing £66 million to the Treasury and the Exchequer.

Subtle sleights of hand are not new to the Minister. When I asked a parliamentary question on the figures for the new local authority bills, for some strange reason the answer I got now includes the housing association starts for Wales. We then asked the Minister about the Government's task force on empty homes. We are now told that it is called "the Government task force on empty houses". At a stroke—with a single word change—the Government have removed thousands of properties from the list.

Conservative Members have a nerve. They attack local authorities for having a mere 1·9 per cent. of their properties empty; how on earth can they justify the £1·75 million that it has cost the taxpayer to keep 145 Ministry of Defence houses in Braintree boarded up and empty since 1989? Meanwhile, there are 3,500 families on Braintree council's waiting list.

This is the Government whose review spells [illegible] the fact that they are at the fag end of burnt-out market policies. The review's comments about "lubricating the market" are dated now: this is the Government who cannot tell the difference between subsidy and investment. They are locked into short-term survival tactics, and cannot see beyond them.

There is now an acute shortage of homes for rent. Instead of irresponsibly blocking capital receipts, the Government should release the money that local authorities have received from council house sales. That would enable authorities to take building workers off the dole and introduce our policies for radical, flexible tenure so that people could remain in their homes. We ought to be finding new instruments for long-term investment in homes for rent.

Our policies are far-sighted, far-reaching and far removed from temporary market short-termism; but I suspect that long-term investment in our homes and futures will prove far too much to ask of this short-term Government. Under this Government, there is scant chance of bringing a decent home within the reach of every family. We could literally build ourselves out of the recession—and a Labour Government will do that.

9.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The debate has clearly backfired on the Labour party. It has exposed a vacuum

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

—the absence of any Labour housing policy ideas. If any hon. Member doubted that, he needed only to listen to the speech by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). The hon. Gentleman spoke for 20 minutes, but, as *Hansard* will reveal tomorrow, his speech contained not a single new idea, thought or policy. It was a simple, straightforward rant from beginning to end, totally devoid of policy content.

It is always worth while examining Opposition motions. This motion goes from the blinkered to the confused. It is blinkered in that the reference to investment in the first line means only public-sector investment: that shows that, in Labour's view, only the state can provide. It is confused about the question of capital receipts. Before the last general election, Labour party officials said:

> "You do not make new resources available by making new definitions."

Today, that approach was dismissed by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) as "absurd Treasury dogma" —on the very same day that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), the shadow Chancellor, said on the radio:

> "There is no commitment to spend money on anything."

That shows total confusion.

This afternoon, Labour Member after Labour Member cried, "Spend more money; spend more money." It is clear that they were not up early enough this morning to hear what was said by the shadow Chancellor. We now have a "Jekyll and Hyde" Labour party, which advocates fiscal restraint in the morning and spending sprees for all in the evening.

Mr. Straw: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman. Let me point out, however, that he spoke for 45 minutes, during which time he gave way only twice.

Mr. Straw: The Minister is wrong again. If he consults the Board, he will see that I spoke for less time than the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction. I spoke for 39 minutes, and I gave way about five times.

The Minister said that I called the Government's refusal to allow local authorities to spend their capital receipts "absurd dogma". I did indeed. What I want to know from the Minister is why, if it was right last year, under the Chancellorship of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), to unfreeze capital receipts, it is wrong this year? What is the answer to the question that the Minister of Housing dodged throughout his speech?

Mr. Baldry: Those are good diversionary tactics by the hon. Gentleman. Clearly, he should have but did not address the clear discrepancy between what he and other members of the shadow Cabinet said today.

Labour Members obviously were not up early enough to listen to the shadow Chancellor. Perhaps I ought to tell the House what he had to say. He said,

> "These commitments, or so-called commitments, simply do not exist".

That provoked the interviewer to question,

> "But all were either made in Parliament or at a party conference".

"Well," said the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)

> "They just were not. There is no commitment about equalisation of the pension age at a certain age. There is no commitment to spend money on anything".

"Well," said the interviewer,

> "That was carried at the party conference by 59 per cent."

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East replied:

> "We will spend only what we can afford to spend. We will spend only when growth allows us to do and we will spend as resources allow".

What weasel words and totally incapable of being reconciled with every Labour Member who has spoken today and demanded more public spending.

It is little surprise that the first newspaper that had the opportunity to comment on the words of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East since the programme was recorded wrote:

> "This has to stop. Once again Gordon Brown has come up with the mantra beloved of Labour at the last election 'as resources allow'. In an interview on the 'Today' programme this morning, Mr. Brown expressed extreme crossness at being reminded of Labour's conference commitments to instance universal freee nursery education and pensions at 60 for men and women. 'It was preposterous', Mr. Brown said to his interviewer, 'to make out that these conference resolutions amounted to anything so vulgar as a spending commitment.' What Labour really meant was that, if the economy grew enough to generate sufficient money, a Labour Government would introduce all the desirable social measures that had been passed at the party conference."

I know that Labour Members do not want to hear this, but they had better take it on board.

It is a difficulty that the Labour party has plenty of time to sort out before the next election and it had better start now. It is precisely where it came a cropper last time—the discrepancy between the party's spending ambitions and the amount of money likely to be available. Bridging the gap with "as resources allow" does not deceive anyone.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: In the motion, the Opposition maintain that their plans for spending could be met by a gradual relaxation of the restrictions on spending capital receipts. That stance was blown apart by a row between the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) before the last general election.

Speaking in a public debate in which my hon. Friend the housing Minister took part, the hon. Member for Hammersmith claimed that senior colleagues had agreed to alter the definition of the public sector borrowing requirement to accommodate the relaxation in the rules on spending capital receipts without that spending counting as public sector borrowing.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith had quickly to retract his comments, claiming that there had been a misunderstanding. The House can understand and contrast that confusion with the clarity and consistency of policies put forward by my hon. Friends in this debate.

We have heard some excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), for Finchley (Mr. Booth), for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) and for Erewash (Mrs. Knight). All my hon. Friends together comprehensively mauled the Labour party and the past and present record of Labour-controlled local councils.

We set out clear Conservative principles: greater choice, diversity of tenure, better management of social housing and harnessing the energy and resources of the private sector. We are determined to bring a decent home within the reach of every family, through promoting home ownership, securing better value for money in the public sector, encouraging the private sector and targeting public spending towards those people and those areas that need it most.

The power to choose and the right to own are two of the most fundamental rights that an individual has in a free society. That is why Conservatives have been, are and will continue to be, committed to the growth of a property-owning democracy. Some 1·9 million households have bought their council houses since 1979.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why will not the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: Because I have been left with 20 minutes. The hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who spoke from the Front Bench at the beginning of debate, spoke for nearly 40 minutes —more than 40 minutes—and gave way twice.

Some 1·9 million households have bought their council houses since 1979. That is good news for them and good news for local authorities, because right to buy raises receipts for local authorities. The capital receipts holiday last year is expected to yield to local authorities £1·3 million for spending on local authority housing— *[Interruption.]* It is no good the Opposition trying to shout me down. It reminds me of why I came into politics, which was because of the Trots at Sussex university. I am sure that the Labour party does not wish to give that impression.

If it had been left to the Opposition parties, there would have been no right to buy and no capital receipts. We have other initiatives such as do-it-yourself shared ownership and cash and tenant incentive schemes, which also help to release existing accommodation for reletting to those in housing need. Home ownership is not just a good thing for the home buyer. It can also free up existing social housing for the benefit of others who might be in greater need. For every house built for rent, three can be made available to families through cash incentives. Home ownership generally is being encouraged by continuing recovery in the housing market.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: Total housing starts in the three months to November were up by 34 per cent. on the same period a year ago. The House-Builders Federation reports a nearly 20 per cent. year-on-year increase in site visits, and 23 per cent. year-on-year increases in reservations for buying new homes. The majority of house builders expect continued sales growth this year, which is not surprising, because mortgage rates are at their lowest since 1960.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister give way on that subject?

Mr. Baldry: Low inflation and low interest rates mean that the affordability of homes for purchase is at its lowest for 15 years. That is good news for those who want to buy their own homes——

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister appears not to be giving way. Hon. Members must understand that and not persist.

Mr. Baldry: The Conservatives recognise that a considerable number of people either do not wish, or are not able, to own their own home. We want them to have the same standard and quality of housing as home owners. We want tenants to have more control over how their homes are managed. That is why we have introduced a tenants charter, an updated right to repair, a new right to improve, and launched initiatives such as estate action and housing action trusts, which give tenants a real say in the regeneration of their estates. We have spent more than £1 billion on housing estates since 1985 in more than 1,000 estate action schemes. It is public money and has levered in millions and millions of pounds of further investment from the private sector to the benefit of local tenants.

We have invested to improve the physical conditions of homes, improve security, reduce crime and involve tenants in the management of their housing. We have set up housing action trusts in Hull, Liverpool, Birmingham and London. Within all those initiatives, our objectives have been to ensure that a decent home can be within the reach of every family.

Who, a few years ago, would have believed that in Liverpool tenants in 67 tower blocks would have voted to transfer from local authority control to a housing action trust?

All the evidence suggests that our policies are working. The number of households accepted as homeless in 1992 was 2 per cent. less than in the previous year, the first fall recorded since the homelessness legislation was introduced in 1977, and the latest figures show that that downward trend is continuing.

There has been a reduction in the number of households accepted as homeless in the previous 12 months for the past six years and the number of households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has increased dramatically by more than 40 per cent. in the last year.

Lettings, the currency that really matters to those in housing need, were more than 500,000 in social housing in 1992-93, a clear increase on our estimate of 473,000 in 1980. That is a substantial increase, notwithstanding right-to-buy sales. Sometimes Opposition Members like to argue that right-to-buy sales have decreased the housing stock. What is important is the number of lettings and that has increased substantially.

Our objective is to ensure that a decent home is within the reach of every family. Clearly, a considerable part of this debate has been devoted to access to social housing and to the recent consultation paper published by my right hon. Friend. That consultation paper seeks to ensure fair access to subsidised rented housing and measures to prevent homelessness and to increase the supply of affordable housing.

Mr. Battle: Once again the Minister has let slip a reference to subsidised council housing. Will he confirm that it is not subsidised? Tenants in Britain are paying £66 million to the Treasury. Why does he not tell the truth?

Mr. Baldry: That question simply demonstrates why the Opposition are totally unfit to govern. Not only do they not listen to the shadow Chancellor, they are totally incapable of working out that there is a £4 billion housing

[Mr. Baldry]

revenue account subsidy from the Treasury. If the hon. Gentleman cannot grasp that fact—£4 billion—the Opposition are unfit to govern, ever.

Local authorities will continue to have a duty to ensure that accommodation is available for those households in priority need who are homeless through no fault of their own. The present legislation ensures that those who are accepted as statutorily homeless receive priority treatment, creating a perverse incentive to come within the terms of the legislation and penalising those who show initiative and make housing arrangements for themselves while on the waiting list.

The law at present of course provides an essential safety net, but there should be a difference between a safety net and a short cut. The simple fact is that, whether a pregnant teenager, married or not, should have a priority for social housing over a couple who have been patiently waiting on the waiting list who also have children, the safety net will remain. But we are proposing a fairer and more effective system for meeting the housing needs of those who rely on rented housing to allow local authorities to make better use of their housing stock.

We want to see the best use of all our housing stock. We want to see and encourage a continued revival in the private rented sector to encourage responsible landlords to rent out their property. People still do want to rent. Landlords still do want to let property. Tenants want confidence that landlords will respect their side of the contract and landlords want to be confident that they will receive a fair return on their investment and their property returned at the end of the letting. That is why we have introduced shorthold tenancies and assured tenancies and those reforms, in encouraging a private sector revival, are working.

Residential letting agents recorded a 60 per cent. rise in new tenancies in 1991 alone; expansion directly attributable to our reforms. The rough sleepers initiative has led to a marked decline in the number of people sleeping rough in London—285 at the last count. It has provided nearly 3,500 beds in temporary and permanent accommodation for people sleeping rough in London. It is being extended for another three years and a further £86 million is being made available.

We are determined to continue to increase home ownership, to make better use of our existing housing stock and to concentrate help on areas and people in the greatest need. In our manifesto we set out a commitment to provide 153,000 new homes through housing associations in the first three years of this Parliament, and we shall beat that target. We are also determined to give families a greater say in the running of their estates and the management of their homes. Conservatives will——

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Quesiton be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 279, Noes 319.

Division No. 92] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert

Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles

Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert

Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.

Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas

Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas

MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*

Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 316, Noes 275.

Division No. 93] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James

Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
F[illegible]cant, Michael
Fa[illegible]airn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard

Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Micha[illegible]
Powell, William *(Corb[illegible]*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim

Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela

Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gera[illegible]
Keen, Al[illegible]
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpoo[illegible]rdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon [illegible]il *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Arch[illegible]
Leighton, Ron

Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the fact that the Government is set to surpass its manifesto commitment to produce 153,000 homes in the first three years of this Parliament by 25,000; notes with approval the reduction in the number of families accepted as statutory homeless and temporarily housed in bed and breakfast accommodation; notes that the size of the nation's housing stock has grown faster than population growth over the last 15 years and its quality has improved and that the mortgage rate is now at its lowest since the 1960s as a result of the Government's economic policies; commends the Government's policies to secure decent housing for those in need, to provide a safety net for vulnerable people faced with losing their home and to provide more opportunities for home ownership; and calls on Her Majesty's Opposition to condemn the actions of those Labour-controlled councils who wasted taxpayers' money through mismanagement of their housing stock, failure to collect rents and the imposition of high council taxes.

District General Hospital (Norwich)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

10.32 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): My subject is the proposal for a new district general hospital in Norwich, and the inordinate delay in providing it.

The proposal for a new district general hospital was first considered in the late 1960s. We have since had nearly 30 years of delay and confusion in the project. In April 1973, Norwich was promised a second hospital. In October 1986, plans for an 800-bed, £48 million multi-purpose hospital at Hellesdon in Norwich were sent to Whitheall for approval. In July 1987, the then Secretary of State told Norwich health authority to consider a new site at Colney, just outside the city of Norwich. In December 1987, the regional health authority voted for Colney and performed what was, at that time, a U-turn in its policy. It is difficult to understand the status of the authority, which was able to overrule local opinion over the location of the hospital.

In February 1990, the Government approved plans for a 920-bed £104 million hospital at Colney. In April 1991, the Norwich health authority announced a complete rethink of the design and bed numbers for the new hospital, and it then became apparent that we were down to about 700 beds. In February 1992, plans were unveiled to shut the Norfolk and Norwich hospital—the main hospital at present—when the new one at Colney was opened. At that time, construction of the new hospital was due to start in 1994, with completion in 1999. In May 1993, the Government appointed a so-called regional task force to investigate whether the new hospital—now with an estimated cost of £150 million—was the best option for future acute service health care in the district.

It is estimated that, so far, £2·5 million has been poured into the scheme, which consists of a notice and a sugar beet field. The site cost is £1·5 million; the infrastructure, drainage and landscaping cost is £600,000; and thousands of hours of administrative and management time have been spent on the scheme.

The latest news is that, last summer, the business case for the development of acute services in Norwich was submitted for consideration by an ad hoc task force of regional health authority and National Health Service Management Executive officers. On 21 July 1993, we learned that the task force was unable to recommend that the business case should be considered further by the Management Executive, the Secretary of State or the Treasury.

The reasons for the task force's decision were principally that it believed that the proposed bed numbers for the future acute hospital services were to high—for two reasons: first, because the planned performance levels in some specialties were considered too low; and, secondly, because the volume of work that it was planned to divert to the primary health care sector was also considered to be too low—and that Norwich health authority, as the principal purchaser, would not be able to afford the preferred option for a single-site, new district general hospital at Colney lane, and it needed to be considered further.

After discussion, the authority reaffirmed its view that a single-site hospital at Colney lane, with in-patient services for mentally ill people as an integral part of the district general hospital service, was by far the most far-sighted and sensible solution for acute services in Norwich and that this objective remained its clear policy.

The health authority then decided that the matter should be pursued, with the possible assistance of an external consultancy. Since then, there has been silence, which I hope will be broken tonight, and our health services continue to deteriorate. In September 1993, the Norwich hospitals were fined £9,000 for failing to meet the patients charter standards—with patients waiting more than two years for urology treatment, for example. Last November, a friend of mine was given his first appointment with a consultant for an awkward condition. The appointment date was March 1995. The people of Norfolk, including my constituents, deserve better. Fertility treatment, psychotherapy and cosmetic surgery have been stopped altogether.

Our local hospital services have suffered for years from chronic underfunding, with increases in allowed spending way below the growth in population, which has been among the highest in the country. They have also suffered from split-site working, with acute services based on the Norfolk and Norwich hospital, the West Norwich hospital, St. Michael's hospital and Aylsham and Cromer. Local medical consultants have written that it is unacceptable for major operations and acute medical care to be undertaken three to 25 miles from coronary and intensive care units and from the blood bank.

Norwich is the largest district in its large region and the only one not to have major new hospital building during the 1980s. Norwich consultants have developed excellent arrangements with general practice. The medical and support staff are outstandingly committed to patient care in very difficult circumstances. But it cannot go on like this. For one thing, the present arrangements on a split site lead to high-cost services and to unfair disdvantages for our acute units in today's market system.

If the new hospital has only 600 beds, it may find itself similarly disadvantaged by having far too big an overhead for the volume of treatment it carries out. The Norfolk and Norwich hospital—the main hospital—is clearly obsolete. The tower block construction is wholly unsuitable, with patients being sent up and down in unreliable lifts. There is parking for 400 cars, and every day 3,000 cars arrive. Now, there is a real problem with emergency access.

The backlog of building maintenance is £20 million, and sewage rises through the floor of the operating theatres in storm conditions, as happened not long ago. Another £20 million-worth of building work is needed for the other local hospitals. The recovery and pre-med rooms are overcrowded, and the cramming of beds makes care difficult. In the main theatre block, the conditions appear to be in breach of the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974.

Pharmacy, medical records, sterile supplies and the main kitchen have no natural light and poor ventilation. All areas of the electrical system are overloaded, and the standby generator gives only 20 per cent. coverage in case of a power failure. Windows have fallen out of the main tower block—luckily, not causing casualties which might have had to be admitted to the hospital.

The need for a new hospital has been supported publicly by three Cabinet Ministers, and I assume that their welcome support has been conveyed to the Department of Health. A vigorous campaign covered by Louise Zucchi of the *Evening News* called Operation Transplant has failed to get any sense whatever out of the Department. When the

[Mr. John Garrett]

Secretary of State for Health visited Norwich in December 1993, she said that I was a prophet of gloom and doom when I suggested that the Department had little intention of ever building the new hospital.

She also said that what was needed was practical, diligent work to bring forward practical proposals—a sentence I find almost entirely devoid of meaning. She said that she wanted a state-of-the-art hospital for day surgery, and she admitted that the present split site was a problem which made it difficult to reduce the hours worked by junior doctors. At present, 20 per cent. of junior doctors are working over 83 hours a week.

I hope that the views of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard), were given to the Secretary of State for Health. The *Eastern Daily Press* has reported that the right hon. Lady has claimed that Norfolk's health services are suffering because of the delay in giving the county a much-needed new hospital. The paper reported that she demanded an urgent answer on the issue from the Secretary of State for Health. The Minister for Agriculture, who is herself a former local health authority chairman, also said that local people needed to know where they stood. I do not know if she ever got an answer, but I have never heard of it if she did.

The Secretary of State for Health, in her flying visit to Norwich, refused an interview with the local media on the subject of the hospital. That was in a week in which the right hon. Lady found time to present a business award to a sex products firm. That also caused a certain amount of media comment. An editorial column in the *Eastern Daily Press* was headed "Rock Bottomley."

The paper claimed that the Secretary of State was consistent in her self-publicity, and attacked her for clearing her diary for a glitzy media presentation, but not to talk to the Norfolk public about the state of their hospital service. As an example of ministerial concern, the paper's verdict was "Rock Bottomley". We would all agree with that.

The questions I have to ask the Minister are very simple. Will the hospital ever be started? If it is intended to go ahead, when will the building start? What size will the hospital be? What on earth is the task force up to?

I have genuinely no wish to make any political capital out of the disaster for Norwich of the NHS reforms, and the two-tier system which they have introduced. I have no desire to make political capital out of the stress caused to patients and to staff by the squalid conditions which exist and by the uncertainty of the future acute services in the district. I know that the district has had changes of management, and changes in its area of coverage.

I know that the change of site was a complication. In my view, it was unnecessary. Yet the ball has been in the Government's court for more than five years. I hear that in other regions, the Government plan to close large hospitals wherever possible. But the critical need in Norwich for a major investment in acute services is agreed by all the parties in the matter—the staff, the ancillary workers, the GPs, the consultants and the local Members of Parliament.

Feeling on the subject is running high in the city of Norwich, and the stalling simply has to stop. I want plain answers to my simple questions.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I am glad to have the opportunity to answer the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) on this important topic. The subject of a new hospital for Norwich has been raised on many occasions. It has been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) in an Adjournment debate and on other occasions. I note with interest the presence in the Chamber of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), who has taken a strong interest in the matter on behalf of his constituents.

I also see that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) is here. He is noted for his championing of the cause of the James Paget hospital in his constituency. I have also heard from other colleagues, including the Member of the European Parliament, Mr. Howell, who has taken an active role in the matter. I have heard often from him on the subject. So I am fully aware of the strength of feeling on the matter and how important it is to people living all around Norfolk.

The description given by the hon. Member for Norwich, South of the hospital and the local health service did not give due credit to it. He quoted my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State as calling him a prophet of doom, and today he gave us a gloomy picture. He gave no credit for all the successes of the hospital or to the thousands of people who work for the health service in the area. That was remiss of him, but I am afraid that it is typical of him and his colleagues and of their approach to the health service.

Mr. Garrett: That simply is not true. I went out of my way to congratulate the medical consultants, the local GPs and the people who work in the hospitals in Norwich, under the most difficult conditions, most of which are due to the Government's policy.

Mr. Sackville: If I may return to his words on the subject of the planning of the hospital, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that plans were put forward for the hospital which have proved to be unsuitable and inappropriate. The plan known as Norwich 2 was a very large scheme for a hospital of more than 1,000 beds at the high cost of almost £150 million. It is not surprising that the task force from my Department and others who examined the plan found that some rather optimistic projections had been made.

In the light of the changes that are taking place in the health service—especially the rapid growth in day surgery and the transfer of many services to the community and to primary care—we are not likely to see hospitals of that size in the future. That is not to say that there should not be redevelopment in Norwich. I am sure that a good case can be made for that.

The hon. Member mentioned the visit of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to Norwich. His description of it was somewhat selective. The quotes that I have include one from an editorial in the *Eastern Daily Press* entitled "Golden Virginia". It praised my right hon. Friend for giving a strong suggestion that it should be possible to consider sympathetically any practical and realistic scheme for a hospital development. She said:

> "We are sympathetic to the provision of a new hospital so long as it is well planned and well founded."

My right hon. Friend is quite right, because, given some of the changes that I have enumerated, a new hospital in Norwich might prove too large for the job that it must undertake. In a few years, if there is too much capacity in the hospital, the health authority will be left with an extremely expensive building and facilities. It will have to cope with all the revenue consequences of that, which will impact on the services that it is able to offer patients. It is important that we get it right.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the Norwich 2 plan was withdrawn. I am informed that, should my right hon. Friend decide that the acute unit should become a trust, the health authority, in tandem with that trust, will put together a business case for a hospital development appropriate to the needs of the local population. It is important that they assess that case correctly and that whatever is built is economic and efficient and can optimise the resources available to the local health authority.

It would be unwise to be too pessimistic about that. Many people try to claim that the health service is underfunded and short of resources, but I must remind the hon. Gentleman that, for next year alone, the Treasury has allocated £1·5 billion for capital developments in the health service.

Mr. Garrett: Will we get any of that?

Mr. Sackville: If the business case is, as my right hon. Friend said,

"well planned and well founded",

there is no reason why a development should not take place in Norwich. There are problems with the current acute services, but the hon. Gentleman's description of them was extremely ungenerous. Money is available for developments appropriate to local patient needs.

I have no reason to suppose that any business case that is submitted will not be sympathetically considered. I hope that it will reinforce and continue the tradition of excellent health care that already exists in Norfolk.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 27 January 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Marketing Board

1. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she will next meet the chairman of the Milk Marketing Board to discuss the dairy sector.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I last met the chairman of the Milk Marketing Board before Christmas and I expect to meet him again shortly.

Sir David Knox: Will my right hon. Friend give the House the assurances that if the national milk records become the responsibility of the milk residuary board, dairy farmers will comprise a majority of that board, and that she will consult the Milk Marketing Board before making the initial appointments?

Mrs. Shephard: I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that, because of the duties laid on me by the Agriculture Act 1993, I cannot prejudge any decision or comment on any proposal that might come from the Milk Marketing Board. Suffice it to say that I intend to ensure that the interests of the 29,000 producers are at the fore of any scheme that is eventually approved, whichever aspect of it might be in my hon. Friend's mind.

Mr. Tyler: Is the Minister aware that there is widespread consternation at the delay in bringing into effect the marketing scheme? Is she also aware that there is a perception among dairy farmers, in particular, that she has been listening to the interests of the processors and the Dairy Trade Federation, but not to either the producers' or the consumers' interests? Will the Minister give us an undertaking that no new obstacles will be introduced into the discussions now, given the assurances that we were given by her predecessor in the Chamber and in Committee?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman has perhaps not familiarised himself with the Department's announcements, made on 10 December and 24 January. If he examines those announcements, he should be perfectly reassured that the interests of the 29,000 producers are absolutely top priority, that the interests of 50 million consumers also have been taken into account and that we are talking about many billions of pounds worth of business. They are big decisions; I am absolutely aware of the concern about the delay, but what matters more than any deadline is getting the scheme right, and that I intend to do.

Sir Peter Emery: Does my right hon. Friend accept that most milk producers in the west country are delighted that she is ensuring that there will be proper lead time before the scheme comes into operation? Will she ensure for the benefit of the consumer and producers that Milk Marque and other organisations will have the capital structure and the transport to deliver the goods?

Mrs. Shephard: As my right hon. Friend may have noticed from the announcements from the Ministry, the availability of capital, particularly to meet the board's existing liabilities, and transport matters are being closely examined.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I tentatively congratulate the Minister on appearing to adopt the approach taken by the Labour Opposition in the Committee considering the Agriculture Bill with regard to the construction of Milk Marque? Given that Milk Marque will be a very different animal from that proposed by the Milk Marketing Board, would it not be right for the Milk Marketing Board to release all those farmers from the contracts that they have signed, thereby enabling them to take a new decision that may well be different from the one they have already made?

Mrs. Shephard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations—tentative or otherwise. May I say that I —like, I am sure, everybody on the Government Benches —regret his departure as Front-Bench spokesman on agriculture, fisheries and food? On the important matter of contracts, we shall, of course, consult on any revised reorganisation scheme that the Milk Marketing Board suggests. An important question for that consultation will be whether producers who have already signed contracts with Milk Marque should be allowed a period to consider their position.

Mr. Brandreth: I thank my right hon. Friend for the prompt replies on that issue that she has given farmers in my constituency. Does she share the concern that Mr. Gerry Fair and other distinghished farmers have expressed at the delay in the new arrangements? If the deadline of 1 April is passed, what might the new deadline be, given that we all agree that it is important to get it right rather than quick?

Mrs. Shephard: The board has stated that it proposes a new vesting day of 1 November.

Dr. Strang: Is the Minister aware that the Government must accept full responsibility for the disarray that has been created in the milk industry? If she has read the parliamentary proceedings of the Committee that considered the Agriculture Bill, she will have seen that the Opposition repeatedly attacked the Government for giving the Milk Marketing Board responsibility for bringing forward the new scheme when, clearly, the Government should have brought forward the revised arrangement after full consultation with the industry. Will she now apologise to the thousands of dairy farmers and the many thousands of other people who work in the industry for the quite unnecessary lack of confidence and insecurity that the Government created?

Mrs. Shephard: I consider that I have already explained the position perfectly satisfactorily to the House. I reiterate to the hon. Gentleman that it was always the case that the board would come forward with its proposals, there would be full consultation with producers and other parts of the industry, that we would consider those proposals and, if necessary, amendments to the proposals would be made. That is the position that we are now in. I should have thought that, from the position that the hon. Gentleman occupies, he would welcome the thorough examination that has been given to that extremely important question. I would at least have expected him to admit that it is right to take time in something that is as important as this.

Farmers

2. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps she is taking to ensure that the needs of consumers are being met by United Kingdom farming.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Minister, and all the other agriculture Ministers, are actively involved with Government marketing initiatives aimed at helping United Kingdom producers to identify and satisfy consumer needs.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend is undoubtedly the best of advertisements for the quality and goodness of English food. What further action might his Department take to persuade the British housewife to buy more British home-produced produce? How much would that benefit the British farmer?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As he knows, the British consumer today has a choice and variety of food unthought of even 20 years ago. It is of magnificent quality and is produced in a seamless chain from the field to the table. It is a food industry of which we can rightly be extremely proud, which employs 14 per cent. of the work force and produces 9 per cent. of the gross domestic product of the United Kingdom. The British housewife has benefited enormously from the sophistication and development of the British food manufacturing industry. I can assure my hon. Friend that none of us loses any opportunity to promote British food. Perhaps in the months to come, my hon. Friend will have a chance to see the fruit of the Minister's marketing initiatives as they develop, for the benefit of everyone in this country and our balance of payments.

Efficiency

3. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps she is taking to improve the efficiency of her Department.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Department publishes and reviews annually its targets and achievements.

Mr. Thurnham: You, Madam Speaker, know how we in the north pride ourselves on our thrift, but will my right hon. Friend confirm the contribution made by MAFF regional centres to the efficient running of her Department, and ensure the continued promotion of regional specialties such as Bolton's famous black puddings?

Mrs. Shephard: I am reminded by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary that the black puddings are made by Jack Morris, but whoever makes them they are an excellent product of the north-west. I congratulate the north-west on its thrift and I reassure my hon. Friend that the regional service centre in the north-west is the mirror of the community that it serves.

Mr. Ainger: Why is the Minister party to the bureaucratic nightmare of arable regionalisation in Wales in which, parish by parish, there is a differentiation—some would say a discrimination? Farmers in one parish may receive £191 in subsidy and farmers in the neighbouring parish, producing exactly the same tonnage of cereal per hectare, may receive £93. The Minister will recall that I wrote to her on 10 December asking why she has not yet explained to the farmers of Wales why she is rejecting the suggestion made, I understand, by the Secretary of State for Wales that England and Wales should be a single region with a single payment. I should like a reply.

Mrs. Shephard: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but the matter that he raises is one for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Farm Holdings

4. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farm holdings in the less-favoured areas she considers to be full-time commercial businesses.

9. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farm holdings in the less-favoured areas she considers to be full-time commercial businesses.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): There are 11,764 in England and 10,901 in Wales.

Mr. Jones: Is not the farm business survey a poor measure of the actual incomes of farms in less-favoured areas such as mine? Should not the Minister try to rectify that, because farms in my area have a much lower income, probably closer to £7,000 a year, than the £19,000 or £20,000 shown in the survey?

Mr. Jack: I thought that the hon. Gentleman might ask his question from the Front Bench, so, in anticipation, I welcome him to his new role and I join my right hon. and hon. Friends in expressing sadness that the forensic skills of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) will be lost to us.

The survey to which the hon. Gentleman referred was agreed by all farming organisations to be based on a truly representative sample of farm incomes. I looked carefully to see whether, in its constituent elements, proper and due weight had been given to all types of full-time farming and I was satisfied that the sample did just that.

Mrs. Jackson: Does the Minister agree that, if there is some doubt about the figures, cuts in the hill livestock compensatory allowance are unjustified? Is he aware that in my constituency alone at least 30 hill farmers depend on that allowance to make ends meet and to keep their farms going, and that they are extremely concerned about the proposed cuts in allowances, which are not justified on these mistaken figures?

Mr. Jack: I first remind the hon. Lady that, had it not been for the Government, in 1985, extending hill livestock compensatory amounts to the full range of less-favoured areas, the farmers to whom she refers would not be receiving any benefit. The figures of which I am certain are the £550 million of direct subsidies that will go to the cattle and sheep producers in the less-favoured areas and the rise in real terms by one third of farmers' incomes in 1992-93. I am equally certain that, in 1993-94 there will be a further increase of 28 per cent. in those incomes.

Sir Jim Spicer: The sectors about which my hon. Friend has been talking are receiving subsidy, but what about those that do not receive subsidy? In particular, what about the pig industry, which is facing a major crisis and in which many hundreds of our producers will be going out of business unless something positive is done by the United Kingdom Government, alongside all that is being done, often in an underhand way, within the EC?

Mr. Jack: I am certainly aware of some of the concern that is felt—in particular, the concern about subsidies from the French Government—and that concern is being taken up.

I am also aware of the pig industry problem. It is very cyclical, but our pig producers are among the most efficient in the Community. Developments such as the significant reduction in interest rates are benefiting those in the pig production industry as well as hill farmers.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Is my hon. Friend aware of the growing anxiety among hill farmers in my constituency that the payment of HLCAs and ewe premium will be linked, in some way, with a substantial reduction in sheep stocking levels on the hills? Will my hon. Friend assure me that, if he uses that weapon, it will be linked with a headage payment, so that we can continue to guarantee the livelihood of hill farmers?

Mr. Jack: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that point. I became aware of its significance recently, when I visited Cumbria and discussed with regional representatives some of the problems that poor moorland management can cause in regard to grazing land.

As my hon. Friend will know, all farmers in receipt of HLCAs have received a code of good upland management. He will also know that over-grazing is a major problem. When such matters are drawn to our attention, however, a report dealing with all the aspects will be requested from the Agricultural Development Advisory Service. That report will be discussed with sheep farmers, in particular, before any action is taken.

Mr. Llwyd: There have been huge cuts in HLCA support for less-favoured areas. Has it occurred to the Minister that—by coincidence or otherwise—many of those areas are also environmentally sensitive? Is it not time to consider extending environmentally sensitive area status throughout the United Kingdom? There is certainly a valid case for extending it throughout wales.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to what I said. The decision on HLCAs took into account the substantial increases in farmers' total income, as I made clear a moment ago when I read out the figures. Some £550 million is spent on direct subsidies for cattle and sheep farmers in less-favoured areas.

The hon. Gentleman will know that six more environmentally sensitive areas are to be announced this year, bringing the total to 15 per cent. of the entire United Kingdom land area. We take our responsibilities very seriously. Moreover, in addition to the subsidies that I mentioned, further payments associated with ESAs will benefit precisely the hill farmers whom the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

Scientific Advisers

5. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what role her scientific advisers play in developing more environmentally sensitive forms of farming.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The science advisers in my Department and agencies play a key role in developing our policy on more environmentally sensitive forms of farming.

Mr. Devlin: In view of the welcome announcement of the biodiversity reports on Tuesday, will my right hon. Friend and her scientific advisers now set specific targets to aid the conservation of wildlife, which is dependent on farming?

Mrs. Shephard: The Government's biodiversity action plan has set broad targets for action; we have also announced a proposal to establish a biodiversity action plan steering group, which will include representatives of major conservation bodies. The group will advise the Government on the development of a range of environmental management policies. My Department will play a full part in the achievement of those targets.

Mr. Loyden: What advice is the Secretary of State currently receiving about the use of bovine somatotropin to improve the milk yield of dairy herds?

Mrs. Shephard: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the use of BST is currently subject to an EC moratorium of one year. We have urged the EC to take note of scientific advice, and also to profit from the lifting of the ban in the United States. The Commission will now be able to study the effect of that move.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, regardless of whether some of our upland areas are ESAs, there is an agreement, especially in national parks such as those in North York moors, not to overstock with sheep and cattle? Does she therefore agree that it is crucial that the differential created by the hill livestock compensatory allowance for farmers in those upland areas is maintained because without it they cannot farm, whether in environmentally sensitively or others?

Mrs. Shephard: We remain committed to HLCAs, but I remind my hon. Friend that 67,000 upland farmers will this year benefit from a total of £550 million in grants, which is quite some commitment.

Mr. Morley: Did the Minister's scientific advisers point out the importance of field margins in supporting plants and animal species? Is she aware that in the past 15 years nearly a quarter of all hedgerows have disappeared?

Is she also aware that the biodiversity action plan contains no mention of a hedgerow protection Bill, although such a Bill was a Government manifesto commitment? Will she use her influence in the Cabinet to press for that manifesto commitment to be honoured, or is that to be yet another broken Tory promise?

Mrs. Shephard: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that I try to use my influence in the Cabinet in a number of ways. As for field margins, the hon. Gentleman is expert in these matters so I am sure that it will not have escaped his notice that many of the ESA schemes, the number of which is of course shortly to be increased to 22, include the careful and sensitive use of field margins.

Mr. Paice: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that she talks to the Department of Health and takes the very best scientific advice before formulating new policies on farming and food? Does she agree that simply because modern technology means that we can detect the minutest traces of nitrates or pesticides, it does not automatically follow that such traces are bad for our health, and that we must have a sense of proportion in these matters?

Mrs. Shephard: We certainly work closely with the Department of Health on those matters. I am a firm advocate of common sense and old enough to remember the saying about "eating pecks of dirt before you die".

Fishing Industry

6. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she last met representatives of the United Kingdom fishing industry to discuss conservation measures.

Mr. Jack: Conservation measures were discussed with the industry on 14 December, in the context of a meeting to discuss the agenda for the December Fisheries Council.

Mr. McFall: How will the Minister meet the legally binding requirements of the multi-annual guidance programme now that his iniquitous tie-up scheme has been sent to the European Court of Justice? Does he not realise that a properly funded and sensible decommissioning scheme is necessary? Will he therefore reply to the Scottish fishermen who produced a document on alternative conservation which they sent to him in September and on which they are still awaiting a reply? Will he delay any decisions until meaningful consultation has taken place with the industry?

Mr. Jack: I very much welcome the tone of the hon. Gentleman's question because he is right to emphasise the importance of meaningful discussion with the industry. I did not rule out a role for decommissioning in our plans, but the House agreed that, to be effective, decommissioning required an element of effort control and, clearly, days at sea was part of our original plan. We still have the benefits of licence aggregation which forms part of our policy and, following a meeting with Commissioner Paleokrassas, I am considering the role that technical conservation measures can play. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall discuss that with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it is his Department's policy not to close fisheries unless it is absolutely necessary? Will he join me in condemning those who take a short-term view of fish stocks? Does he agree that there is no point in allowing boats to overfish today if it means the end of the entire industry tomorrow?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend puts his finger on an important point. A full scientific assessment was certainly part of our discussions at the December Fisheries Council to determine the overall allowable catch and quota, not only for our fishermen but for those of other Community countries. It is important in terms of day-by-day, month-by-month quota management to take into account the long-term implications, because if too much fish is taken in the short term, there will, as my hon. Friend says, be none left in the long.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I hope that the Minister will now accept that he was warned by hon. Members on both sides of the House not to go down that road of days at sea limitations and that, having gone down that dead-end street, the responsibility is his for curing the industry's problem by introducing a more effective and more generous decommissioning scheme to limit effort and by introducing a wider range of conservation measures in consultation with the industry. Has not the time come to stop dithering and to get on with introducing competition?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Member will know that my style has always been to try to talk with the industry. The hon. Gentleman says that it is our job to sort out the industry. To put it simply, unless there is dialogue and partnership, no edicts from me will sort out the fundamental problem of too much fishing capacity in relation to the quantities of fish in the sea. There has to be a responsible attitude on both sides of the equation. I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that I will continue to discuss with the industry other ways of conserving fish and reducing effort, and technical conservation measures will be among them.

Milk Quotas

7. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when United Kingdom farmers were first informed of new EC advice on milk quotas.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Ministry issued a supplementary guidance note on 6 December, reflecting the European Commission's clarification of the circumstances in which producers may retain their existing butterfat base when converting direct sales quota to wholesale quota.

Mr. Clapham: I thank the Minister for that answer. Is she aware, however, that that supplementary guidance note is backdated to July and that it has caused great hardship? Let me give her an example from my constituency. I met farmers at my surgery a fortnight ago and I was told by one farmer that he had applied to change his milk quota from direct sales to wholesale and he expected that the measured butterfat level would be applied, only to find in December, when he received the supplementary note, that a level of 3·8 per cent. was applied, which meant that he had to provide another 70,000 litres of milk to meet the quota.

Does the Minister agree that that is unsatisfactory and that the 1993-94 guidance note should continue until the end of the milk year? Will she also tell the House whether dairy farmers in other EC countries received their supplementary advice note at an earlier date than dairy farmers in the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Shephard: I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman that it was unacceptable that the European Commission issued a note of clarification eight months into the quota year. We issued our note of clarification following the Commission's as soon as we could. The Commission's note came to us on 25 November and I have taken up the issue of that lateness with it, and with the Commissioner himself, in the strongest terms.

I know that the hon. Gentleman has been in touch about his individual constituents. Three hundred and eighty producers are affected; 53 have applied to retain their existing butterfat base and, of those, 41 have been approved. We are handling the matter as sympathetically as we can. I think the hon. Gentleman also knows that we responded to the British National Farmers Union request to extend the deadline for quota leasing until the end of December. The situation is absolutely unsatisfactory and I shall continue to point that out to the Commissioner.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is some concern among farmers in my constituency of Mid-Staffordshire about the intent of the Council of Ministers and the possible cutting of milk quotas in the United Kingdom? Will she confirm that she will resist all attempts by the Council of Ministers to cut those quotas?

Mrs. Shephard: We avoided a quota cut for the current quota year—indeed, we achieved an increase of 0·6 per cent.—and we will certainly resist any proposal for a quota cut in Britain in the coming year.

Mr. Molyneaux: Can the right hon. Lady assure me that United Kingdom farmers who live in Northern Ireland will not be placed at a disadvantage under the present modified scheme, as they definitely were when milk quotas were first announced and introduced, and subsequently?

Mrs. Shephard: I think that the right hon. Gentleman will have heard that I said that the whole matter was being dealt with as sympathetically as possible. I shall draw his concern to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and I am sure that equal sympathy will be extended to producers in Northern Ireland.

Fishing Industry

8. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the accession of Spain and Portugal to the common fisheries policy; and if she will make a statement.

12. **Dame Jill Knight:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she last met representatives of the fishing industry to discuss the questions arising from the Spanish and Portuguese treaty of accession.

Mr. Jack: Following the conclusion of the Fisheries Council on 21 December, I remained in Brussels to give a full explanation to representatives of the United Kingdom industry on the proposals to deal with Spanish and Portuguese accession. The full impact of those proposals will depend on Council decisions which have yet to be taken.

Mr. Kennedy: I appreciate the efforts that the Minister made to keep the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and other groups up to speed with what was developing in December. Will he confirm that he will bear in mind the genuine deep-seated anxiety, not least among west coast fishermen, at the possible impact of the accession, and will he comment on the Department's and the Government's thinking on the legality of the accession under European law?

Mr. Jack: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. I did my best to keep the fishermen well informed. It was right that they should be given a full statement on what was occurring, for the avoidance of doubt. On legality, we established at an early stage that both the original Commission and the subsequent presidency compromise text was consistent with the appropriate parts of the European treaty. The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the western approaches, and we made it clear that we gave equal weight to the western approaches and the North sea. On Monday, when I visited Commissioner Paleokrassas, I restated our firm position on the matter and the concerns of fishermen throughout the United Kingdom.

Dame Jill Knight: May I invite my hon. Friend to use this opportunity to reaffirm his determination to protect the interests of fishermen in the North sea and elsewhere? I congratulate him on sidelining the unsatisfactory proposals from the Commission and assure him that on both sides of the House there is support for the interests of British fishermen—and, for that matter, for the interests of British fish eaters, of whom there are many in Birmingham, notably at our splendid Harry Ramsden's.

Mr. Jack: As somebody who came from Yorkshire, I know about Harry Ramsden's, and I am glad that my hon. Friend mentioned that aspect. I am also glad that my hon. Friend, as a Birmingham Member, has spoken on this subject, because I had the pleasure of visiting Birmingham fish market last Friday, and a goodly supply of fish was seen. It is indeed important that in the negotiations on Spanish and Portuguese accession we preserve the fishing rights of our fishermen in order to ensure that people in Birmingham, especially those who buy their fish and chips from Harry Ramsden's, can continue to enjoy all the fish that they enjoy at present.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is the Minister aware that wherever the Spanish fleet has operated, whether in Namibian or United Kingdom waters, it has fished in gross violation and total disregard of the rules? Whatever agreements or arrangements may be made for the accession, there must be adequate policing to ensure that the Spaniards do not simply rape our waters, as they have done throughout their history.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Enforcement is the key to the effectiveness of the common fisheries policy. I have made it clear at the European Fisheries Council and to the Commissioner that unless enforcement is taken seriously, he will not have a credible policy for our fishermen. From 1 January this year, a new control regulation has been in force that introduces, for example, random inspection by Community inspectors.

When I raised the matter with Commissioner Paleokrassas, he was seized of the need to strengthen yet further those inspection procedures.

Mr. Harris: Is my hon. Friend aware that a leading member of the fishing industry has said to me how pleased he was at the way in which my hon. Friend defended British interests at the Fisheries Council meeting? Does he agree that the threat is still there, and will he re-emphasise the fact that the interests of west coast fishermen will not be sacrificed in any way to those of North sea fishermen, because the real threat is in the western approaches, rather than the North sea?

Mr. Jack: As I said a moment ago, in all my discussions I laid equal emphasis on the problems in the North sea and in the western approaches. However, I also commend to my hon. Friend the stepping stone approach which the proposed Commission regulation took on the matter. After tough negotiating from the United Kingdom, it was made absolutely certain that there would be no sacrifice of the principle of free access to Community waters without sound polices to replace the present regime. The interests of fishermen are uppermost in my mind in negotiating those details.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the Minister give a commitment that he will study in great detail the recent report from the European Parliament's directorate of research which shows quite clearly that in the 19 agreements which have been reached with other countries, Spain has taken the lion's share? Indeed, I believe that Spain has 520 boats out of the 736 that operate in those international waters. That belies the fact that Spain claims that, unless it has access to the North sea, the fishing industry in Spain would be in dire straits. May we have a clear commitment that the Government will study that report very carefully and review once more the legality of access to the North sea in particular, given its importance for Scottish fishermen?

Mr. Jack: I will certainly study that document. I am very aware of the sensitivities in respect of Spain. Any changes will have to take into account individual track records of particular countries. The option to do nothing is not there. I have checked the legality of what is before us and I am satisfied that it conforms with European law.

Common Agricultural Policy

10. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much the CAP is costing per head of the United Kingdom in 1993-94.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There is a significant net cost to United Kingdom consumers and to United Kingdom taxpayers from the CAP. For a number of reasons, of which my hon. Friend will be aware, it is not possible to be precise about the figure.

Mr. Evans: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does she realise that my wife Janice tells me that the average family is paying £28 to support the CAP? Does my right hon. Friend also agree with Janice that if the leader of the lot opposite, the wriggler from Monklands, East, and Romeo from Yeovil, the leader of the other lot opposite, ever got their hands——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is moving very far away from his wife at the moment. Will he please stay with Janice?

Mr. Evans: If they ever got their hands on the Brussels cheque book, the £80 a week by which the average family is better off after 14 years of Conservative Government would disappear like rats up a drainpipe.

Mrs. Shephard: I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend not only on his question—whatever that was—but on Janice. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear hear."] Janice is making a very good recovery from an extremely serious operation and it is good to know that the operation is enabling her to be as right minded as she normally is, and as right minded as my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend is correct to say that Labour's grasp of the fact that public spending plans affect tax is a little tenuous. However, I agree with my hon. Friend—and believe that this was the point that he and Janice were making—that the cost of the CAP is too high. That is why the United Kingdom has consistently pressed for a reduction in that cost and why we will continue to do that.

Dr. Strang: Is it not a disgrace that the intervention board in this country alone will be spending around £2,000 million this year on open-ended market support? Does the right hon. Lady recall her predecessor's statement that he had got rid of the MacSharry proposals and replaced them with the Government's own reforms? Following the admission by the Commissioner yesterday that EU agricultural spending this year will exceed its already enormous budget, will she now accept that the Government have failed to secure an adequate reform of the CAP?

Mrs. Shephard: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's conversion to our cause of prudent public spending, and I hope very much that he manages to find some support within the shadow Cabinet.

Sheepmeat Regime

11. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to assist sheep producers who have been denied access to quota by the recent change in the EC sheepmeat regime; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The national quota reserve for sheep annual premium is designed to assist certain categories of producers who, because of the changes in the sheepmeat regime, are not able to receive enough quota for their needs.

Mr. Kirkwood: What is the Minister doing to identify cases of genuine hardship? People are caught in some of the emerging transitional traps and, through no fault of their own, are left with little or no quota at all. Would he be prepared to consider tribunals reviewing genuine cases of hardship, as happened in respect of milk quotas? Is the Minister aware that the alternative of buying or leasing a Government quota is not a real alternative because it is too expensive?

Mr. Jack: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point: 18·7 million units of quota have already been allocated, and we have the reserve of 740,000 units still to go. Each category in the national reserve was very carefully thought out to deal with, I hope, precisely the type of hardship case that he mentioned. We do not have any plans to buy up quota; nor do we have power to deal with some of the cases that the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Garrett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Garrett: In all the ministerial dodging and weaving on "back to basics" and in all the Prime Minister's vapid speeches on social policy I have never heard anything about child poverty. Has the Prime Minister read the recent report that 3 million children in this country live in poverty, that most of them are undernourished and that this country has the fastest growing rate of child poverty in western Europe? What is more basic than nurturing and cherishing our children?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that Conservative Members need any lectures from the hon. Gentleman on nurturing and protecting children. We have not only ensured and enshrined the system of child benefit but introduced family credit and a range of other benefits specifically to help people who face particular difficulties. That has been so over many years, it is an intrinsic of social policy, and the hon. Gentleman in his heart knows that that is the case.

Q2. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Field: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we are to have lasting economic recovery, any promises of public expenditure must be subject to the closest possible scrutiny, whether they are made inside or outside the House and whether they are made by blank cheque socialists or by the man who has made more false starts in British politics than a jockey in the Grand National—the leader of the Liberal Democrats?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course I agree with my hon. Friend. As for pledges inside or outside the House, that point might have been better directed to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) than to me. I am not at all sure about pledges from the hon. Gentleman or his hon. Friends. A large number have been made and a large number now seem to have been denied by the hon. Gentleman. It now seems that there is a new doctrine: if a promise is made by the Opposition outside the House, even at their party conference, even to business men, anywhere, nobody should believe a word they say, according to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Smith: How does the Prime Minister explain the devasting catalogue of incompetence, mismanagement and waste of public money by his Government and their agencies announced today in the Public Accounts Committee report?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the report issued by the PAC today. It provides a useful check list. It suggests that there has been no decline in standards. It quite rightly says that improving the efficiency of the public sector is not inconsistent with propriety. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's question surprises me, because the bodies in question are run by public servants. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is not criticising public servants.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Prime Minister welcome the fact that the situation is so grave that the Public Accounts Committee felt compelled to make such a report for the first time in its 130-year history? Does the Prime Minister welcome the fact that the report reveals that the national health service management executive wasted more than £100 million in the mismanagement of a hospital project; that the Property Services Agency wasted £65 million, detected by the PAC; and that millions of pounds have been wasted in the health service, in named examples—in Wessex and West Midlands? What does the Prime Minister say about those and the many other fiascos revealed in the report?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is in his general role of making all-purpose charges. He clearly has not studied the report with the care with which he would wish people to believe he has. It states clearly that there has been no decline in standards. The PAC quite rightly criticises breaches, but says that there is no suggestion of deficiency in the public sector financial framework itself. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledge that that is the case?

Mr. John Smith: Does the Prime Minister not understand that the report says that there has been a departure from public standards that have been observed for 140 years? Does he not understand that the British public now clearly understand that one of the reasons why his Government are a Government of high taxation is that they are also a Government of waste and incompetence?

The Prime Minister: On the contrary, the report supports our drive for efficiency. Either the right hon. and learned Gentleman has misread or he is misrepresenting the substance of the report. He should look at it more carefully and come to the House and correct what he has said this afternoon. Perhaps he believes that he can convince people that the public service in this country is not, as I believe it to be, of the highest calibre of any public service anywhere in the world. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman does not share that view, he should.

Q3. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although the House has to endure the ritual gibes of Opposition Members about reductions in the number of hospital beds, the truth is that more and more elective surgery is carried out in general practitioners' surgeries, in out-patient departments and, most important of all, on a day surgery basis? The Royal College of Surgeons predicts a figure of 50 per cent. in the near future. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that proves that the Opposition are as out of date as ever? Is it not about time that they got behind the Government's reforms and stopped alarming patients?

The Prime Minister: I would certainly agree with that. We know from what has been said in the past 24 hours that there would be no more spending on the national health service from the Labour party, even though that is described as "obvious rubbish" by leading members of the Opposition. The reality is as my hon. Friend suggests: record numbers of patients are now being treated in the health service and there are record numbers of day cases. Not only is there better value for money in the health service but it is providing what patients and their families want. That is the reality of what is happening under our reforms. They have been an enormous success and they will continue.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister understand the anger that will be felt by many ordinary people who are asked to pay unprecedented levels of taxation only to see his Government hand that money over to quangos and executive agencies to throw away on waste, corruption and fraud?

The Prime Minister: I hope the right hon. Gentleman can substantiate what he has just said and will be prepared to do it. I hope also that the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that it is his party's stated position to increase taxation.

Mr. Harris: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to read the report issued to Members of Parliament today by the Trustee Savings bank on the affordability of mortgages? The report says that the typical first-time buyer of a house now pays no less than £110 a month less than he did a year ago because of the dramatic fall in interest rates. It also says that the fear of negative equity has virtually disappeared.

The Prime Minister: Yes, my hon. Friend is quite right about that. Indeed, the saving on the average mortgage from the peak level of interest rates to today is about £160 to £170 a month. The result is shown quite clearly in the extent of the personal expenditure that has helped to steer the recovery. We are now recovering, and recovering more comprehensively than any other European economy.

Q4. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cummings: What words of advice and comfort can the Prime Minister give to my constituent who has a child of 10 with double curvature of the spine whose operation has been cancelled because the joint health commissioning board has run short of cash? Does he not find it extraordinary that while there is a cash shortage for patient care, loads of money can be found for loads of posh cars and loads of managers with hugely inflated salaries in a needlessly expanding national health service bureaucracy?

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Gentleman knows as well as any other Member of the House the extent to which patient care has expanded and improved in the national health service. We now know that there is going to be no more money for the health service from the Labour party. We can have no more of this nonsense week after week from Labour Members whenever anything happens, saying that there will be more money, because all their promises are "obvious rubbish," as the Opposition Front Bench has told us.

Q5. **Mr. Lait:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Lait: Does my right hon. Friend accept that I, along with millions of parents, welcome the new emphasis that he wants put on competitive sports at school? Does he agree that such sports teach children not only team skills but the competitive skills that children need to succeed in their future lives?

The Prime Minister: I strongly agree with what my hon. Friend has to say. I think children need to learn about competition. I have no doubt that team sports instil that spirit of competition in children, quite apart from enhancing their school days and their childhood generally. Any revision of the curriculum is a matter initially for independent advice from Sir Ron Dearing. He is considering the future place of team games in the school curriculum. When we receive his report, we shall study it very carefully.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Prime Minister join me in asking the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) to pay back to the ratepayers of Westminster the £50,000 profit that he made when he arranged through an intermediary to buy the council house next door? Will he join me in asking for the repayment of that money?

The Prime Minister: I have no intention of going down that road with the hon. Gentleman.

Q6. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Has my right hon. Friend seen the report in *The Guardian* today commenting on remarks by the German Economics Minister, who says that our Government's policy of deregulation and privatisation is outstanding and that, indeed, he is going to copy it? Does my right hon. Friend know that Black and Decker has moved its international headquarters from Europe to Durham? Does not that demonstrate that the United Kingdom is the leading country in which to do business, and does not it show the folly of the Opposition's policy of supporting the social chapter, which is bad for industry and bad for this country?

The Prime Minister: There is absolutely no doubt about that. If we want jobs in this country, we certainly must not add costs through the social chapter or in any other way. Black and Decker is just the latest in a long line of companies leaving other countries and setting up in the

United Kingdom because of its tax structure and its prospects, which make it a very competitive place to do business. Companies like our industrial relations, they like our system of business tax and they like the fact that we have no social chapter.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 31 JANUARY—Consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill (First Day).

TUESDAY 1 FEBRUARY—Completion of Consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 2 FEBRUARY—Until Seven o'clock, motions on the Biotechnology and Biological Services Research Council Order, the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council Order and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Order.

Motion on the Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Regulations.

THURSDAY 3 FEBRUARY—Until about Ten o'clock, motion on the English Revenue Support Grant Reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report.*

FRIDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 7 FEBRUARY—Until about seven o'clock, private Members' motions.

There will be a debate entitled "Taking Rio Forward" on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee 'A' will meet on Wednesday 2 February at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents No. 5953/91 and 7506/93 relating to landfill of waste.

[Wednesday 2 February:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: (a) 5953/91 and (b) 7506/93, Landfill of Waste. Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports: (a) HC 29-xxvii (1990-91 and HC 79-i (1992-93); (b) HC 79-xxxvi (1992-93) and HC 48-iv (1993-94)]

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Lord President recall that, during business questions, I have, with strong support from his side of the House, repeatedly requested a full day's debate on the Child Support Agency before approval of the orders giving effect to a package that no one but the Government thinks is adequate? Is not it disgraceful that, as soon as we told the Government that we proposed to use the half day of Opposition time that they had offered to the Labour party for such a debate, making it possible for the House to have a full day's debate on the Child Support Agency next week, that offer was withdrawn?

Is it not particularly odd that the Government are determined to have a decision before full debate when the Prime Minister is dropping hints in the *Yorkshire Post* that there might be further changes in the package on offer? Or is this yet another example of the Prime Minister's saying something that he does not mean?

Does the Lord President recall our continual pressure for an early decision on the boundaries on which the European elections will be fought in June? Is not it true that the French and the British Governments are almost alone in their failure to ratify the arrangements? Is the Leader of the House aware of the ugly rumour that the delay here arises because the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) wishes to stand for one of the new seats and the Government are afraid that this will reopen divisions in the Conservative party? As the French Government have made it quite plain that their delay is deliberate, will the Lord President reassure us that, in the case of the British Government, it is a matter of incompetence rather than of malice?

May I, finally, draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the fact that today's *Daily Mail* tells us that the Prime Minister is yet again relaunching his philosophy this weekend? Will the right hon. Gentleman find time for the Prime Minister to tell the House what "back to basics" now means? Is there any chance that it will include "back to a standard of good government"?

Mr. Newton: The suggestion in the hon. Lady's second point is pretty far-fetched, even by the standards of Her Majesty's Opposition. There is absolutely no truth in it. We shall bring forward the parliamentary orders required to confirm the new European constituency boundaries at the earliest possible date—in good time to enable them to take effect for the elections this June.

As to the *Daily Mail*, perhaps the right hon. Lady would be wiser to wait for my right hon. Friend's speech. I am able to tell her, without breaking the doctrine of collective responsibility and all the rest of it, that that speech will be concerned with one of the things which we have been most anxious to bring about and which we are successfully bringing about—greater competitiveness for the country. Much of that competitiveness will rest, as my right hon. Friend said in his Question Time earlier, on our record of maintaining the lowest tax rates in Europe for both individuals and businesses and making this an attractive place for others to do business.

I noted what the right hon. Lady said about the Child Support Agency and I rather welcomed the suggestion that she is edging back towards the usual channels in her approach to business. That was the impression that she gave and perhaps she can confirm that that is the case. We intend to provide more than the one and a half hours that such regulations are normally allocated, because we recognise the desire to debate them.

The reason for the business that I have proposed for next Wednesday is that, yesterday afternoon, the Opposition, led by the Leader of the Opposition, demanded that those regulations should be debated on the Floor of the House. I have provided the time for just that.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Can my right hon. Friend find time, if not next week, fairly soon afterwards, for a debate on early-day motion 459, which is entitled, "Liberal Democratic Party and Racist Literature"?

[That this House notes that the latest official Activists Handbook of the Liberal Democratic Party addresses the problems of delivering Liberal Democratic leaflets to 'unintelligible inhabitants who appear to speak only in Punjabi, broad Cockney or Scouse or, worst of all, Glaswegian'; notes that this is only the latest example of the Liberal Democratic Party using racially offensive language or language that mocks regional accents; notes that it follows the publication by the Liberal Democratic Party of overtly racist literature in a local government election in Tower Hamlets, together with racist remarks by the Liberal Democratic Councillor Tom Dommett in Somerset; and calls on the Right honourable Member for Yeovil yet again to expel Councillor Dommett from the Liberal Democratic Party and to withdraw the Activists Handbook forthwith.]

Is my right hon. Friend aware that many hon. Members on both sides of the House would welcome the opportunity to discuss the sleazy tactics of the Liberal Democrats and expose their fraudulent racist message, which they give where it suits them?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend knows well that the Government deplore as much as anyone else offensive comments of the kind that have been attributed in this case. He will be aware that the Public Order Act 1986 makes it an offence to use threatening, abusive or insulting words if it is likely that racial hatred will be stirred up. I am sure that those at whom my hon. Friend's remarks are directed will reflect on that. Perhaps I might take his remarks as a request for a half day for the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I should be very pleased to hear that we are going to get a half day, and the sooner the better. If the Government are so confident that they have a good record on the proper conduct of public business, will they allow a full day's debate in Government time next week on that subject?

Mr. Newton: The right way for the Government to respond, as the hon. Gentleman certainly knows, is first to respond to the report of the Public Accounts Committee. That will be done at the proper time and in the proper way, but on the basis that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister outlined in exchanges earlier today.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Will my right hon. Friend follow the instincts that he expressed last week and arrange for a debate soon on the waste of public expenditure by public authorities? Does he agree that that would be a marvellous opportunity for Conservative Members to expose the waste, corruption and inefficiency of Labour-controlled authorities, such as my own authority of Worcester, where an unnecessary footbridge was built, at vast expense, across the River Severn? The cost of that has now been transferred to the Labour and Liberal-controlled county council.

Mr. Newton: I certainly agree that such a debate would provide myriad opportunities for examples of waste by Labour local authorities to be cited. As I said before, I will certainly pursue my efforts to find time for those examples to be discussed.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): We are faced with massive family debt, the break-up of families, divorce, suicides and children in second families who are deprived and under stress, while parents no longer visit their children in first families because they cannot afford to do so. May we have a full debate on the Child Support Agency and what it has done to respectable and responsible second families?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows that the Government have already issued proposals on that matter and that, as I have announced, they will be debated next week. That will give the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to make his points.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that, although the Opposition Front-Bench team is terrorised by the Bolsover dinosaurs on the subject of the thoroughly sensible all-party Jopling reform of Parliament, there is no reason for the Government to be so terrorised? Is there any reason why we should not have a debate and thereby expose to the public just how antediluvian the Labour party is on that subject?

Mr. Newton: I assure my hon. Friend that I neither feel nor am terrorised by the hon. Members below the Gangway to whom he referred. I shall certainly bear in mind my hon. Friend's comments and those that my right hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure has made in a not dissimilar sense on a number of occasions. It may be that yesterday's episode, when the Leader of the Labour party led his party in an attempt to disrupt the orderly conduct of business in the House, will strengthen public support for the report.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The Leader of the House must know from his constituents of the enormous chaos and unhappiness that are being caused by the Child Support Agency. He must also be aware that the package that is being proposed is totally inadequate and has not even taken account of the problems highlighted by a Select Committee. I ask him seriously to allow a full day's debate on the matter, because it is the children, whether they be the product of first or second marriages, who are our concern—and they are suffering.

Mr. Newton: I have already said that my right hon. Friend has understood and sought to respond to that concern and that time will be provided for a debate next week. I should observe, however, that, after carefully reading the Select Committee's report, my understanding is that the Government's package almost entirely implemented the Committee's proposals.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): Will my right hon. Friend study early-day motion 434?

[That this House believes that a system should be agreed between the political parties allowing honourable Members who are involved in international institutions, recognised by the UK, such as the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and Western European Union, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to deposit their votes with their respective whips, to be used according to their instructions or that attendance at those bodies which advance international co-operation are not dependent on domestic party relations, which can, at times, deteriorate, even to the extent of suspending pairing arrangements, leading to the exclusion of UK representatives from such bodies to the disadvantate of both the UK and the institutions.]

It shows that we can no longer send representatives to international organisations because of the breakdown of links between the two parties. That is extremely bad for Britain and means that we had to apologise at the Council of Europe for our conduct. Such a situation should be stopped as soon as possible so that Britain can be properly represented.

Mr. Newton: I take those remarks, with which I agree, as being primarily directed at Opposition Front-Bench Members. As I said last week, they may think that their current behaviour in the House is directed at the Government, but the effect of the attack is increasingly on Parliament.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): In view of today's Public Accounts Committee report, may I reiterate the request for a debate on the standards of public conduct?

[Mr. Dennis Canavan]

That report cites several examples of the serious decline in standards, including that of the Foreign Office accounting system, which was conducive to fraud and theft. Is not the case for such a debate reinforced by the evidence to the Scott inquiry, by the Pergau dam fiasco, and by the general stench of corruption emanating from the Government, who are fast sinking in a sea of sleaze?

Mr. Newton: I think that part of not being terrorised by hon. Members below the Gangway is not to respond to the overheated, overstated language that they use on occasions of this sort. I do not for one moment accept one word that the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent early debate on the national minimum wage, which would cost this country £1·5 billion and which is a policy supported and endorsed by the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Newton: I think that my hon. Friend will welcome our continuing efforts to provide opportunities for such a debate, which will bring out both the down side of the policies that Her Majesty's Opposition are pursuing, and —this is no less important—the positive advantages that our very different policies have brought to the competitiveness of this nation.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Leader of the House ask for a statement from the Foreign Secretary or a Minister next week on the situation developing in Iran, where the Superintendent of the Assemblies of God went missing in the past week following the execution of another pastor allegedly for apostasy? Many people in our nation are concerned about that. I have already written to the Foreign Secretary. May we have a statement on what action the Government are taking?

Mr. Newton: I shall bring that request to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mrs. Edwina Curry (Derbyshire, South): May I urge the Leader of the House to consider giving us an early day for the debate that has already been promised on the age of consent? Does he recall that the Minister of State, Home Office said that such a debate would be held in the House with a free vote.

"at a relatively early stage in the Committee proceedings"?—[*Official Report,* 11 January 1994; Vol. 235, c. 115.]

The Committee has now been meeting for a fortnight and the matter is becoming urgent. I should be most grateful if the Leader of the House would consider the matter.

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly seek to provide time as soon as possible for the matters that we have undertaken to arrange to be discussed on the Floor of the House in the way that my hon. Friend described, but I am not in a position this afternoon to give a date.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we please have an early debate on the extraordinary and crazy decision of Leicestershire social services to ban my constituent Sharon Isett and her husband from adopting a second child because Sharon Isett smokes between six and 10 cigarettes a day, even though she has undertaken that she will not smoke in the presence of the baby? I do not know whether the Minister is, as I am, a reformed smoker who hates the habit, but surely what matters to a child is that it is placed in a loving, warm and stable home, such as that of the Isetts. This decision should be revoked.

Mr. Newton: I shall forbear from commenting on that part of the hon. and learned Gentleman's question that was perhaps directed at me. He asks about adoption. He will be aware that my right hon. Friend has recently published a White Paper dealing with some of the questions of who should or should not be regarded as appropriate in this area. I shall bring the hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend probably realises that June is the 50th anniversary of the landings in Normandy. I am sure that the whole House will want to celebrate the wonderful sacrifice by our troops and their allies. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am extremely worried—which is why I ask my right hon. Friend to arrange a day's debate—that some local authorities, and certainly my Labour-controlled council in Southampton, Test, are virtually ignoring that historic landing. I want them to do more to alert the public, and that is why we should have a debate.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will have heard the murmurs in the House at what he said. I am sure that the whole House hopes that all parts of the United Kingdom, and especially those coastal parts that have strong connections with the sea, will consider the impropriety of ignoring this historic and significant anniversary.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Has the Leader of the House seen the reports that western Governments are seeking to persuade the Secretary-General of the United Nations that air strikes against Serbia could be launched without going to the Security Council? Will he assure us that he will seek a statement from the Foreign Secretary or the Defence Secretary before British service personnel are engaged in offensive action in Serbia that could endanger our troops who are already there and undermine the humanitarian work that is going on? May we have a statement before any action is taken that might involve our service personnel?

Mr. Newton: I will bring the right hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend, who will be in the House at Question Time next Wednesday. The right hon. Gentleman will know of the measured approach and tone that the Government have always sought to adopt in this matter, in contrast with some of the things that have been pressed on the Government by Liberal Democrat Members and by some of the right hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): In view of the debate earlier this week on the Finance Bill, can my right hon. Friend make time for yet further debates on public expenditure so that we can discuss the £14 billion additional promises made by the Labour party only this week on health, overseas development and housing? Such a debate would give us the opportunity to remind the people of this country that when Labour was last in government it ran a regular budget deficit of 7·5 per cent. of GDP, which led to an average rate of inflation of 15·5 per cent. and stagnant living standards. Does not that show what a hypocritical bunch they are now?

Mr. Newton: The possibility of a whole Opposition supply day, let alone a half day, would be even more attractive to us all if we thought that we would get any clear explanation of precisely what the Opposition are saying about public expenditure.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Will the Leader of the House consider putting aside some time to debating manufacturing industry, particularly in the north-west? Will he discard his rose-coloured glasses and note that, in the past seven days, 1,500 manufacturing jobs have been declared redundant from Chorley through Bolton to my constituency? In three small towns, 1,500 good, solid, well-paid, highly skilled manufacturing jobs have gone. What is the right hon. Gentleman going to do about it?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows that, when one looks at the whole picture, there is no doubt that British manufacturing industry has been strengthening, not weakening. Perhaps the motor car industry is a classic case. We shall continue fundamentally strengthening the British economic base on which manufacturing rests.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend provide time for an early debate on the relationship between drugs and the growth in violent crime in our cities? Has he noticed recent reports showing that a particular vicious group of drug barons, known as the Yardies, are being expelled from New York city but are setting up shop in British cities? Should we not have a fairly urgent debate on that, given that the task force set up to counter the Yardies some years ago was disbanded and I understand that the police are now considering re-forming it?

Mr. Newton: I have seen those reports. My hon. Friend will be well aware of the importance that the Government attach to those issues. I shall bring my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of the Home Secretary. He will be aware that, only a few weeks ago, my right hon. and learned Friend announced the creation of a new unit to make even more effective the Government's efforts both in the prevention and the control of drug abuse.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Many people will have agreed with the Prime Minister's comments about the importance of organised games and sport for our young people. Is the Leader of the House aware that, in any constituency represented here and in others, hundreds or perhaps thousands of families are unable to buy such items as football boots unless they are fortunate enough to find them in a jumble sale? Can we have a debate on the social effects of poverty on millions of families in Britain?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should look at the figures that have emerged today, showing that, contrary to some of the myths that Opposition Members seek to spread, in the past decade or 15 years, there has been a substantial rise in the disposable incomes of every sector in the population.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): My right hon. Friend will know that yesterday we held a complete day's debate on an Opposition motion on housing, yet the Opposition took no opportunity to explain why hundreds of millions of pounds in rent remains uncollected in Labour-controlled authorities throughout the country. In view of that, will my right hon. Friend ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to make a statement to the House about that appalling waste of public funds, and about whether those authorities could now be reported en bloc to the Audit Commission?

Mr. Newton: That appears to me to be a suggestion well worth considering. I was more tempted than perhaps I should have been by the suggestion from the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), as it is clear that any debate on waste would embrace the matters to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If the Leader of the House agrees to a debate about the Jopling report, will he put it on record that a number of Government Ministers and, in particular, Government Whips are not keen on having a four-day week in Parliament? If we are interested in having a four-day week here, we should consider first a four-day week for those who produce wealth outside this building so that we can mop up the 4 million unemployed and give hope to the thousands of young kids leaving school without the hope of a job. When Parliament has done that, we can start talking about a four-day week for Members of Parliament.

Mr. Newton: I have to say, not for the first time, that I detect some division above and below the Opposition Gangway. That sounds to me exactly the sort of proposition that caused the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) to find—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about the four-day working week in the population. That is the proposition which the right hon. and learned Gentleman ran a mile from as soon as he found that he had signed up to it in Europe.

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): Will my right hon. Friend find time in the near future for a debate on employment practices within Labour-controlled councils, so that Conservative Members can fully debate what is going on in Monklands district council? That is a particular reference to the redundancy of Mr. Tom McFarlane, a constituent of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), and the subject of letters between myself and the right hon. and learned Gentleman, to which I have had no reply, and now a letter from my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), which I hope will get a better response.

Mr. Newton: I certainly feel that it would be appropriate for the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East to comment on what has been appearing in the newspapers. I hope that he will reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield and my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch).

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House clarify his intentions on the reform of the age of consent? Am I right in thinking that he said a few moments ago that he intends to have a Committee of the whole House before the Standing Committee on the Bill has completed its work, and before that Standing Committee may choose to have a debate on the age of consent?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I put it in those terms, but that is the proposition that my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) was advancing and is the prospect that I think that most hon. Members are expecting. I see that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) confirms that.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): During the debate on the revenue support grant orders, will my right hon. Friend ensure that we have sufficient time to debate rate capping and, particularly, the Labour party's commitment to it, which would imply extra expenditure of between £3 billion and £4 billion?

Mr. Newton: That is another interesting point for the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to consider against the background of the declared Brown doctrine of which we have read in the newspapers. As to the rest of my hon. Friend's question, we intend to provide, as I have said, a full day on the revenue support grant reports. I think that that might provide him with the opportunity that he seeks.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the Leader of the House not see it as an urgent priority that we debate the destruction of one of our most precious treasured national institutions—the civil service? What is going on, and what the Public Accounts Committee has drawn attention to, is the growth of quangos. The contractorisation and privatisation of the civil service are introducing into that body the lower ethics of commerce. The civil service took a century to build up. Once those high standards are gone, they can never be re-created. When will we have a debate on that?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps you could advise me, Madam Speaker, on whether the word "codswallop" is a parliamentary term. If it is, may it be put on the record?

Madam Speaker: It is on the record.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my right hon. Friend consider again the request made by our hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and to link the debate with early-day motion 341?

[That this House calls upon the Right honourable Member for Yeovil to disassociate himself from the description by Tom Dommett, a Liberal Democrat County Councillor, of his constituents in Somerset, as 'Yids, Nig-nogs, Ities and Pakis . . . no better than New Age scum and vermin'; believes that the use of such grossly offensive language about people of other nationalities and races is wholly unacceptable in public life; notes that this is yet the latest example of blatant racism within the Liberal Democrat Party; and calls upon the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, the Right honourable Member for Yeovil, to expel Councillor Dommett from the party forthwith.]

It has been signed by hon. Members on both sides of the House and draws attention to the racist language used by a Liberal councillor in Somerset. The debate would also give the House the opportunity to debate the credibility of a party whose leader can describe one of his councillors as inexperienced and stupid, but still offer him up to the electorate as a credible purveyor of Liberal party policy.

Mr. Newton: I see that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), perhaps predicting what might occur during these exchanges, has fled, but perhaps the Liberal Democrat Chief Whip will take the message to him.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House accept the demand for a debate on the drugs problem, particularly in the light of the statement by the chief investigation officer of Customs and Excise, Mr. Douglas Tweddle, that the drugs problem is worse than at any other time in this country's history and is linked with a record of violence, including a number of inner-city murders? During the debate, we could assess how the single European market, which has been imposed on this country, has removed a great deal of protection at our borders and is allowing the freer movement of drugs, guns and criminal activities across our borders, with diminished supervision. Surely that is a serious problem and we should have time to debate it.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows well the importance that the Government attach to those matters and their determination to tackle any such problems as those that the hon. Gentleman has described. However, he might wish to consider whether he has accurately stated the position.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on student support, in particular student loans, in order to examine the cost of student loans to Britain with a view to establishing the apparent cost that the nation will have to face if the words of the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies), in quoting the leader of the Labour party in the House on 19 January as being opposed to student loans, are carried out? That would be a severe cost to the nation and we need to know what it would be.

Mr. Newton: That is a helpful addition to the list of questions that need to be answered by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate on the success or otherwise of the experimental charterline service that is operating in Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, bearing in mind that the service, which cost £2 million to set up, had received, at the end of last year, a total of 3,199 calls and that of the 201 in relation to Nottingham, only four were complaints and a large proportion of the others had to be redirected because they had been wrongly directed in the first place? Such a debate would enable us to clarify whether, at a cost of £625·20 per call, that is one of the measures against which the Government would wish to be judged in terms of the value for money of the services that they offer.

Mr. Newton: The service should be judged in the context of the undoubted improvements that the citizens charter initiative have brought to the standards of many services. However, I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's observations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): May we have a debate on crime and, in particular, police numbers so that I can expose the hypocrisy of Cambridgeshire county council, run by the Liberal and Labour parties, which, having asked for 68 more police officers because of increasing crime problem, has been given substantial extra resources this year—an extra £19 million—and has now rejected the Conservative proposal for those extra officers?

Mr. Newton: That sounds like another rather good point for the debate on the revenue support grant orders next week. My hon. Friend might seek to catch your eye, Madam Speaker.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): May we have a debate on the matter raised in early-day motions 378 and 379 in my name regarding the Sheriff Court Fees Amendment (No. 2) Order?

[That this House notes the comments of the Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, Scottish Minister of Home Affairs, that with the introduction of increased court fees resulting from the Sheriff Court Fees Amendment (No. 2) Order judicial costs will be recovered from fee income; notes that the principle of equality of access to courts will be eroded both by the scale and rate of increase in charges; and questions why individuals on a weekly income of £150 per week should be paying towards a judge's salary of over £1,150 a week.]

To illustrate the urgent need for such a debate, I refer the right hon. Gentleman to a constituent of mine who, before 31 December, would have been required to pay £40 to go to court to get her husband out of the house, but is now required to pay £123, which is 80 per cent. of her income. She cannot afford that and, as a result, her progress in the matter has been impeded. Given the problems that exist all over Scotland as a result of the order, will the Leader of the House urge on the Secretary of State for Scotland the need for such a debate?

Mr. Newton: I will certainly bring the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend and, as always, in my own constructive way, consider them myself.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): When my right hon. Friend considers the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and others for a debate on early-day motion 459 on Liberal Democrat literature, will he bear in mind the concerns and fears that many British people have about the activities and influence of extreme and racist political forces in Europe and their wish not to see those forces imported in this country in any way whatever?

Mr. Newton: I am increasingly tempted to think that one of the innovations that should be introduced into our proceedings is an opportunity for Liberal Democrat Members to answer questions.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week about the underhand, coercive pressures imposed on teachers? That would enable us to draw attention to the threats issued by Liberal and Labour-controlled Kent county council to primary and other school head teachers who are considering applying for grant-maintained status. They are being told that if they support such action, they cannot expect ever to be considered for vacancies in any of the council's schools.

Mr. Newton: It would clearly be very disturbing if that were demonstrated to be the case. No doubt Opposition Members who may have influence over those to whom my hon. Friend refers will consider what he has said.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate next week on early-day motion 461?

[That this House condemns unreservedly the remarks of the honourable Member of Glasgow, Hillhead in praising the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in Baghdad; regrets that these remarks have provided a propaganda coup for the Iraqi dictator; notes his statement made personally to Saddam Hussein; 'Sir, allow me to salute your courage, power and indefatigability. I would like you to know that we are with you until the nasir (victory)'; and regrets the distress which these remarks will have caused to the families of British service men and women who were killed or injured in the Gulf War and families of those British civilians imprisoned by Saddam Hussein.]

The motion relates to the conduct of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway). On a recent visit to Baghdad, he paid tribute to the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Does my right hon. Friend agree that those remarks will have caused deep distress to the courageous British service men and women who fought in the Gulf war, and to their families? The debate would also give us an opportunity to express our dismay at the inadequacy of the discipline imposed on the hon. Gentleman by his party.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right to feel that those remarks caused deep offence in every quarter of the country.

Points of Order

4.5 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that the Committee of Selection has appointed five hon. Members representing English constituencies to the Standing Committee considering the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill. Standing Order No. 86(2) imposes on the Committee of Selection a duty to

> "have regard to the qualifications of Members"

to serve on Committees.

The Committee of Selection receives specific information about hon. Members' participation in debates before the Committee stage of a Bill, which is a major criterion in the selection of Standing Committee members. In this instance, not one of those English Members spoke or actively participated in such debates. They have not an ounce of mandate in the form of a Scottish vote; yet, in consideration of a purely Scottish Bill, they will constitute the majority that determines the future of Scottish local government.

I know, Madam Speaker, that you emphasise the fact that ours is a United Kingdom Parliament, and that hon. Members can speak on any matter. It is, however, very unfair and blatantly undemocratic for the future of Scottish local government to be decided in this way, against the wishes of the Scottish people. Will you examine the matter, and advise us on how the Chairman of the Committee of Selection could explain, on the Floor of the House, the reasoning behind a decision that has scunnered people in Scotland and re-emphasised the current democratic deficit in relation to Scottish matters?

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall take one more point of order from each side.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I entirely agree with what the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) said about the democratic deficit. You will know, Madam Speaker, that the Labour party, the Conservative party and, I believe, the Liberal party have selected large numbers of Scots to represent English constituencies; as far as I am aware, the reverse has not occurred. As we have been generous and decent in this regard, should not reciprocal arrangements exist in Scotland? That would also deal with the hon. Gentleman's point.

Madam Speaker: I think that, after all, I have heard enough points of order on that particular matter.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose*——

Madam Speaker: No, I have heard enough. We are not going to have a debate about procedure. I can now help the House, and through the House—as the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) suggested—the people of Scotland.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order, which allows me to make two points clear. First, appointments to Standing Committees made by the Committee of Selection are final, and do not require the House's approval. Secondly, as page 618 of "Erskine May" makes clear,

> "The interpretation of the order of reference of a select committee is . . . a matter for the committee."

It would therefore be wrong for me to comment on the judgment of the Committee of Selection, its Chairman or any of its members about the qualifications of the Standing Committee members that it selects. The House has entrusted the responsibility to the Committee of Selection, and must leave it with that Committee.

Royal Air Force

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Michael Brown.]*

4.9 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): It was this time last year that the House debated the Royal Air Force in the context of its activities in the Gulf. Despite steps which have been taken towards peace in that region since then, the RAF presence remains necessary; but that is but one of a number of operations around the world to which the RAF is contributing.

In opening today's debate, I shall focus on how the RAF is continuing to meet its many commitments while at the same time rising to the challenge of substantial reorganisation and change, which will make it a leaner organisation still fully capable of meeting Britain's future defence needs.

Hon. Members will recall the publication of last year's White Paper, "Defending Our Future", which included a new and fundamental analysis of the way in which defence assets are and will need to be employed to meet our various commitments around the world. The framework for the analysis is provided by the three overlapping defence roles to which the RAF makes significant and key contributions.

Our defence strategy continues to be underpinned by our nuclear capabilities, strategic and substrategic. While our longer-term intention is to transfer the substrategic role to the Trident force, this vital link in the chain of nuclear deterrence will continue to be provided by Tornado GR1 aircraft, armed with the WE177 free-fall bomb, well into the first decade of the next century.

Defence role one provides for the protection of the United Kingdom and dependent territories. The integrity of British airspace in peacetime is maintained by the improved United Kingdom air defence ground environment, supplemented by the Sentry airborne early warning force—AEW—and Tornado F3 fighters. We should remember, too, the significant role played by the RAF in Northern Ireland where it provides crucial helicopter support for the Army in extremely testing conditions. The RAF Regiment also provides specialist airfield ground defence. Nor should we forget that the RAF continues to make vital contributions to our forces in Cyprus, Hong Kong, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands.

The second of the three defence roles provides insurance against a major external threat to the United Kingdom and our allies. This role is discharged through our membership of NATO. NATO has three new force categories: immediate and rapid reaction forces, main defence forces, and augmentation forces. The RAF contributes to all three and, of course, its nuclear capability, which I have already mentioned, is double-hatted here. Tornado F3 air defence aircraft and Rapier fire units are declared to NATO's immediate reaction force and some 80 Harrier, Tornado and Jaguar aircraft are declared to the rapid reaction force in the critical areas of offensive air support, tactical reconnaissance and interdiction.

In addition, a further 190 aircraft are assigned to main defence forces, including tankers, transport aircraft and helicopters. Finally, a composite force of Chinook and Puma helicopters is assigned to the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps.

I deal now with the third defence role—the armed forces' contribution to promoting the United Kingdom's wider security interests. It is, of course, under this defence role that our armed forces, and the RAF in particular, have in recent years seen most active employment.

The area of current operations in which the RAF is most publicly visible continues to be in the former Yugoslavia. There, the RAF is maintaining its considerable, and key, contribution to United Nations operations. As part of the multinational NATO airborne early warning force, the RAF's Sentry AEW1 aircraft fly daily over Hungary to monitor the airspace of the former Yugoslavia. These aircraft were joined in April of last year by eight Tornado F3s, which deployed to Gioia del Colle in Italy when the emphasis of Operation Deny Flight changed from surveillance to enforcement of the no-fly zone. Since then the Tornado F3s have flown more than 800 operational sorties, and the Sentry AEWs have flown more than 650 since their deployment to the area.

On 16 July, eight Jaguar aircraft also deployed to Gioia del Colle to mount close air support and reconnaissance operations in support of UN forces operating under United Nations Security Council resolution 836, covering the provision of safe areas.

The Jaguars, since December 1993 comprising eight aircraft in the theatre with four ready to reinforce at short notice from the United Kingdom, are drawn from squadrons based at RAF Coltishall and have flown more than 650 operational sorties since their arrival in theatre.

Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft have also flown more than 110 sorties in support of arms embargo and sanctions monitoring operations in the Adriatic, and Canberra photographic reconnaissance aircraft have provided vital intelligence for our forces on the ground.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My hon. Friend must be aware, in the context of the support of the RAF for the various operations that he describes, that the Secretary of State told the Defence Select Committee on 1 December that there was a need to procure additional large support helicopters for the RAF. My hon. Friend must be aware of the importance to the industry of Somerset and Dorset and the west country of securing an order for the Westland EH101, but many hon. Members are increasingly baffled by the long delay in obtaining a decision on the matter. Will my hon. Friend say whether it will be possible very soon to make a decision under NAPNOC—no agreed price, no contract—arrangements to appraise the contract by the summer?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is right to mention the issue and tonight is as good a time as any to do so, although perhaps it is a bit premature for a definitive answer to be given. I am accompanied on the Front Bench, not only by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, but also by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who will answer the procurement question later when he winds up the debate. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that for the time being.

The element of the RAF's contribution that has perhaps the highest public profile is the flights into Sarajevo by Hercules aircraft, which have been carrying on since July 1992. The danger to our aircrew is of paramount concern, and flights are suspended when aircraft have come under ground fire, or when the risk from the warring factions surrounding Sarajevo has been too great. However, the operation is never free of uncertainty and sometimes very great danger.

[Mr. Hanley]

The RAF humanitarian airlift into Sarajevo has now totalled more than 1,100 sorties and has delivered nearly 15,000 tonnes of aid. When requested by the United Nations, the RAF will continue, where possible, to assist with the evacuation of medical casualties, as we have seen on television and in the press. There can be no doubt that the RAF's presence in the region has helped, and is helping, to save the lives of thousands of innocent victims. All the members of the defence team here know from their own experience that all the personnel involved continue to demonstrate great skill and courage in successfully carrying out the United Nations mandate.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): My hon. Friend mentioned a few moments ago the role of the Hercules aircraft. I think that he will know of the significance of Centrax, a company in my Teignbridge constituency, and the role which it has played in joining the industrial support group for Hercules. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that programme offers significant industrial benefits to the country as a whole and that, interestingly enough, it offers them in the short and medium term and not simply in the long term?

Mr. Hanley: Not only are we aware of Centrax and are grateful for its efforts in the past, but I can confirm that the Hercules is extremely important in carrying out successfully our current defence commitments. As I said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) earlier, my hon. Friend the Minister of State will refer to the procurement aspect of matters later, at a more appropriate time, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning the subject.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I wish to ask the Minister about an operational matter, understanding that he will be inhibited from giving an answer which might have the effect of putting information which should be classified into the public domain. He spoke about the dangers inherent in the operations into Sarajevo airport. There was an apprehension that those operations might be at risk from the use of surface-to-air missiles and especially the hand-portable surface-to-air missile, which can be mounted on the shoulder and may be effective up to as much as 5,000m. Without giving away any classified information, is the hon. Gentleman able to tell us whether there have been any incidents when British aircraft have come under attack from such weapon systems?

Mr. Hanley: I am not aware of any instances of our aircraft coming under attack from missiles from the ground, but anyone who flies into Sarajevo in a Hercules sees regularly when ground-based radar is locked on to the aircraft, which shows that there is a possibility of a SAM2 being aimed at the plane. Of course, there are ways of dispelling that threat, should it occur. The fact that that happens regularly, although it might be discouraging to anyone in the House, means that RAF crews regard it as a matter of course. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the danger involved in carrying out the humanitarian task.

This would be a good opportunity for the whole House to join me in praising the efforts of all the RAF personnel who have done their very best in difficult and risky circumstances to bring what relief they can to the area. I am aware that the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), too, has had the opportunity of seeing that work in action.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): I join my hon. Friend's tribute to the men and women of the Royal Air Force, but is he aware that the slashing of the front-line strength of the Tornado strike squadrons since the Gulf war from 11 to a mere six represents a devastating reduction in the capability of the RAF? Given the extreme instability in the former Soviet Union today, and the fact that more than a dozen non-NATO countries actively have programmes in place for acquiring weapons of mass destruction and the means of delivery of such weapons, is there not an urgent need for the RAF to acquire a stand-off missile with a dual capability, both nuclear and conventional?

Mr. Hanley: I agree with my hon. Friend that under both "Options for Change" and Prospect there has indeed been a restructuring and reduction of our front-line forces. I accept that as a result of "Options for Change" 15 front-line squadrons will have been withdrawn from service by 1995, when the programme comes to an end. That has been calculated by reference to our need for front-line offensive forces, to the reduced threat from the former Soviet Union, and to the fact that the cold war is over. It has been carefully calculated according to our defence needs——

Mr. Churchill: Treasury threats.

Mr. Hanley: I hear my hon. Friend murmuring that the reductions were demanded by the Treasury. I can assure him that that is not so. I am proud to be able to say that we have calculated our needs according to our defence requirements.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): As well as the Tornado squadrons being reduced, is it not clear that the phasing out of the Buccaneer will mean that Tornado squadrons, in smaller numbers, will have to accept an additional role? Does the Minister not feel that if Tornado squadrons are to take on the role of the Buccaneer the reductions should be reconsidered?

Mr. Hanley: The withdrawal of the Buccaneer has been decided upon for perfectly sensible strategic reasons. There is no reason on earth to believe that at this moment we, in conjunction with our allies—any operation within the area of our NATO responsibilities is of course likely to be undertaken in conjunction with our allies—cannot make a sizeable contribution to an international force. There is no reason to believe that we cannot carry out our wider defence roles, including the most important role—the defence of our shores—with the aircraft that we have, and the men and women who serve in the RAF.

Therefore, I have no hesitation in making that claim for what we have now. There may be many in the House who wish that we had more, but there are also some who wish that we had less—that was the posture of Labour and Liberal Democrat policy in their overall party conference statements. Perhaps we shall hear more about those as the debate goes on.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Bearing in mind what my hon. Friend the Minister has just said, is he saying that what we have at the moment is the minimum that we require, in terms of front-line forces, to meet our commitments?

Mr. Hanley: At this moment, we have a carefully calculated number of aircraft. The White Paper, "Defending our Future", produced last year by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence explains our commitments and how we meet them with our existing forces.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): As it sounds as though the 40 Tornados already in store are to be joined by a rather larger number, does it not behove the Minister to look, in relation to the defence procurement industry, at future needs bearing in mind the reduced demand for fighter aircraft from our armed forces and the need for our highly technically capable industry to develop alternative products and means of employment? Should not the Government be doing something about that because market forces clearly will not make any provision?

Mr. Hanley: If Labour party policy, approved by almost an 80 per cent. majority at last year's Labour party conference as it was approved in the five years before that, were to be introduced, it would slash our defence industry. The amount of money which would have to be taken out of the defence budget would be equal to the whole budget for the Army, the Royal Air Force or the Royal Navy or the whole of the defence industry. Some 500,000 people could lose their jobs if Labour's plans were introduced.

Mr. Cryer: Answer the question.

Mr. Hanley: As a direct answer to the hon. Gentleman, I can tell him that our policy would not do that to the defence industry.

Certainly some defence companies are reducing in size as the need for our defence forces reduces. However, very substantial contracts are keeping the defence industry going and ensuring that our research and development is of the highest quality. I remind the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) that defence industry exports last year amounted to £5 billion. That was 20 per cent. of world sales and was a record amount for the United Kingdom. Instead of the doom and gloom referred to by the hon. Member for Bradford, South, I believe that the story is one of success and expansion.

As well as a continuing presence in the Adriatic theatre, the United Kingdom remains committed to providing aircraft to enforce both the northern and southern no-fly zones over Iraq. Tornado GR1s drawn from bases in the United Kingdom and Germany have now flown nearly 1,500 operational sorties in the surveillance role over southern Iraq. In the north, Harrier GR7s, which replaced the Jaguars originally assigned to the task, have flown more than 1,000 reconnaissance missions in support of the United Nations operation over northern Iraq.

Of course we should not forget that crucial to the success of all those operations are the perhaps less glamorous tasks performed by the air transport and air-to-air refuelling forces. I need hardly remind the House of the extent to which the RAF's ability to react effectively to the full range of potential tasks depends on the skill and professionalism of those personnel. In all those operations——

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hanley: I have answered a number of interventions. I will take a few more interventions, but I would like to make progress.

Mr. Ainger: On the Minister's point about trying to match resources with perceived need and demand, will he explain why, in respect of search and rescue where the perceived need is increasing, the Government plan to reduce resources from 16 RAF aircraft devoted to search and rescue in 1992 to 12 aircraft in 1996?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that our capability is increasing. If we have better helicopters carrying out the task, perhaps we do not need as many bases. Operationally, we believe that we will be covering the existing area as efficiently and even better. The hon. Gentleman may be referring particularly to RAF Brawdy. The proposal to move the search and rescue facility from RAF Brawdy to RAF Chivenor has been taken for operational and other reasons.

In all those operations, it continues to be the speed of response, flexibility and relative ease with which aircraft can be deployed that so often enables the RAF to be in the forefront in its ability to respond to international crises or to requests for help. Indeed, in the past few months, it has helped in Somalia, Guatemala and the Lebanon.

So that we are able to meet the challenges of the future, we remain committed to a Royal Air Force which is well equipped. I have said that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will wish to say more about the future equipment programme. He will show how that reflects the changes in the strategic environment which have taken place in the past few years. Although the direct threat to the United Kingdom has decreased, uncertainties still remain, and, as events in the former Yugoslavia have demonstrated, we must stay sufficiently flexible to react to any new threats to our security and to more general threats.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The hon. Gentleman is a Minister of State. I understand that the hon. Gentleman to his left is the Parliamentary Under-Secretary. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Forgive me, I got that wrong. However, from what the Minister was saying, I understand that, as Minister of State, he has some responsibility for defence sales. [HON. MEMBERS: "No. Wrong again."] He does not have that responsibility then. We now know that he has no responsibility for procurement or defence sales.

Having clearly been made aware of what is going on at the Scott inquiry, I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman could tell us whether, in view of the ethos of secrecy which pervaded his Department in the late 1980s, outside the two aspects to which I referred, and in the light of what has come out of the inquiry, changes are being made in the way in which Ministers go about revealing to the wider public what is happening.

Mr. Hanley: Clearly the hon. Gentleman is not aware —the information is not secret—that I am the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and that my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) is the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. We both serve loyally our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who is seated further to my left. My hon. Friend is responsible for defence procurement, which includes defence sales. My area of operation is responsibility for the worldwide operations of the armed forces. They are the

[Mr. Hanley]

best possible advertisement—both them and their equipment—for defence sales worldwide. Therefore, their capability is vital.

As for the rest of the hon. Gentleman's question, that matter is secret—but I will tell him later on, if he wants.

At this stage—I do not want to pre-empt anything that my hon. Friend may say later—the scale and nature of the forward equipment programme clearly demonstrates the Government's intention to retain all the capabilities that the RAF needs if it is to continue to play the full role that will be necessary to meet the challenges that this uncertain world presents. At a time of public expenditure stringency, it is essential that we achieve the greatest possible defence output from available resources.

As you will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has established a major study entitled "Front Line First", under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Minister of State. That study is a radical and searching scrutiny of defence support functions. The prime aim of the study is to find savings so that we can best preserve our front-line capabilities. That must be the most important aim. The study is progressing well, and we have received more than 3,000 efficiency suggestions from all aspects and levels of the Ministry and the services. We have received a substantial number from the Royal Air Force as well as from the other services.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) seems surprised by that figure—surprised that people are being so constructive in the initiative. Some suggestions are, of course, being very seriously considered, some might not be relevant to the current studies, but the vast majority show not only the quality of the staff, both military and civilian, but that they are thinking hard about their responsibility for providing the United Kingdom's defence for the future. That certainly demonstrates their commitment to ensuring that the organisation in which they work and to which they dedicate their lives needs to adapt to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I admit that I was somewhat bemused. Can the Minister tell the House when it was not the Government's policy to put the front line first?

Mr. Hanley: As the hon. Gentleman said, "front line first" has always been our policy: successive Governments have concentrated on the front line. The new initiative will involve our examining every single area of our defence estate to ensure that the funds available for the years ahead are fully committed in the most important area, which is our front line capability, and that we do not waste a single penny on anything else. That surely must be sensible.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): The Minister talked about the co-operation of the staff, many of whom are civilians. Would he not see more co-operation from the staff if he made the reports public so that they could debate the conclusions?

Mr. Hanley: The reports are management reports. From the suggestions in them will come policies and from those policies will come changes in the way in which we provide support. I should emphasise that we already take our staff with us and keep them informed—as a matter of good management ethics and because we believe that the Ministry of Defence is an excellent employer.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) will not be aware of the situation at RAF Carlisle. Within two days of making an announcement, I invited representatives of the trade union side to come to see me, which they did, accompanied by my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean), the Minister of State, Home Office. Following our discussions, I extended the consultation period by more than a month. I have offered two meetings, at which the trade unions will receive full information about the decisions that have led to our proposal.

So we are, indeed, keeping our staff fully informed. Some information is bound to be commercially confidential and it is important that only the information relevant to a particular matter is dealt with, but I believe that we are doing exactly what the hon. Gentleman requires of us.

We should not let the new initiative overshadow much of the hard work that has already been done to make the services and the Ministry of Defence leaner and more efficient—all of which is fully consistent with the aims of "Front Line First". The RAF has played a leading role in that work. Let me take the opportunity to outline some of the respects in which the RAF has made and continues to make considerable progress, showing an imagination and initiative that I do not find at all surprising.

As explained in last year's "Statement on the Defence Estimates", from 1 April a new RAF logistics command will take over the functions of the current organisation of the Air Member for Supply and Organisation, and part of RAF Support Command, and will be located at Brampton/Wyton. A new RAF Personnel and Training Command, to be located at RAF Innsworth, will absorb the functions of the organisation of the Air Member for Personnel and parts of RAF Support Command, bringing together recruitment, training and personnel management functions. We are confident that the creation of those two separate commands will make for a more effective RAF support organisation and make the best use of the defence budget.

The existing policy of rationalising the RAF estate in order to concentrate assets was given added impetus by "Options for Change" and has continued to be a major consideration in the years since the initial post-cold war appraisal. The original "Options for Change" announcements, made in July 1990, identified five RAF stations in the United Kingdom and two in Germany that were to be closed. Studies since then have identified further locations that can be made available for disposal or reduced to minor enclaves. Since 1991, 15 stations have been closed. Estate rationalisation initiatives have made and will continue to make a significant contribution to the drive to provide a slimmer service to meet the changed international situation.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): When the Minister examines the future of Royal Air Force bases, will he pay due regard to the importance of maintaining a sufficient number of usable airfields, which could be required in time of expansion, emergency or war? It is essential for the successful conduct of air operations that our air assets should be satisfactorily dispersed. If the Minister proposes to close stations, will he please close those where there is no runway or airfield and transfer facilities that need to be transferred as a consequence of closures to stations with airfields, in order to keep them open?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. Of course, we are aware of the need to keep spare runways in good condition for use in an emergency. A care and maintenance regime is in force on several bases. It is clearly important to meet not only our own requirements but those of NATO. I shall certainly examine what my hon. Friend has suggested.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister note that quite a few of the RAF bases that have been closed seem almost immediately to have been taken over by one of the other services? That may help to reduce expenditure on the Air Force budget, but it may not make much difference to the total defence budget.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman's experience in these matters is well known. Obviously, our first requirement when we remove a particular RAF unit from, say, an RAF base is to find an alternative defence use for it. If a use could not be found, we would negotiate with local councils and planning authorities as to the best use for the site. I assure the hon. Gentleman that where we use an RAF base for which there is no longer a Royal Air Force need, say, to accommodate an Army battalion, we do so merely because otherwise we should have to put that battalion in a place that might be more expensive or build new accommodation. The problem arises particularly with the draw-down of forces from Germany, Belize and Hong Kong.

There has been a great need, particularly with the draw-down from Germany, to find alternative accommodation. Therefore, RAF bases, with their excellent accommodation and housing, have been used fairly regularly. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we seek to use the estate efficiently and effectively. Our policy is that, if there is no defence need, we sell the site to the broader community.

In accordance with the change in the front line outlined in the White Paper, the RAF has continued to examine the possibilities for rationalisation, particularly in the support area. That has resulted in recent proposals on the rationalisation of equipment supply depots, avionics and communications and flying training. Those proposals are all currently the subject of consultation with the trade unions and other interested parties.

A study of equipment supply depots recommended that the focus of the technical storage function should be at RAF Stafford. That decision relates to the proposal to close RAF Carlisle by 31 March 1997, to which the hon. Member for Carlisle referred. It also relates to the progressive run-down of RAF Quedgeley and its ultimate closure by 31 March 1998. RAF Stafford is the most cost-effective option for the task because of its greater warehouse capacity and lower upgrade costs. The proposals will save some £85 million over 10 years—a considerable figure. We shall, of course, make every effort to minimise or, if at all possible, avoid redundancies among the civilian staff who have served us so well over the years.

Mr. Martlew: I did not mean to interrupt the Minister again, but he implied that the decision on RAF Carlisle and RAF Quedgeley had been taken. Is it not the case that we are in the middle of a consultation period? I wish that the Minister would make it clear that no final decision has yet been taken.

Mr. Hanley: We have made a proposal based on carefully calculated information and data. We have put that proposal out for consultation. That does not mean that the decision is absolutely final. It means that we are showing that we have confidence in our proposals. We are allowing those who wish to comment to do so and to see not only me but officials personally to discuss the matter. As I said, I have extended the consultation period by four weeks so that we can ensure that the meetings occur. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will come to the meeting that I shall have at Carlisle in March.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): If my hon. Friend has confidence in his Department's proposals, he presumably also wishes that those affected by the decision should have confidence in the basis on which he has made them. Will he, therefore, give the House an undertaking that all the information that he uses to reach his decisions will be made available to those who are affected by them?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend has been assiduous in representing the interests of his constituents who are affected by the decision on RAF Quedgeley. I am grateful to him for bringing a delegation to me only this week. However, I must say to him that "management in confidence" and "commercial in confidence" mean just that. We cannot supply every piece of information that my hon. Friend might require, but we can provide sufficient information to allow people to decide whether we have made the right decision. The decisions will be tested by the accounting officer at the Ministry of Defence and I am sure that we shall not be found wanting.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister has just raised an issue that takes my mind back to a report that the Public Accounts Committee made on the Castle Donington fire. A large amount of unduplicated defence equipment was stored at a single location. Are Ministers saying that there will be one depot for all this RAF equipment, which will be unduplicated? That would mean that if there was a repeat of the incident at Castle Donington, we could wipe out the spare parts which might be needed in an emergency. Is that what is likely to happen?

Mr. Hanley: If the hon. Gentleman was more aware of the pattern of stores holding that prevails in the modern world—everything is not held centrally—perhaps he would have more confidence. It is clearly right that we should collocate on one site and gain economies of scale, for a reduced size of stores holding.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I accept that.

Mr. Hanley: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman admits that that is a sensible move. He may not be aware that, when the Donington conflagration occurred, I was one of the Members of Parliament who complained vociferously about it. I believed that the security was totally inadequate. The amount of spares carried now is much smaller. As a result of other management initiatives and quicker turn-round of the requirement for spares, the amount of spares carried as a whole is smaller.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The amount of spares as a whole may be smaller, but the point is that if one needs a vital component in an emergency and it is not available on another site because it is not duplicated, the equipment will be non-operational whatever the management changes that have been made to provide greater efficiency. Surely that is dangerous in terms of national defence policy.

Mr. Hanley: Under the hon. Gentleman's policy, we would have two sets of Crown jewels in case one was damaged. We need to keep the best security if we keep expensive equipment at one site. We believe that we are carrying out the changes. The "Front Line First" studies will continue to examine that matter.

The review of avionics and communication electronics has recommended that the ground radio servicing centre should relocate from RAF North Luffenham No. 30 maintenance unit at RAF Sealand.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Does my hon. Friend accept that, if RAF North Luffenham closes, thought must be given to how the large area on which it is based will be used afterwards? North Luffenham is in an idyllic part of rural Rutland and it must be allowed to preserve its identity. Will he give an assurance that thought will be given even now to how the land might be disposed of, how business might be brought in and, for example, how trees and shrubs might be planted? Will he undertake to work with Rutland district council to ensure that we have an imaginative transition to civilian use?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is right that there would be uncertainty in the proposals if we had not said that the RAF North Luffenham site would be closed by 1 October 1996. Other units currently located there will be relocated elsewhere. Indeed, the Ministry will save about £15 million over 10 years. However, we shall co-operate fully with the local council and the planning authorities—that is always our intention—and, with the guidance of my hon. Friend and of the planning authorities, shall ensure that people's time with the RAF is remembered with happiness rather than with the misery that many Opposition Members have expressed today.

A wide-ranging review of RAF maintenance group as a whole is currently being undertaken. This should identify a more cost-effective location for the ground radio servicing centre. So far as Sealand is concerned, there are still decisions to be made, but we are proceeding on the basis of the assumption that North Luffenham will close. A new RAF Personnel and Training Command will be created at the same time.

The third major study—the one on the future of RAF flying training—has recently reported a first stage of rationalisation. It has recommended that fast jet advanced flying training should be rationalised from the current two stations—RAF Chivenor and RAF Valley—into just RAF Valley. Chivenor would cease flying from 1 October 1994 and would be put on a care-and-maintenance basis from 1 October 1995. This proposal, which is out to consultation, would save £130 million, at net present value, over a period of 10 years.

Mr. Ainger: Is the Minister aware that today is the 51st anniversary of the Royal Air Force mountain rescue service? I should like to refer to the reorganisation of flight training along the west coast. The mountain rescue team that is currently covering the Snowdonia range is extremely concerned that, as a result of the proposed transfer of Flight 202 from Brawdy to Chivenor, which, as the Minister has announced, is due to close, it will not be able to respond quickly enough when climbers and walkers fall and, because of severe injury, face hypothermia.

Mr. Hanley: I am very grateful for the hon. Gentleman's tribute to the search and rescue teams, which do a tremendous job around the country. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the decision to move this service from Brawdy to Chivenor was made on logistical grounds. It is an entirely sensible move. The hon. Gentleman may, for constituency reasons, regret it very much—though he has not today welcomed the move of the Royal Welch Fusiliers to Brawdy, which is an example of the best use of facilities —but every silver lining has a cloud.

I was dealing a moment ago with the question of flying training and the move from Chivenor to Valley. Further work on the pattern of flying training is being done to determine whether there is scope for more rationalisation of flying training.

All the matters that I have mentioned involve difficult and painful decisions. We have carried out our appraisals to secure cost-effective solutions for the taxpayer while meeting the changed requirements in the new defence environment. As I have stressed to Opposition Front Bench Members, we are in full consultation with the trade unions. I have met hon. Members from both sides of the House whose constituencies are affected, as well as representatives of local authorities. It is important that the need for these changes be understood.

Market testing is another recent initiative which the RAF has pursued with great vigour and success. Current savings from the RAF's market testing programme are positive and encouraging. The achievement of the Royal Air Force in meeting the challenge of its market testing targets and time scales is perhaps best illustrated in a snapshot of recently completed market tests. Savings of more than £8 million in annual support costs were realised through market testing between 1992 and 1993. The activities in respect of which savings were made formerly cost the public more than £22·5 million. They range from the elementary flying training school at RAF Topcliffe, where training for ab initio pilots entering the RAF and the Royal Navy is undertaken, to the engineering maintenance and supply support of training aircraft at RAF Scampton.

The RAF is also adopting new working practices, one of which is known as support chain management—SCM. Under SCM it is possible to detect previously hidden inefficiencies caused by bottlenecks in the flow of information or material. Within the RAF, SCM will move the service away from its traditional dependence on depot stocks, which are costly to maintain, and will introduce more responsive and flexible supply management. SCM will also complement the RAF logistics information technology strategy, which aims to introduce an integrated system serving the whole logistics community. Together, they should generate net savings, in spares and repair costs, of at least £500 million.

The "Front Line First" study is, of course, looking again at all these rationalisations and initiatives in the support area with a view to seeing whether even greater reductions in costs can be achieved. But, as I hope I have demonstrated, the RAF is now engaged in making many of the fundamental changes that are necessary if it is to be in the best possible shape to meet the varied challenges that will face us all in the coming years. The changes in its organisation could not, of course, be sustained if it were not for the professionalism displayed by its men and women, together with—and this is so often forgotten—the support of the families who remain at home.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can my hon. Friend say whether it is still Her Majesty's Government's policy that members of the armed forces—men and women—must be ready to undertake any duty on behalf of the Crown, in peace or in war? If a member of the Women's Royal Air Force becomes pregnant, she is paid off to the tune of several tens of thousands of pounds. Is this an appropriate use of taxpayers' money?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend raises an issue that has caused some concern recently. A situation that existed for a time has now been overtaken by events and by changed contracts of employment. I believe that the changes took place in 1990. The situation is of a finite nature. The vast majority of the women involved settled their claims quickly and efficiently, although some are taking a long time in their efforts to secure very large sums. I have to admit that, whatever their rights may be, and whatever compensation is decided legally, this has given offence to certain people. However, as I have indicated, I hope that it has been changed by events.

There is a great deal of uncertainty in the hearts and minds of the families, but I am tremendously impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm that both civilian and service personnel—at headquarters, at other establishments and in the field—have demonstrated.

Sir Harold Walker (Doncaster, Central): The Minister has quite properly paid tribute to the professionalism of the men and women of the Royal Air Force. I hope that he has in mind the professionalism of and the service given by those who preceded the present generation. The hon. Gentleman is no doubt aware that 1994 is the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the jet fighter aircraft —the Meteor having gone into service with the South Yorkshire Squadron 616, flying out of Doncaster in 1944. What does the Minister intend to do to commemorate that significant event?

Mr. Hanley: I am one of those who wrote to the Royal Mail asking that a stamp be issued to commemorate the event. In addition, I was in south Yorkshire this morning, and I pay tribute to the RAF—in particular, 33 Squadron —for getting me back in time for this debate.

The entire Ministry of Defence team, under the Secretary of State, is impressed by the professionalism and the stoic good humour of the people we meet as we travel around. It is a great credit to the RAF that it is approaching the hurdles—many of them financial—with the skill and determination that it has displayed so often. This attitude continues in many places around the world. I appreciate that current operations in some areas are placing heavy demands on personnel, but their enthusiasm and attention to duty is inspirational.

With the 75th anniversary of the RAF and the 50th anniversary of the jet aircraft, it is appropriate and it gives me great pleasure to be able to announce to the House that Her Majesty the Queen has graciously approved the introduction of a medal to recognise aggregated campaign service since 14 August 1969 in those theatres where the General Service medal (1962), with clasp, has been awarded. The medal will be known as the Accumulated Campaign Service medal and it recognises 36 months or more of service, which qualify for a clasp or clasps to the General Service medal (1962).

The medal is for services in awkward and difficult theatres of operation in which our service men and women work around the world. I am delighted that that service will now be formally recognised. The details of the award are set out in a Command Paper, which was presented to the House earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. The regulations for the award of the medal are different for each force, because the qualifying periods are different for each of the forces. They are slightly complicated, but they are available to hon. Members in the Library.

I am sincerely grateful to the men and women of the RAF who continue to serve their country with such distinction and courage. I am also grateful to the civilians who help them out in the field and to the civil servants at the Ministry of Defence, whose efforts often go unsung. I assure them that they are all worthy upholders of the traditions of their proud service, which has lasted for the past 75 years.

5.1 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): On behalf of the Opposition, I welcome the announcement about the new medal, which is perhaps overdue. I should also like to associate myself with the final words of the Minister, but I am not sure about the parts in between.

I pay tribute to the men and women of the RAF who have continued to serve the country loyally in the year since the previous debate on the RAF. In 1993, in addition to their continuing role of defending the United Kingdom, RAF personnel have assisted efforts in Sarajevo aimed at lifting the siege so as to ensure that the local people are not starved into submission. They have assisted the United Nations by policing the no-fly zone in Bosnia and undertaking the early-warning monitoring role over Hungary and the Adriatic. Aircrews have also done a magnificent job in assisting the rescue efforts in Bosnia and the Adriatic.

The RAF is also policing the no-fly zone in southern Iraq to deter the Iraqi air force from attempting the genocide of the marsh Arabs. It continues to protect the Kurdish people of northern Iraq. It also continues to provide security cover in the Falklands, Hong Kong and other outposts around the world, while playing a major part in assisting the security forces in Northern Ireland. There is no doubt that millions of people throughout the world have reason to be thankful for the skills and dedication of the RAF.

We must also remember the thousands of MOD civilian workers and the hundreds of thousands of people who work in the defence industry, who play a vital role in our defences.

In many ways this has been a good year for the RAF, but as Charles Dickens wrote:

> "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times".

The reason for that is the shabby way in which the forces, and in particular the RAF, have been treated by the Government. I can recall no other occasion in recent history when there has been such a lack of confidence in the commitment of a British Government to maintain credible armed forces.

[Mr. Eric Martlew]

As a result of "Options for Change", the RAF has suffered the loss of 15 squadrons, a 33 per cent. reduction in the number of combat aircraft and a reduction in the number of service personnel from 91,000 in 1989 to 77,000 in 1993. "Options for Change" anticipates that, by 1995, that number will be down to 70,000. Rumours are already circulating around the RAF, however, that even greater cuts will be made. I know that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who will reply to the debate, is not responsible for manpower, but perhaps he can comment on it.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman has accurately recorded the changes that have taken place in the past few years. I hope that he will spell out exactly Labour party policy towards manpower, equipment and RAF commitments across the world. We will then be able to measure more accurately whether Opposition rhetoric is matched by facts.

Mr. Martlew: That is fine by me. I will return to that issue later. The short answer is that—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members should not start laughing. The Labour party will consider our overseas commitments and the necessary role for the forces, including the RAF. We will then decide, subject to a full defence review, what we need to meet those commitments. We shall provide the money to ensure that they are met.

The Government have failed to carry out a defence review, but they have continued to make cuts in the forces, like a blind man. They have not reduced our defence commitments, but they have cut the personnel, which has put an extra strain on service men and women. Conservative Members are aware of that. I am sure that, before the debate is over, we will hear a call for a defence review from many Conservative Members.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The hon. Gentleman will know that I am one of those who has called for a defence review, and I have been doing so for some time. I want to be absolutely clear about what the hon. Gentleman said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans). Am I correct to assume that, at the end of that review, the Labour party will match commitments with resources? Can we therefore assume that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will not be bound by several recent Labour party conference motions?

Mr. Martlew: We shall be bound by our manifesto commitment that we will fund whatever defence requirements were needed.

The Government have broken their promises to the RAF on many occasions, not least with regard to the RAF's continuing nuclear role. During the debate on the defence estimates, the Secretary of State announced that the tactical air-to-surface missile, TASM, would be cancelled. We welcomed that decision, but the RAF did not. I spoke to several senior officers before that debate and they did not believe that the Government would leave the RAF without a nuclear role in the next century. That is exactly what they have done.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): The hon. Gentleman has made a most important policy statement about the Labour party's defence policy. May I ask him to clarify it? Is he now saying he would make funds available for any future defence commitments entered into by the Labour party, in defiance of the binding resolution—passed by 79 per cent. of the voters at the Labour party conference—in composite motion No. 49, the effect of which would be to reduce Britain's defence spending by £7·5 billion? That is equivalent to wiping out the entire spending on one of our three services. Is he overruling the motion that his own conference passed by a binding majority of more than two thirds, 79 per cent., of the voters at that conference?

Mr. Martlew: The Government should remember that they have already made massive cuts in defence spending. It does not sit well on the Minister's shoulders to talk about other parties cutting defence expenditure. We made a commitment at the election to the electorate that we would provide the necessary resources to protect the United Kingdom. It is obviously dawning on the British electorate that that cannot be said of the Government, because the most recent opinion poll on the subject, which asked people in whose hands the defence of Britain would be safest, revealed that the majority believed that it would be safest in the hands of the Labour party. That is some reference not only to the good work of my hon. Friends but to the dismal performance of Ministers.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The hon. Gentleman talked about the defence of the realm being safe in somebody's hands. Is the base at RAF Carlisle safe in the Labour party's hands? Would it be kept open if the Labour party were to form the Government?

Mr. Martlew: The point is that it is not safe in the Government's hands. The Minister said today from the Dispatch Box that he intends to ignore consultations. It is a disgrace for Conservative Members to make political capital out of 850 people's jobs. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) will remain seated.

Conservative Members do not want to hear about the other broken promises, including those on air bases. However, the Government said that they have closed 14 air bases. That has been done with scant regard to consultation with the people who work there and even less regard to the effect of the closure on the local economy. It seems strange that the majority of the bases that have been closed are in the north, in what could be called the Celtic region of the country, and that those that are kept open are around the south of England.

Mr. Nicholls: A very good thing.

Mr. Martlew: The Government have broken their promises on pay and conditions for service people. They said that they would allow a wage increase last year of only 1·5 per cent. If we believe the Chancellor of the Exchequer, they will not receive any pay increase this year.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, but I think that I should draw his attention to a comment made from a sedentary position by a former Minister on the Government Back Benches. When my hon. Friend referred to the fact that the Government kept closing bases in the north but not those in the south, that former Minister said, "A very good thing." Does not that show that there is a problem in defence policy of bias against the north of England?

Mr. Martlew: There is a feeling that the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) was only reiterating what Government Front-Bench Members believe.

Mr. Nicholls: It may not have escaped the hon. Gentleman that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has absolutely no sense of humour. If he had ever doubted that, he will appreciate it now.

Mr. Martlew: I do not find the loss of 850 jobs, wherever they occur, a laughing matter. I disagree with the hon. Member for Teignbridge on that point.

The Government's total mismanagement has meant that they have had to pay £7 million in compensation to women who were unfairly dismissed because they were pregnant. I shall return to that matter. As the Minister of State for Defence Procurement is to wind up the debate, I shall mention one or two items on that subject as well.

Eurofighter 2000 is a very important project both in military and industrial terms. It is a scandal that the Government have allowed the timetable for that programme to slip by two years. I have been pressing for it to get back on stream as it is essential, especially to people working in the north-west. No one hopes more than me that Eurofighter 2000 will fly in April this year. Events surrounding the Eurohelicopter 101 are an absolute scandal. We have waited eight years for that project and the Minister, in reply to me during previous Defence questions, could not give a date for when the project was likely to come about.

The Government have treated the RAF badly over the past year. Morale in the RAF is low. It is so bad that last November Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon, Chief of the Air Staff, launched an unprecedented public attack on the Government, saying that Treasury Ministers had campaigned deliberately to discredit the RAF.

Mr. Mans: I was in the audience when the Air Chief Marshal made that speech and I assure the hon. Gentleman that his remarks were directed not at any Treasury Minister, but elsewhere. If he were to read the text of the speech, he would understand that. On that basis, I hope that he will withdraw his last remark.

Mr. Martlew: The problem is that the speech is classified. We rang the Air Chief Marshal's office and he referred us to the Secretary of State. We rang the Secretary of State's office and he refused to give us the report of the speech, which has never been published. If the Secretary of State were to intervene now and say that he will put a copy of it in the Library, I should be delighted.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Martlew: I am waiting for the Secretary of State to intervene.

We have not seen a copy of the Air Chief Marshal's speech. We go by the press reports. We have been told by the Secretary of State that we cannot have a copy of that speech and we msut presume, therefore, that it is classified.

Mr. Walker: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), I attended that open meeting, which took place at the Royal Aeronautical Society. At no point in his speech did the Chief of the Air Staff say specifically that anyone in the Government was spreading damaging information about the RAF. He did say that he and the RAF knew who had been putting out that information. That is not the same as what the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said.

Mr. Martlew: I would be more convinced by the hon. Gentleman's argument if the Secretary of State had not made the Chief of the Air Staff write a letter of apology to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. *The Guardian* carried the headline:

> "Air Chief says sorry to Portillo".

If the Chief of the Air Staff did not say anything, why did he have to apologise?

Mr. Hanley: I should like to help the hon. Gentleman with a little matter that he mentioned earlier. He is clearly speaking with prejudice or in ignorance—or both. In either case, it is breathtaking. Of the last 15 base closures, two were in Germany, 10 were located under a line south of Birmingham and only three were in the north. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman is wrong and I hope that that helps to clarify the position.

Mr. Martlew: I am sure that, if one considers the proportion of job losses and the proportion of bases to the area, one will find that what I said was correct.

May I now get to the meat of my speech? Obviously, hon. Members have enjoyed the starter, but perhaps we can get on to the main course. There has not been a great deal of disagreement between the Opposition and Government Front-Bench Members on Bosnia. I am aware that Back-Bench Members on both sides of the House have differing views. From my last visit to Bosnia in the autumn, I came away convinced that it was suffering a human tragedy and a civil war, and that the United Nations, or any other outside organisation, should not get involved on one side or another. It would be disastrous if we were seen to be taking sides.

The present role of developing humanitarian aid and policing the no-fly zone has made a considerable contribution in reducing the number of innocent casualties. I am critical, however—this is where there is some discord—of recent statements made by the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence, who appear to be threatening to pull out British forces unilaterally. I have no doubt that that would lead to a considerable loss of innocent lives. I wish that we could give the commitment to the United Nations that we would remain in Bosnia as long as necessary and that, if and when a firm peace agreement is signed, we would stay to police it and, if necessary, make extra forces available.

At this time, we should be telling the United Nations what forces we shall have available. I hope that we can get away from the idea that we should keep on pretending that we may pull our people out. It does no good to the morale of our people on the ground and I am sure that the innocent people in Bosnia are not happy about that scenario.

I spoke earlier about service pay, but no Conservative Member sought to intervene. They did not seem to be bothered too much that service pay is being cut in real terms. Last year, the Government enforced a pay increase of 1·5 per cent. on all service personnel. That was equal to a cut in take-home pay of up to 2 per cent. because members of the armed forces are not normally mortgage holders and did not benefit from the dramatic drop in interest rates. As a result, they lost more than anybody else.

In November, the Chancellor told them that they would get no increase whatever unless it was earned by

[Mr. Martlew]

productivity. The mind boggles. How does one measure the productivity of an RAF fighter pilot or an infantry man? One measure that could be applied is the reduction of 15 squadrons and a cut of 22 per cent. in RAF service personnel. In view of that and of the fact that few roles are being reduced, it could be argued that they are entitled to a 22 or 33 per cent. increase.

I had hoped that the Minister would say that the armed forces were to receive a pay increase this year. It has been rumoured in the press that senior officers will get a pay award of 2·8 per cent. That does not seem out of line, especially as Members of Parliament got 2·9 per cent. However, it would be regrettable, and it would be opposed by the Labour party, if senior officers received 2·8 per cent. and other ranks did not. There is no doubt that the pay difference between officers and other ranks has been growing steadily.

A page of the Tory party manifesto had the quaint heading "Taking responsibility for Britain". As the Prime Minister has been to the Scott inquiry, he is probably asking for that heading to be withdrawn so that he can take responsibility for nothing. The Government have broken their pledge because under that heading the manifesto states:

> "Our Services deserve the excellent pay and conditions which we have secured for them and will maintain."

The Government failed to carry out that promise last year and I suspect that they will fail again this year.

A Select Committee report in 1991 concluded that the forces were having great difficulty in recruiting skilled technical staff, and in 1991 we were in the teeth of a recession. If there is the recovery for which we all hope, and service pay has not kept pace with the private sector, the forces will not be able to recruit and there will be an exodus and a severe skills shortage. I hope that the Minister will address that issue.

The Minister spoke about the closure of bases—I am sorry that he is not in his place. He said that it had been decided to close RAF Carlisle and RAF Quedgeley. He could have given many other examples of closures. There are great doubts as to whether the transfer of MOD establishments is in the best interests of the country in defence and in money terms. An example of that is the transfer of the MOD establishment in Harrogate, Yorkshire. Great resentment was felt, especially by the work force in that area, because the work went to RAF Wyton and RAF Brampton, which are in the Prime Minister's constituency. I am told that that could not be justified on grounds of cost saving or improvement in the national defences.

There is no doubt that there were major flaws in the way that consultation with the Harrogate work force was carried out. There is a belief in the country, which I do not say that I accept, that the RAF and other services do not like to be based in the north. Therefore, they slant their reports towards recommending the closure of such bases.

If we are not careful, my part of the country will be left with nothing but jets flying low over the Lake District. There will be no jobs. The Government should look at the economic impact of relocating bases.

Harrogate is a good example, and the Minister mentioned RAF Carlisle. I am sure the House would expect me to speak about that and, in doing so, I shall examine how the MOD works. It was rumoured that the decision to close RAF Carlisle would be taken during the equipment supply study in December, and that was confirmed when I phoned the Minister's office. I was told that a decision had been made but that it had not been decided when to announce it.

On 13 December the Government leaked the fact that they would announce a decision the following day on the thermal oxide reprocessing plant in Cumbria. Lo and behold, there was a planted question that day by the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) about the equipment supply study, and he was kind enough to give me a copy of the reply. On the day that the Government announced that the THORP plant was to be opened in Cumbria, they decided to close RAF Carlisle.

Some of us thought that that was a piece of media manipulation. The Government knew that the local and national media would pay attention to the THORP announcement and, of course, they did because that decision had been leaked whereas the one on RAF Carlisle had not. I phoned the Minister's office to find out when I would be informed and I was told that a letter would be placed on the Board at 3 pm. I was at the Board at that time but no letter arrived. By 3.30 there was still no letter and at 3.45 pm I was told by a Lobby correspondent that RAF Carlisle was to close.

At 4.15 pm I met the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary who told me that there had been a mix-up and the letters had not been placed on the Board. I am sorry that the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary is not in his place. I have had a letter explaining the situation and I accept that there was a genuine mistake. However, it is strange that the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), who was also to get a letter, sent a fax to RAF Carlisle at 3.30 pm, 45 minutes before the letters arrived. It was obvious that the Government had leaked the information to hon. Members on the basis of their political persuasion. Such happenings occur when a party has been in government too long and no longer has respect for the House.

As the Minister said, it was arranged that the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border, would meet union representatives on the Friday. That was announced on the Wednesday, and it was made known to me that I would not be welcome at the meeting. I suppose that is politics. Perhaps it was a little early for them to get the full facts, but the union representatives went to the meeting and were told by the Minister that it seemed a good idea to publish the study and that he would look into it. He also agreed that it would be a good idea for the National Audit Office to study the recommendations, and he said that he would see what could be done.

On 21 December, the unions wrote to the Minister to confirm that, and on 18 January, well through the consultation period, they received a letter from the Minister saying that he would not release the report and would not call in the National Audit Office. That dashed union hopes because they believed that a full study would reveal a good argument for saving RAF Carlisle because over six years £50 million had been spent on it. There was no argument against some job losses, but they believe that they can be cost effective and put a good case to the Government. They may have been naive, but they believed that the Government simply wanted to save money. That belief was shattered by the Minister's letter in January.

The Minister must consider reversing his decision not to make the study available to trade unions or to call in the

National Audit Office. It is a disgrace that 800 people in Carlisle will lose their jobs because of a secret report. They were loyal workers throughout the Falklands conflict and the Gulf, and they have been treated very shabbily.

Yesterday, I met trade union representatives from RAF Quedgeley. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) is in his place. They had asked for the report and were devasted when they were told they could not have it. They also thought that it was a good idea that the National Audit Office should examine the findings of the report as they did not believe them to be correct.

As the Minister said, RAF Quedgeley is not earmarked for closure until 1998. The depot had been allowed to tender for furniture repair contracts. It has been successful on three occasions in winning against outside competition repair and maintenance contracts for furniture, yet this month the depot received a letter saying that it would not be able to tender in future. I am sure that the hon. Member for Gloucester will also raise that point, but I must ask the Minister to reconsider his decision.

The Minister made some fairly derogatory comments in answer to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) about women being unfairly dismissed from the forces because they had become pregnant. It is a moral disgrace that has been going on for many years.

The real problem is that the bill is coming home. Until now, according to parliamentary questions, the Government have paid £7,800,000 in compensation to women who were unfairly dismissed. That sum covers 1,679 cases. Two women who took their cases to the tribunal won large sums. One was awarded nearly £200,000, and only this week a Wren was awarded £130,000. There are 3,700 outstanding cases. If we assume that that amount is exceptional and accept the norm as £10,000, that represents a bill of £37 million. If we take the norm as £100,000, the bill will be £370 million and the MOD will be paying out more than Littlewoods.

Where is the money to come from? Is it to come out of the defence budget or from contingency funds? If it were to be spent by local government, no doubt the councillors in charge would have been surcharged. It is a large sum of money and the House needs to know where it is to come from.

The Opposition were pleased when the Secretary of State announced the cancellation of the sub-strategic tactical air-to-surface missile, but there are still outstanding questions to be answered. When will the sub-strategic capability be placed on Trident? If it is to happen in the near future, as people are predicting, why are we keeping the free-fall bomb in service with the RAF until 2006?

Mention has been made of helicopters. Let us go through the disgraceful saga of the Westland helicopter, the EH101. In April 1987, the then Secretary of State announced that he would order 25 EH101 helicopters. In October 1992, after considerable pressure, the President of the Board of Trade visited Westland. In November 1992, Westland presented to the MOD the specifications, price and cost effectiveness. On 20 May 1993, draft specifications were received by the MOD. In July 1993, Westland responded, providing unit prices and support costs. On 27 July 1993, the matter was raised during the Consolidated Fund debate in which the Minister and I took part—I thought that the Government were going to try to win the by-election, but by that time it was obvious that Christchurch was a lost cause anyway.

In early October 1993, despite assurances from the Minister that he had had a word with his Dutch counterpart, the Dutch placed an order for a French helicopter. On 13 October 1993, the Secretary of State for Defence visited Westland and on 5 November 1993 the Prime Minister visited Westland. Last week in Defence questions, when I asked when the Government were likely to place an order, the Minister said that he did not know. The Chairman of the Select Committee said that the order would not be placed until after the Budget. However, he did not say what Budget and I hope that the Minister will make an announcement tonight that he will place the helicopter order with Westland. Many jobs depend on it and it is an excellent helicopter.

Another defence procurement issue involves the Eurofighter 2000. There are no stronger supporters of the Eurofighter 2000 than myself and my hon. Friends. There has been some slippage on that, but I shall concentrate on the number of aircraft that we are likely to order. The Government are sticking to their statement that they will order 250. My understanding is that it is to replace the Tornado F-3 and the Jaguar. If I am kind and add the numbers together, there are 140 aircraft—some would say that we do not have 100 Tornados—but are we really talking about placing an order for 250 Eurofighter aircraft to replace 140 Tornados and Jaguars? I hope that we can have some clarification.

Mr. Mans: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman with those figures. He is comparing the front-line strength of the Jaguar and Tornado F-3 force with the total buy and has not taken into account the number of back-up aircraft that the Eurofighter would also have to replace.

Mr. Martlew: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I hope that Minister will give us some clarification on the exact figures. It would be wrong to continue to pretend to the industry that the Government are going to order 250 if they know that is not likely. *[Interruption.]* I understand that I have been speaking for some time. I see that the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) has woken up.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I was falling asleep; the hon. Gentleman's speech is so boring.

Mr. Martlew: The hon. Gentleman falls asleep during everyone's speech.

There is a complete breakdown of trust between the armed forces and the Conservative Government. It is best summed up by a report from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 January, under the heading:

> "Back to Basics: Portillo on fighting the new British disease of cynicism about institutions".

The Minister said:

> "Tonight I am going to talk about one of the greatest threats that have ever confronted the British nation. It does not come from the Soviet Union, nor from . . . Nuclear weapons, not even from domestic terrorism. It is more insidious and therefore harder to counter and even to defeat. It is not an external threat but an internal one. It comes from amongst us.".

That was made two months after Sir Michael Graydon, Chief of Air Staff, said in a speech to the Air League that there had been a deliberate campaign to discredit the RAF and the other services. He added that they knew who had instigated it and why and no doubt a number are the same people who basked in the reflected glory of the Gulf war. The next day's headlines said that Sir Michael was

[Mr. Martlew]

carpeted by the Secretary of State for Defence, and that the air chief "said sorry to Portillo". That is what the quote says. I am not drifting from protocol.

I wrote to the Prime Minister, asking him to confirm whether Sir Michael was referring to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and, if so, would he sack him? Of course, the Prime Minister did not reply. I presume that the letter went across his desk, but he never noticed it. Ten days later I got a reply from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, saying that it was all misplaced media comment. We did ask for that speech but were refused by the Ministers.

Dr. David Clark: What were they afraid of?

Mr. Martlew: Obviously, only Conservative Members are invited to the Air League. Perhaps the Air League will take some cognisance of that fact. We would then have had the true picture in the House.

So much for the Chief Secretary fighting those who attack fine British institutions. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that there is no finer British institution than the Royal Air Force. The scandal does not stop there. As though that was not bad enough—a Treasury Minister trying to undermine the armed forces—it must be untenable when advisers to the Secretary of State for Defence are implicated. On 10 November, *The Daily Telegraph* said:

> "Last night it emerged that an article written by Mr. David Hart, right-wing adviser to Mr. Rifkind, may have triggered off a recent press report which claimed there are too many generals, admirals and air marshals and also making unfavourable comparisons between the RAF and the Israeli Air Force."

That was by an adviser to the Secretary of State. What did the Secretary of State do? Did he get him in and carpet him? Did he sack him? Did he get him to write an apology to the air marshal? Not a bit. He is still advising the Secretary of State. He is still allowed to spread his poison.

Mr. Hardy: Is not that the second example of political failure to defend the armed forces? The armed forces cannot be responsible for fighting a political battle, in a direct sense. The Government allow a savage attack on the history and tradition of the Royal Air Force, as they did at the time of the Harris memorial, and allow repeated and quite ill-informed or mischievous articles comparing the Royal Air Force with the Israeli Air Force, when the comparison is simply preposterous. It is irritating for the services when their political masters sit on their hands instead of speaking up clearly for them.

Mr. Martlew: My hon. Friend is right. If the Secretary of State had any decency, he would have sacked his adviser and then taken his resignation to the Prime Minister. I shall quote again from "A Tale of Two Cities". Perhaps he could have said:

> "it is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done".

That is what we should have done. I have seen the video. Unlike the hon. Member for Harrow, East, I do not have problems with big words. It is time for the Government to resign. The country and its armed forces need a Government who will review foreign policy objectives, then reveal our defence commitments and needs and provide the necessary resources and support to those who are given responsibility for the defence of the nation. What we need is a Labour Government—and Parliamentary Private Secretaries who can deliver letters on time.

5.44 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I have not yet intervened in the speeches from the two Front Benches, so I feel unusually virtuous. Having begun to feel, like other Conservative Members, that perhaps some newspapers were right recently and that the Government's classic mid-term unpopularity, which we are going through temporarily, was perhaps slightly more than that and was a deeper trough, and having heard the so-called savage attack of the Labour Front Bench on defence, I do not think that the Government have anything to worry about on this matter, or in any other broad main policy areas.

I have never heard such a feeble speech as that from the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew). It is preposterous nonsense, first, to suggest that senior service chiefs, rather than politicians, should decide policy matters concerning the size of our armed forces. I have never yet met a general or air marshall who said that his forces should be smaller. We all know that to be the classic truth of defence history. Secondly, as a result of the end of the cold war, the Government would have been rightly criticised if they had not taken important measures of cost reduction and economies in various fields as a result of that changing reality.

For the Labour party suddenly overnight to pretend to be the friend of our defence forces and service men and women is a preposterous piece of nonsense. Most people in the services know that, and therefore we can dismiss its arguments with the contempt that they deserve.

I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will be able to reply later on the subject of the local closure of a base in my constituency. There have been good references in the speeches so far to the debt that we owe the Royal Air Force and its marvellous history and role, which we are celebrating this year as well as next year, and all the things that we owe those men and women who serve in it. I am second to none in adding my words to that.

In my constituency, everybody has been immensely proud to have had for many years two RAF bases—Bentley Priory and Stanmore Park. The Battle of Britain was directed from Bentley Priory. I think that my hon. Friends the Ministers of State for Defence Procurement and for the Armed Forces have visited it. It is an historic and moving site, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), who has also visited it on a number of occasions, knows full well.

All base closures are regrettable, particularly if job losses are involved and if they involve civilians. I do not say that in any anti-service men and women sense, but there is a risk now that the cold war has ended that the number of service jobs will decline. Many people in the defence forces realistically accept that, but the trouble is that we are in a time of high unemployment nationally, so it is a painful thing for anybody to contemplate.

A number of closures have been referred to in the debate. In the case of the impending closure of RAF Stanmore Park, the situation is different. If my hon. Friend the Minister has a chance to refer to it in his winding-up speech, I hope that he will reassure us that there will be no job losses. I believe that the position with the RAF is that redeployment will take place. The affected numbers on that site have already been reduced.

As my hon. Friend the Minister and I know, as do others who follow this closely, there will be redeployment to Bentley Priory, whose functions will be augmented by taking some of the Stanmore Park activity. In that case, the local community is not reacting in a sense of traditional dismay at the closure of a much-loved RAF base, although it has a long history and there is considerable pride in it in the area, not least because the RAF personnel there in recent years have been doing a lot of hearts and minds work of a lasting quality—charity work, helping with the local community and helping disabled people. There are many other examples, but I will not go into them because of the time. They have had a close relationship with the local community.

Apart from that, the acceptance of the closure in the area is positive, and slightly wider, too. It makes sense to have the rationalisation of the base closure with RAF Bentley Priory, as it is so close—it is up Stanmore hill. It is a large green belt site, where it is possible to expand some of the facilities. I will refer to that in a moment. There is a welcome for the closure of the site, because its alternative use in future will be exciting for our local community in the borough of Harrow and in Harrow, East.

Apart from five or six acres of open space and recreational ground, the site will be designated for housing, which I hope will be high-quality housing. I have to hand the development brief for RAF Stanmore Park, with which, being a local authority matter, I shall not tax my hon. Friend the Minister of State too much because it would not be his job to respond to such points.

I wish to ask my hon. Friend to reassure me, generally and on the background and the latest developments, about the closure plans of the RAF, MOD and Property Services Agency and to bring us up to date on that and, in particular, individual considerations.

First, I wish to mention the historical background because the closure of RAF Stanmore Park means that that large and attractive site will, at long last, after almost 60 years, be returned to the local community. It was first taken for defence use by the then Air Ministry in 1936 as the war clouds were looming and gathering over Europe and Britain.

In those days, because controls were inadequate, the marvellous old Stanmore Park house on that site was torn down overnight, a famous and notorious occasion, by Ministry of Defence operatives. When the inhabitants of Stanmore, in those days a leafy village of great beauty, woke up the following morning, the whole magic house at Stanmore Park had been torn down virtually without warning. Mercifully, that kind of thing does not happen nowadays.

The local community is gathering back this important site for housing, and that is much to be welcomed. The borough plan has the objective and target of 4,500 houses during the next 10 years, so this will provide an important site for housing in the borough.

In the meantime, the RAF, MOD and PSA have a responsibility, which the Minister of State therefore also enjoys, to ensure that the site, when it is transferred from defence to civilian hands, whatever applicant purchaser eventually ends up with it—it may be more than one entity or development company—is handed over in good order and properly. That is of considerable concern to people in the local community. There is an agreement between the local authority and RAF representatives to preserve trees on the site and to ensure that no damage is done in the realisation, disposal and evacuation of the site, which should take place by November 1995.

Those and other matters, and the dismantling of the existing RAF buildings, some of which are quite large, should be clarified. I should be grateful if the Minister would do that either today, or partly today, because I have not given him prior notice of this, and perhaps in subsequent correspondence if I deem it right to send him a letter, depending on what he has a chance to say in the debate.

Reverberating from the closure of RAF Stanmore Park is the augmentation of facilities at RAF Bentley Priory, which is much to be welcomed. That is a great boost to the morale of RAF personnel on the Bentley Priory site, an important strategic site, now with underground facilities about which, for obvious reasons, I shall not go into detail here. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to deal with the job increases that will occur as a result and the configuration of RAF plans and activities that will be outlined in the expansion of Bentley Priory.

Above all, from the point of view of my constituents, I hope that my hon. Friend will ensure that the transitional work of augmentation, and the conclusion for that base when it is expanded, does not mean a significant increase in the nuisance effect for local residents. In fact, no increase at all would be acceptable. The residents have been patient. So far, physical facilities on the site have been expanded, including two radio masts whose location and size have resulted in some controversy, and there are other aspects as well.

The site is problematical in that, although there is plenty of acreage, certain pockets are already beginning to look full. For some reason, the RAF seems to be concentrating its new installations and physical buildings on the edges, near the roads and the residential houses that surround that site, rather than further in where they would be less of a nuisance in terms of noise.

Will there be a significant increase in helicopter sites? I accept that they are essential to the RAF's function, but they have already been somewhat of a nuisance, at least to residents and sometimes more widely than that. Therefore, the more that my hon. Friend can reassure me on the closure of RAF Stanmore Park and on the expansion of RAF Bentley Priory—once again, I pay tribute to the RAF for what it has achieved over the years on both sites—the happier I shall be. I shall be in further touch with my hon. Friend, and I shall return later to the debate—I have another engagement—to hear what he has to say about these matters.

5.54 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): It was my intention to begin by extolling the virtues of single service debates, but when I look around—I do not exclude my party from what I am about to say—those advantages appear to be rather less obvious to all but the 18 or 19 of us who are present at this stage.

The single service debate provides a particular advantage with regard to procurement. It is apposite that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement should reply to the debate. I doubt whether there has ever been a time in the history of the RAF when the procurement decisions that had to be made were more acute and were likely to have longer lasting effect.

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

For example, the Eurofighter 2000 is expected to see service for at least 30 years into the next century. I sometimes think that the procurement decisions are of much greater long-term significance than manpower decisions because, for example, the recruitment and training of fast jet pilots can be much more easily and quickly accomplished than the development or production of a fast jet for them to fly.

Procurement decisions become more and more difficult to reverse because such is the pace of technical advance that, if a particular capability is given up, it is almost impossible to regain it, or regaining it would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

Where a capability is given up and reliance is placed on foreign manufacture, the continued availability of equipment and spares will depend on the political attitudes of the supplying country. Some may remember that, in the immediate post-election period when the debate about the future of the European fighter aircraft, as it was then known, was at its height, some argued for the purchase of the SU27. There is no question but that that is an outstanding aircraft, but one would have to anticipate rather more optimistically what was likely to happen in Russia before one would believe that one could guarantee the spare parts and the equipment that would be necessary if one adopted that aircraft as fulfilling the needs of the RAF.

The reference to Eurofighter 2000 provides an obvious opportunity on which to restate the case for that aircraft. The arguments in favour of it remain as persuasive as ever. It is right that we should maintain the manufacturing capability that Eurofighter 2000 necessarily represents. We must also remember that some of the technology may have a civilian application and be worth while for that. But the primary need is for an agile fighter with which the RAF can fulfil the air defence-ground attack role, particularly when one has regard to the third task which is identified in the defence estimates for the current year.

In future operations outside the United Kingdom, in which we may increasingly be called upon to participate, the RAF's task will be to protect friendly forces against hostile air attack. One thing is certain and that is that there is no shortage of modern combat aircraft on the international market which will make it possible for the air forces in unstable parts of the world to be extremely well equipped.

We know that derivatives of the SU27 and the MiG29 are already under development. It does not take any particular political perception to conclude that, if Russia is anxious, first, to continue a sphere of influence, and, secondly, to acquire hard currency, the uninhibited export of aircraft of that calibre to those who are willing to purchase them is likely to be a policy that Russia will follow. If we expect to be able to participate in international operations—including United Nations operations—the RAF must have an aircraft that is capable of matching its potential opponents. Anything less would create a considerable disadvantage for the aircrew on which we would call.

As the Minister will know, some apprehension is felt about the project. Already, after four speeches, he has been asked to reply to a substantial number of questions, but I hope that, if he cannot deal with the points that I am about to raise in his response this evening, he will be able to do so by means of a letter, or some other method of communication.

Can the Minister tell us the current estimated cost per copy of the aircraft? There is some dispute about that in the technical press. Is it true that there have been cost overruns of as much as DM500 million in the development phase? Following the software difficulties experienced by the Gripen—which, at one stage, was considered to be a candidate for the RAF—what is the up-to-date position with regard to the flight-control software for the Eurofighter? I believe that the predicted flight date is April 1994. Is that still a firm date?

I do not wish to leave the question of procurement without referring to either the Hercules replacement or the support helicopter, both of which have been mentioned today in speeches and interventions. If we are to do more in what might be briefly described as the United Nations area, the greater the out-of-area activity, the greater will be the strain on the transport resources of the RAF.

Marshalls of Cambridge is carrying out a study to determine whether the Hercules should be refurbished or replaced, and it is only right to await the results of that study; however, I would require considerable persuasion to accept that we should wait until the year 2000, or beyond, for the future large aircraft. I say that as one who is on record as arguing—in the House—the case for common defence procurement within Europe. I believe that to continue until the year 2000 without moving to an alternative aircraft would place unnecessary strain on the RAF's transport resources.

Mr. Mans: Would not that virtually guarantee that, beyond the year 2000, the RAF will be equipped with an aircraft whose basic airframe was designed in the 1950s? Would not the study do better to compare the costs of the C130J throughout its life—up to the year 2030, or even 2040—with the costs of refurbishing existing aircraft, enabling them to last until the FLA was available?

Mr. Campbell: I do not argue with anything that the hon. Gentleman has said; he has considerable knowledge and experience of these matters. I will say, however, that the Hercules has a reliable and proven design, and—as has been pointed out—British companies such as Westland and Dowty would have an important part to play in the development of the C130J.

Important industrial issues are also involved. We should consider the extent to which Government funding forms a component of the discussion and, indeed, the ultimate decision. I am keeping an open mind, although what I am about to say may contradict that claim: I do not believe that we should wait until the year 2000, given that there is no guarantee that the FLA will actually fly.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. and learned Gentleman will be relieved to learn that I agree with what he is saying.

I do not think that development costs can be ignored in any future aircraft considerations. No one knows what the costs of developing the new aircraft will be. The hon. and learned Gentleman asked about the possible overrun on the Eurofighter 2000. All experience of modern military aircraft suggests that considerable extra costs can be incurred during the development phase. Clearly, putting an aircraft "on the shelf" will not involve that problem.

Mr. Campbell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We should not pretend that the decision is easy, but I remain convinced that the onus is on those who argue for the FLA. It is up to them to prove beyond reasonable doubt—if I may use a legal phrase—that it is appropriate.

Mr. Hardy: May I join the chorus of agreement with the hon. and learned Gentleman's thesis? Surely, if there is to be a delay, we are entitled to hope that, on the frequent flights of the Hercules to Sarajevo airport when dramatic landings must be arranged, pilots and crew will be accompanied by Ministers of the Crown. On many occasions, we would welcome the resultant by-elections, and the reassurance of companionship that such flights would provide.

Mr. Campbell: I can do better than that; I can threaten them with the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

That leads me quite naturally to the issue of the support helicopter. When its history comes to be written, I doubt that it will be regarded as a paradigm of good procurement. The most recent chapter of the story is yet another study of the mix between the Chinook and the EH101. I doubt very much that Lord Younger—as he now is—anticipated the delay that has occurred since his announcement on a date in 1987, which has already been mentioned. I also suspect that little enthusiasm would be expressed in the armed services committee of the Senate or, indeed, in the House of Representatives on Capitol hill about a similar contest between Boeing and Westland.

I hope that the Government will take due account not only of capability but of the national interest that would be served if the EH101 were to predominate in the mix of 25, as opposed to the Chinook.

Let me deal briefly with two other matters connected with procurement. One is the low-level laser-guided bomb; the other is the conventionally armed stand-off missile, which has already been mentioned. The RAF requires those systems, for different reasons. I hope that an early decision can be made, so that firm contracts are available for both.

A further issue arises from the RAF's current operations in Bosnia. I suspect that the matter goes a little beyond the remit of the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, but it has raised a number of anxieties. I refer to the means by which authorisation of air strikes in Bosnia would be effected and the time that it would take for permission to be given. I understand that the chain would be something like this. A request would come from forward air controllers on the ground with the troops; that request would go to the air operations co-ordination centre at Kisseljak. From there—with the good will of the commander of the Bosnia-Herzegovina command—it would go to the UNPROFOR commander in Zagreb. It would then go to the United Nations civilian head, also in Zagreb, and from there to the United Nations Secretary-General. That could reasonably be described as a rather extended order of command.

It has been suggested that a recent trial took six hours to produce a reply from New York. One of the outgoing United Nations generals has expressed considerable apprehension. Let me put the point in a domestic context, however. If United Nations forces—by which, of necessity, I mean British forces on the ground—required close air support for their defence, which is not improbable, surely the availability of such support must be much more direct. We must do better than six hours' notice.

The matter may fall well outside the remit of the Minister of State for Defence Procurement and I should not expect him to deal with something so technical, but we are entitled to expect the Government to deal with it, not only in the interests of the United Nations but for the sake of protecting our own forces on the ground.

I was pleased that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces referred to RAF operations in the northern and southern exclusion zones of Iraq. Little mention has been made of the aircrew there recently, but they are carrying out an extremely important United Nations mission, and I should not like to bet that they will never see action in either of those theatres. During a debate such as this, it is right to recognise their substantial contribution to the international order.

Once issues of procurement have been dealt with and constituency matters have been raised, it is right to turn our attention to the role that we envisage for the RAF. Until the end of the cold war, the RAF had prepared for two principal tasks: first, the air defence of the United Kingdom over the North sea and, secondly, low-level counter air offensive against airfields of the Warsaw pact. The first task has been greatly reduced and the second has been virtually eliminated, so what do we now envisage as the RAF's rôle?

Let us approach the matter first from a negative angle. I welcome the announcement, made not in the House but in a speech by the Secretary of State to an outside body, of the abandonment of the tactical air-to-surface missile. I checked when I had first raised the issue in the House and discovered that in June 1990 I made a speech in which I had questioned the need for it and its utility. Once the cold war was over and once NATO's nuclear doctrine became one of minimum deterrence and we had the assertion that nuclear weapons would be used as weapons of the last resort, the need for TASM was removed.

TASM was a system designed for the doctrine of flexible response and the need for it was predicated on the requirement to break up massive tank formations of the Warsaw pact if they streamed across the inner German border. Once Trident is operational, we shall have a tactical capability if we require it. That leads me to return to the point made by the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew): what is the justification for continuing with the WE177 after Trident becomes fully operational with the tactical alternative that we know can be provided? Why is it necessary to continue with free-fall bombs to the year 2006—the most recent estimate—if we expect Trident to be in service by the year 2000 and providing the tactical element after 2006?

Another fundamental matter that should be considered is how strong is the justification for a continued RAF presence at its present level in Germany? If we are looking for savings that do not adversely affect capability, should we not now seriously consider reducing not the number of squadrons but the number of squadrons stationed in Germany? They were there to do damage to the countries of the Warsaw pact but, at the NATO summit last week, we were talking about a partnership for peace with virtually all those countries and to some of them we said that NATO membership might not be too far away. In those

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circumstances, should not we examine with some rigour the justification for the continued stationing of RAF squadrons in Germany?

One thing that emerged from the RAF's experience in the Gulf war was that there was a compelling need for flexibility. Hon. Members with an interest in the matter will remember that low-level operations proved too costly and, as a result, tactics had to be varied. Thereafter, the operations were carried out from medium altitude. To be effective, however, we had to introduce the rather curious marriage between the Buccaneers and the Tornados until the thermal imaging airborne laser designator pods could be fitted to some of the Tornados. When considering the future role of the Royal Air Force, it is essential to build in the necessary flexibility rather than having to overcome obstacles to it once operations have commenced.

On this occasion, it is the convention to pay tribute to the men and women of the Royal Air Force. I have a particular reason for doing so because, apart from my duties as my party's defence spokesman, RAF Leuchars is located in my constituency where 43 and 111 Squadrons are stationed, although, sadly, that is no longer the case for the Wessex flight of 22 Squadron. That means that I have occasion to meet men and women of all ranks and I continue to be impressed by their qualities and skills. They are brave men and women who do dangerous things as a matter of routine. They are not saints and would not claim to be. At the moment, they seem to show a remarkable realism about their changing environment.

I think that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces spoke of the stoic good humour of the men and women in the RAF. He should understand that there is, nevertheless, greater apprehension than he acknowledged. I do not want to enter into the controversy over what the Commander-in-Chief said at a meeting of the Air League—that has been sufficiently aired for the purposes of this debate—but my contacts with the men and women of the RAF and, indeed, of the other services, lead me to believe that they have great sympathy for what the Commander-in-Chief was reported as having said. That reflects the fact that they are apprehensive about the way in which the RAF's role will develop in the future. It is our duty to pay more than lip service to the qualities of the man and women of the RAF. They deserve well of us, and it is the duty of the House to see that they get it.

6.16 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): This is the last debate on the Royal Air Force in which I shall speak as a serving member of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, not because I want to stop being a member but because I shall reach retirement on 20 February and will be put out to grass and have to hang up my boots, or whatever it is that one does. However, I shall not be hanging up my flying suit because I shall manage to find ways to get into the air.

I enter into the debate with a sad heart because I care very deeply about the Royal Air Force and, in present circumstances, it cannot be described as a happy service. Why do I say that? "Options for Change" was the result of changes that had taken place in the Soviet Union. We all know what those changes were, so I shall not go into detail. "Options for Change" produced what has been described —by others, not by me—as a peace dividend. I am still looking around the world to see where the peace is.

Massive reductions in the RAF's operational capabilities resulted from "Options for Change". Many have already mentioned the massive 40 per cent. reduction in the strike capability and the reduction of about 30 per cent. in the air defence capability. They are massive reductions by any standards and they are linked to the closure of 15 major bases in Germany and the United Kingdom and a huge decrease in personnel. The changes have occurred in a relatively short time and anyone who has had any experience of dramatic changes in business or in the forces will know what impact they can have.

Because of the reductions in assets and personnel, the RAF of today is a substantially reduced force. No one can deny that "Options for Change" has created massive turbulence throughout the service and has greatly sapped morale. It would be wrong to pretend otherwise. Introducing the debate, my hon. Friend the Minister said that the RAF now had a carefully calculated capability, which was adequate to meet the envisaged possible threat. I shall have something to say later about that envisaged possible threat.

I assume that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and his colleagues believe that they are right in what they are doing. I do not share that belief, but, as my hon. Friend does, can he and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement give me a categorical assurance that he and his colleagues acknowledge that the RAF now needs a period of stability? That is needed more than anything.

In the early 1930s, as everyone knows, we experienced a period of peace. We were enjoying the dividends of peace. In 1930, no one had heard of Adolf Hitler, but, by 1940, Adolf Hitler had created a massive military machine —a huge luftwaffe—and had occupied most of Europe. Today, in the former Soviet Union, there exists a military machine with a nuclear and conventional capability that can only be described as horrendous. In Russia, the recent elections have produced a large number of narrow nationalist Members of Parliament and there is just a possibility that the leader of those narrow nationalists could be elected as the next President of Russia. That is a possibility—I do not put it any higher.

What is frightening, however, is that whoever is the next President of Russia will have massive powers that were created by the new constitution that was introduced by the existing President. Even Stalin would have envied the powers that he will achieve constitutionally. The Ukraine has the world's third largest nuclear force. Everyone is aware of the Russian narrow nationalist declaration—the aim of those nationalists to restore to Russia all the territory of the former USSR. That includes the Ukraine. When linked with the re-emergence of narrow right-wing nationalists in Germany—there is a real possibility that Nazis will be elected to the German Parliament this year—can anyone predict who will be in charge in the Kremlin next year or in two years' time, or what the Governments of the Ukraine and Germany, whoever they are, will feel about the circumstances at that time?

Yet we in the United Kingdom and our allies in north America continue to disarm. We continue to claim that the RAF can absorb the reductions imposed by "Options for Change", the reductions that followed "Options for

Change" and, worse still, the massive extra reductions that will be brought about, at least in year 3, by the recent Treasury-Ministry of Defence discussions.

Will current changes in the former Soviet Union bring about a new option—a rearmament option? Is that the reality of having a Royal Air Force that is equipped to meet the envisaged need or threat?

Earlier, it was said that one can train people more quickly and effectively than one can purchase the right type of equipment, and, of course, that is true, because the lead time for modern aircraft weapon systems is long. If we are to meet an envisaged threat in five years' time, we have to plan and equip today to meet it. It will be too late if we wait five years to see what happens. Will our children ever forgive us if we walk down the road of our predecessors of the 1930s? I doubt it.

That is why, in this debate, I cannot be upbeat, although I wish that I could be. Nor am I saying that we are being Treasury-led or repeating any of the other glib things that are said. The whole western world is living in a dream land. The world today is more unstable than it was during the cold war. The balance of terror actually gave us peace in Europe. It may not have been a very pleasant thing to contemplate, but the truth of it—the reality—was peace. That is unlikely to be the case in the near future or even in the medium term. We can say with certainty that there will be more territorial disputes and ethnic problems and that throughout the former Soviet Union, there will be continuing problems, carnage and war.

In those circumstances, because of what is happening today in Bosnia, we have glib talks about air strikes. As a former airman, I am always frightened when someone talks glibly about using RAF crews in what are not very carefully thought-out plans. I am reminded of the poor chaps who flew in the battles in 1940 against the bridges in France. Oh yes, they were courageous; oh yes, they went and attacked the bridges. The fact that they did not come back, and that they got Victoria crosses posthumously, seems to have been overlooked and forgotten. Are we asking our people in the RAF to look forward to a similar scenario? I hope not.

Let me discuss possible air strikes in Bosnia. No Member of Parliament would expect our forces on the ground, if circumstances demanded, not to have air support, but that is not what has been glibly spoken about in the corridors of power, at least at a recent North Atlantic Treaty Organisation meeting. People who spoke there were speaking about air strikes against others to deter. That is not quite what I envisage when we talk about air strikes to defend our chaps on the ground. Those are two quite different things. If one is talking about escalation—that is what it really is if one is talking about air strikes—one needs only to think back to what happened in Vietnam to recall the fact that constant escalation of air strikes did not resolve the problem on the ground.

I will not discuss that aspect in any more detail, other than to say that one should be careful about committing one's service men to circumstances and situations unless their actions have been properly thought out and carefully planned. The one thing that the Gulf war demonstrated clearly was that air power, used properly and effectively, with good planning, can bring about circumstances in which there will be light casualties on the ground. Let us, however, consider the resources that were deployed to achieve that—and no one can suggest to me that, wherever we wish to carry out an exercise of that type, we can deploy such resources without the United States being there, both in the air and on the ground. It cannot be done. That is why we should be very careful when we speak about it.

I shall now discuss procurement. Of course, the Royal Air Force must have the Eurofighter 2000 and, of course, it will be required in the numbers that have been envisaged, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) pointed out in an intervention, it is replacing not one aircraft but a number of aircraft.

I too am worried about the problems that we have encountered over helicopter procurement. They should be resolved as soon as possible. Whatever decision is taken, it should be taken soon, because the delay is wrong for Westland, wrong for the RAF and wrong for anyone who has pledged that we will do something. Since 1987, we have failed to do so.

I believe that it was right, during our previous debate, to speak about the RAF and stand-off weapons. Unlike the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), I regret that the RAF will not have a stand-off nuclear capability, for the reasons that I have given about the instability in the former Soviet Union and the massive nuclear capability that will exist there, when we have no idea who will be in charge. It is a short-term, mistaken financial decision which we may live to regret.

I aslo believe that Ministers were right to say that we would continue with a conventional stand-off capability. In this modern age, as the Gulf war demonstrated, it is high-risk to fly at low level over the target. It is just possible that, especially when attacking targets near to each other, when the targets are all lit up, one will find oneself silhouetted against the sky—a sitting target for anyone with even conventional anti-aircraft equipment. Clearly, we want our chaps to have stand-off equipment, and it is right to keep the free-fall WE177 bomb until we have a replacement stand-off weapon.

As for the Hercules replacement, I recognise the concerns and fears. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) will acknowledge that no one has been a stronger advocate of buying British than I, but I am concerned with the situation in the Royal Air Force. I do not apologise for that. My first loyalty has always been, and always will be, to my friends and former colleagues who are serving in the RAF. I say to them that if I have any influence it will be directed towards ensuring that the Hercules replacement is the updated modernised Hercules. That can be bought off the shelf and will not cost anything like the probable cost of other replacements.

In 10 years' time, if we find that world circumstances demand something else—if there is a real threat or even a war going on—we can deal with that at the time. Today and tomorrow, we have to consider what we are likely to be doing with whatever aircraft the RAF has for that type of activity and duty. Today, that is the Hercules. The Hercules is getting long in the tooth, and it must be replaced. I have no hesitation in saying that the solution is to buy the new, modernised, updated version, the C130J. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement hears me say that.

Now I shall talk about the forces with which I have been directly involved—the auxiliaries and reserves. I can tell Ministers that it is bad, even desperate, when one chops and changes around with regulars, but it is calamitous if one does that with volunteers and auxiliaries. Many people do not understand about volunteers—although I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr.

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Goodson-Wickes) does. It is one heck of a commitment to go and fly on behalf of the RAF most weekends, as I have done throughout most of my adult life. First, volunteers have to persuade their families that that is a good thing to do. When other people are going out with their families during the lovely summer days, a volunteer disappears and is not seen all weekend. To do that for one year is something, and so is to do it for five years. To do it for 10, 20 or 30 years is quite an achievement. I have been doing it for damn near 40 years—and I am astonished that my wife is still married to me. She is a remarkable lady. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] She is; any woman who is married to me has to be remarkable.

I want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that by tinkering and chopping and changing, we kill the faith and confidence that are essential if a chap is to go home at weekends and say to his wife and family, "I am doing a good job for my country; I want to go on doing it." Once that individual is diverted, we shall not get him back. That applies to all territorials and auxiliaries. Those chaps will go off and use their energies elsewhere. Their families will not accept a second dose. In my experience of commanding volunteer units, one cannot get people back once the continuity has been broken, because family pressures will not allow it. There is a tremendous problem if we lose that faith, and we must never forget that when we are dealing with auxiliaries and reserves.

I am sad that we still do not have a proper auxiliary air force of the right sort. I wish that the people who write funny stories about the Israeli air force would remember that Israel is surrounded by enemies. It is not difficult to persuade Israeli employers to let people go away for four or five weeks, and often much longer, every year.

I wonder what British employers would feel if we had to have a conscript air force, largely made up of reservists to be called up at times of hostilities, and we insisted that they did four weeks' training every year. I rather think that there would be a long list of employers complaining; in fact, they would not accept it. That is why we require a volunteer force only, to back up regular forces that, at times of hostility, are capable of holding the line until the auxiliaries and reserves can come into play.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The hon. Gentleman knows much more about the reserves than I do. Does he see any lessons to be learnt from the United States experience? Are there any parallels to be drawn that we might usefully apply here?

Mr. Walker: Yes, I wish that the parallel drawn in the newspapers had been between the Royal Air Force and the United States air force. Then we would not have read all that nonsense and dross that has caused all the problems. The United States air force has a worldwide capability. Of course, it is a massive air force, but, like the RAF, it is subject to worldwide demands. The United States, therefore, requires the necessary structures and organisations to motivate and activate their people in all the different parts of the world.

That calls for a much greater back-up than does the Israeli air force. Israel does not do anything outside its own borders, except in connection with its neighbours, and all activity takes place from bases in Israel. Israel can therefore have a smaller back-up capability. I want to draw attention to the nonsense that has been written, because people are not comparing like with like when they compare our air force with the Israeli air force. I hope that what I have said, and my letter to the newspapers, will deal with that fairy tale being spread by people who know little about real air force matters.

I had an Adjournment debate on the air cadets recently, and I hope that before we make any decisions affecting the air cadets under the programme for financial reductions we shall wait until we have carried out the complete review of all the other activities, including university air squadrons, air force base locations, and so on. If we try to make changes in a haphazard way we may damage the cadets, and we may find that we lose good people. I return to what I have already said about the loss of faith.

If I have a message for my right hon. and hon. Friends in government it is this: they have on their Back Benches a number of hon. Members who will support the Government on defence matters. In many ways, the best people on the Government Back Benches are the people who have a direct involvement and who care. Those individuals would have no difficulty in accepting an increase in expenditure in that one area of Government spending. Many of us feel strongly about balanced budgets, but not at the expense of national security.

I am not making a bid because I am wearing an air force lobby hat, or saying that the RAF should have more money because I love the RAF. I say what I say because I believe that world and European circumstances call for us to be extremely careful and prudent about any future reductions. I do not believe that we can meet the requirement of the third year of reductions without reducing the sharp end of our fighting forces, especially the RAF. I could not and would not support any further reductions in the operational front-line capacity of the Royal Air Force.

6.38 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): In contrast to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), I will address a rather narrow issue. However, we all recognise his concern, interest and depth of knowledge in relation to the RAF.

I want to raise an issue which, since the Government set out their plans in "Options for Change", has been a cause of great concern in my constituency, throughout Wales and even in the Republic of Ireland. A range of wider issues are raised about the way in which the Ministry of Defence has managed the RAF's transition since the end of the cold war. A petition of 20,000 signatures in respect of the issue has been presented to the House and it has been raised by Members of the Dail. The issue concerns the closure of RAF Brawdy and the MOD's intention to transfer Brawdy's search and rescue facilities to north Devon.

Several defence bases in my constituency have been closed or announcements have been made to close them. The Milford mine depot has gone with the loss of 250 jobs. Royal Navy armaments depot Trecwn is to close in April 1996, with the loss of 500 jobs. There has been an announcement about Brawdy and the United States naval facility, which is located with RAF Brawdy, is to close in September 1995. However, in addition to the economic problems that we face, the most worrying point is the transfer of search-and-rescue flight B 202 squadron to north Devon.

In August 1992, tactical weapons training at RAF Brawdy ended and about 80 civilian jobs were lost; 700 service men, with their £12 million worth of income, were transferred elsewhere. The local economy lost millions of pounds more as the operating expenditure of the base rapidly dwindled. The effect was felt immediately in Haverfordwest, the nearest town to the base. One hundred and one people joined the dole in August 1992, when the base closed.

That was obviously a large rise in the number of unemployed people in a town with a significant tourist area adjacent to it. The fact that a significant number of people joined the dole queue at the height of the tourist season was a symptom of the economic impact on the local economy of the closure and the ending of flight training at Brawdy.

Sadly, that effect continues to be felt. Unemployment in my constituency is still rising against the national trend. In August 1992, 4,695 people were unemployed in my constituency. Last month, 5,632 were unemployed. That is a very significant increase. When the United States Navy leaves Pembrokeshire in September 1995, 70 more civilian jobs will be lost and, perhaps more importantly, the spending power of 450 American service personnel and their families will disappear.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced late last year that the Royal Welch Fusiliers will use RAF Brawdy as temporary accommodation from August 1994 and that the base is being considered for future use as a long-term barracks plot. I welcome that commitment which, initially, will go some way towards putting urgently needed money back into the Pembrokeshire economy with the transfer of those 600 Welsh soldiers and their families to Brawdy this summer.

I was rather disappointed when the Minister said that I had not welcomed the fact that the Royal Welch Fusiliers were to be transferred to Brawdy. He knows very well that I have welcomed them. I wrote to him congratulating him on his decision in which he had considerable personal involvement. However, I urge Ministers to do their utmost to find a long-term use for the accommodation at Brawdy, because Pembrokeshire still desperately needs a long-term commitment in that direction and the income which that will provide.

I remain extremely concerned about the way in which the MOD has managed the affair. I am particularly concerned about the closely related issue of search and rescue. It might be helpful to the House if I explain the background. Prior to the redeployment of search and rescue announced in October 1992, the RAF operated 10 Sea King and six Wessex search and rescue helicopters from nine bases around the British coast. The Royal Navy has five helicopters at its three bases. In October 1992, the MOD said that the RAF operational fleet would be reduced to 12 aircraft, all Sea Kings, operating from six bases. The Navy's fleet was to remain unchanged.

Those changes began to be implemented in April 1993 when the Wessex flight at RAF Leuchars was withdrawn. By the middle of 1994, the flight at Manston in Kent is due to transfer to Wattisham in Suffolk while the flight at Coltishall in Norfolk is to be withdrawn. In July, Brawdy's Sea Kings will be transferred to RAF Chivenor in north Devon.

As a result of those changes, by the end of July 1994, four fewer aircraft will be operating from three fewer bases. However, we should be concerned not simply about the reduction in numbers. It is undoubtedly true that the Sea King, with its auto-hover, all-weather and night flying capabilities, is superior to the Wessex. However, the advantages of the Sea King over the Wessex have been somewhat exaggerated in the MOD's open government document to disguise the consequences of cutting the fleet size.

The really worrying aspect of the changes is the way in which the aircraft are to be distributed. Moving the flight from Manston to Wattisham will lead to a significant deterioration in search-and-rescue cover in the east of the English channel, particularly in the Dover straits which are the busiest shipping lanes in the world—*[Interruption.]* I am aware that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement has a personal interest in the matter so perhaps he will listen even more attentively to my comments.

We have been able to highlight the fact that the Dover straits will be outside the one-hour daytime response time designated as a requirement for search and rescue. When we consider that the Dover straits are the busiest shipping lanes in the world with literally millions of ferry passengers crossing the area, and we are expecting search and rescue to cover that area at the extent of its operational limit but certainly of its response time, I believe that serious questions must be asked.

The transfer of Brawdy's flight to Chivenor is a reckless decision which, in the opinion of every search and rescue professional I have spoken to—including lifeboat men, firemen, off-the-record coastguards and even the men who have flown the aircraft, including the former flight commander of flight 202—will undoubtedly cost lives because of the extra time that it will take to reach incidents off the west coast and in the St. George's channel. Michael Boulding, the former flight commander of the Sea King flight at Brawdy, has publicly described the decision as criminal.

The fact that the decision is a dangerous mistake becomes clear when one looks at the MOD's maps. A working party set up by the MOD in 1986 established a set of criteria for search and rescue services. It stated that a helicopter must be able to reach any point within 40 nautical miles of the coast within one hour by daylight and anywhere within 100 nautical miles of the coast within two hours by night or in bad weather.

When it announced the deployment in October 1992, in the defence open government document called "The Future Provision of Royal Air Force Search and Rescue Helicopters", the Ministry of Defence published maps with circles around each base showing how far helicopters could fly within one hour and within two hours. It is clear from those maps that, following the redeployment, the working group's criteria will not be met in significant areas in the English channel, to which I have referred, and off the Welsh coast. Even when they are met, it will take longer than previously for a helicopter to reach the scene of an incident, so, without doubt, there will be a deterioration in cover. Lives will undoubtedly be lost as a result, despite the unquestionable courage and professionalism of the men who fly the aircraft.

I give a practical example. In October, the coastguard organised a desk-top exercise called Paper Tiger to test the effectiveness of all emergency services in responding to an offshore incident. That exercise compares with an actual incident which took place on the night of 9 April 1990, which involved a Sea King from RAF Brawdy airlifting a team of firefighters to a fire on board the cross-Irish sea

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

ferry the Norrona and in which, sadly, a man died and approximately 20 people suffered severely from burns and smoke inhalation.

That incident took place 25 miles off the Pembrokeshire coast, in the very area which the Government have accepted will be outside the one-hour response time and yet within British waters. The incident happened at 1 am. The aircraft was on the scene, after picking up a firefighting crew, within 58 minutes, less than half the time allowed under the working group criteria for night missions. The criteria state that they should arrive within two hours.

On 23 October, the desk-top exercise took place. It was carried out in daylight conditions, in which a helicopter, in theory from Chivenor, airlifted firemen to a similar ferry fire in the identical position as the incident in 1990. That flight and organisation, took not the 58 minutes as in 1990 but 70 minutes—12 minutes longer than the helicopter from Brawdy took and 10 minutes longer than the time allowed in the daylight criteria that were set down by the working party.

If the Ministry of Defence had properly thought through the consequences of its plans, it would have seen how dangerous they were. But, I am afraid, all the evidence is that neither the Ministry of Defence nor the Department of Transport, which is ultimtely responsible for civilian search and rescue, have taken into account all the relevant factors.

The right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton), who was then Minister for the Armed Forces, in reply to a parliamentary question on 2 November 1992, admitted to me that the Ministry of Defence had made no assessment of the need for civilian search and rescue before deciding to end operations at RAF Brawdy. That point is absolutely crucial. As hon. Members will know, the vast majority of search and rescue missions are to help civilians. On average, 90 per cent. of incidents that are responded to by RAF search-and-rescue helicopters are civilian. Only about 10 per cent. are military.

The argument of the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Transport throughout has been that the working group criteria will be met despite the redeployment. As I have already demonstrated, that is not entirely true, particularly in relation to the St. George's channel and the Dover straits. Even if it were true, it would conceal a serious decline in search-and-rescue cover.

The Ministry of Defence failed to carry out a proper assessment of risk, but I was able, by tabling a large number of parliamentary questions, to carry out my own assessment of the likely demand for search-and-rescue services off the Welsh coast by using the risk factors of the Ministry's own working group. It showed conclusively that the risk of incidents is increasing at the very time when the number of helicopters that are available to respond is being reduced.

Brawdy's helicopters flew 98 missions in 1979, of which 89 were civilian. In 1992, flight 202 flew 158 missions, of which 151 were civilian. That represents an increase of 61 per cent. between 1979 and 1992. Over that period, there were also large increases at RAF Valley and RAF Chivenor, both of which will cover the area currently from RAF Brawdy.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman has made a significant point. He said that the vast majority of search-and-rescue helicopter missions are for civilian use. Bearing in mind that the primary purpose of them is to rescue service personnel, should we keep those helicopters at Brawdy specifically for civilian purposes? Does the hon. Gentleman expect extra money to be made available outside the defence vote for that purpose to be carried out?

Mr. Ainger: I will come to that point, but I am grateful for that intervention. It is irrelevant who pays, whether it is the Department of Transport or the Ministry of Defence. At the end of the day, the taxpayer pays the bill. The figures that I have produced—I have far more if the hon. Gentleman wishes to see them—show that the vast bulk of incidents are civilian. I accept that, like most other countries, we should have a civilian search-and-rescue service, perhaps provided under the aegis of the coastguard and paid for by the Department of Transport, not the Ministry of Defence. After all, that Ministry currently faces the largest cuts in its budget. It is unfair to the civilian population, who pay for that service through their taxes, for it to be significantly cut.

There were similar increases at RAF Valley and RAF Chivenor and throughout all search-and-rescue bases around our coasts, but, following the announcement in 1992, we have fewer helicopters, which are badly distributed in relation to risk.

There is widespread concern about the plans. As I mentioned in an intervention on the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, today is the 51st anniversary of the RAF mountain rescue service. It was very disturbing over the past few days to hear that, as that distinguished service goes into its second half century, members of the Snowdonia mountain rescue team have expressed great fears that aircraft from RAF Valley, which are currently Wessex and which routinely provide vital back-up, might take longer to reach incidents, because, after July 1994, there will be a greater chance that the Wessex aircraft will be required to cover the southern part of the Irish sea and Cardigan bay, which is currently covered by RAF Brawdy.

The other issue is that, from an RAF point of view, down the west coast from Valley, down the Welsh coast and down to the north coast of Devon, there are currently six helicopters which, after July 1994, will be reduced to four.

It is not just numbers that matter: we need to consider distribution—where those helicopter flights are based. The MOD's own maps, which were reproduced in the October 1992 defence open government document, show that if search and rescue were withdrawn from RAF Chivenor and retained at Brawdy, the working group criteria would still be entirely met—in fact, exceeded—because Chivenor's coverage area is entirely overlapped by those of Brawdy and of the Royal Navy bases at Portland and Culdrose.

The same was true of Leuchars, whose coverage area was entirely overlapped by those of Lossiemouth, Prestwick and Boulmar. The MOD used that as part of its justification for withdrawing the Leuchars flight, but failed to see that the same argument applied in the south-west of England.

A simple glance at the maps tells us that if we are to have only two RAF bases covering Wales and the west of England, plus the two Navy bases at Culdrose and Portland, the logical arrangement is to use Valley and Brawdy rather than Valley and Chivenor.

Over the past two years, the MOD has demonstrated illogicality verging on the bizarre. In the defence open government document of October 1992, the Ministry of Defence said that the arguments for using Brawdy of Chivenor were "finely balanced". It claimed that neither base was better than the other from an operational point of view. Paragraph 27 of the document stated:

> "A key factor was that military fast jet flying training recently ceased at RAF Brawdy"—

that was in August 1992—

> "and is now concentrated at RAF Chivenor and RAF Valley"—

that was certainly true in October 1992.

> "RAF Chivenor therefore has a more assured long-term future than Brawdy, as well as the infrastructure needed to support search and rescue operations."

One year later—on 11 November 1993—the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who is unfortunately not with us at the moment, announced that the Royal Welch Fusiliers would be stationed at Brawdy. So use will be made of RAF Brawdy and it will have all the basic support services.

People in Pembrokeshire—indeed, throughout Wales—were shocked when, on 7 December, the Minister announced that flight training would end at RAF Chivenor from 1 October this year. At the same time, he wrote to me saying that the transfer of Brawdy's Sea Kings would still go ahead in July this year. This time, however, he claimed that Chivenor had particular operational advantages. The House will remember that in October 1992 the Government had told us that the arguments were finely balanced and the key factor identified by the MOD was that RAF Chivenor had a future, but RAF Brawdy did not. We then learnt that RAF Brawdy had a future after all, because the Royal Welch Fusiliers were to be based there—and alternative uses are also being considered—while Chivenor has lost its future and is to be mothballed. The arguments advanced in October 1992 suddenly do not matter, and it is now argued that Chivenor has operational advantages.

Having studied the matter in great depth, I must say that that is clearly nonsensical, even from a military point of view. Training aircraft from RAF Valley will now fly across north Wales to mid-Wales to refuel at St. Athan before crossing south Wales to the Pembrey range in west Wales to train. So military flying will now be concentrated in Wales, as much of it is already—especially low flying—and there will be far less activity near Chivenor, which is presumably the justification that the MOD now seeks to advance for its decision.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces told me in a letter dated 6 December that there is no cost advantage in preferring Chivenor to Brawdy. I still await answers to questions about detailed costings, but it seems to me likely, now that Brawdy is to be used by the Army, that it would be more cost-effective to station search and rescue there. After all, it will have support services, whereas Chivenor will have been mothballed. I have been told that once RAF Chivenor has been mothballed, the cost of providing support services could total £937,000.

There is a basic incoherence in the MOD's actions. It said in the open government document that search and rescue flights

> "are stationed around the coast of Great Britain to provide a rapid response in the busiest areas of military activity, but the deployments also take account of agreed criteria for civil coverage."

It is clear that that principle has not been adhered to in any meaningful sense in this case.

The relationship between civil and military search and rescue needs to be rethought anyway, because of the huge preponderance of civil incidents. Search and rescue is, in effect, a civil service and not a military one. The Department of Transport has nominal responsibility for ensuring an adequate level of civil coverage, but, in this case, it seems to have meekly accepted everything that the MOD has told it.

The MOD said that search and rescue should transfer to Chivenor because it had a more assured long-term future. Just 18 months later, it announced the closure of Chivenor. It has admitted that there is no financial advantage in preferring Chivenor to Brawdy but is pressing ahead with the transfer at a time when it is struggling to find cash for the front line.

What kind of policy making is that? It is irrational, inconsistent and deeply flawed. The result is that neither the military nor the civilian population will have the search-and-rescue cover that it needs, which could be provided at no extra cost simply by reversing this life-threatening decision. I urge the Minister, even at this late stage, to reconsider the distribution of search-and-rescue bases, not to transfer search and rescue from Brawdy to Chivenor in July 1994 and to wait to make a final decision until at least 1996 when Valley is supposed to receive Sea Kings—it currently operates with Wessex.

I do not believe that I am scaremongering. I have talked to ferry companies, to lifeboat men, to the chief fire officer of Dyfed county council and off the record to coastguards. All of them said, with the former flight commander, that the decision will cost lives unnecessarily. I urge the Minister to think again.

7.6 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I should like to talk about support services, which, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said in his opening remarks, are subject to rationalisation proposals. I do so because of the proposal to run down and close RAF Quedgeley in my constituency—to close the repair function there by the end of March 1994, which is 10 weeks away, and to run down the stores and accommodation function by 1998 at the latest.

I was glad to hear my hon. Friend emphasise, in his opening remarks and in response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), that these are only proposals. I hope that they will remain no more than proposals until they have been given full and proper consideration, with full access given to everyone concerned to all the information on the basis of which the proposals have been made. I am sure that my hon. Friend will wish his eventual decision to command some respect. I do not think that he can expect it to command respect if he has not shown the workings of his arithmetic—the data that have led him to his decision. I strongly agree with the hon. Member for Carlisle on this, and urge my hon. Friend the Minister to give full access to all the reports and all the other information. It is vital that everyone should be able to see clearly how the decision is arrived at—the basis on which it is made.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces knows very well that the proposal for Quedgeley comes as a further serious blow to the economy of Gloucester. It comes on top of the decision to amalgamate the Glorious Gloucesters, which in itself was something of

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an affront to a very fine regiment and certainly an affront to the city of Gloucester. The proposal also comes against the background of a large number of job losses in Gloucestershire resulting from the general wind-down in defence. One accepts that those factors apply across the country and, indeed, across Europe. None the less, they carry with them, on account of the job losses, serious human consequences which need to be taken into account.

The proposals for Quedgeley are as follows: the stores are to be centralised at Stafford and the repair work is to be taken over by eight regional contractors. Those regional contractors are already in place. It is on that specific point that I have to tell my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces that he is being less than fair to the work force at Quedgeley. I should like to explain why.

On the whole, the introduction of private sector disciplines into many areas of public life is desirable. In general, I am a strong supporter of privatisation. I see great merit in market testing and other ways in which private sector competition and competitive influences can be brought to bear on the public sector. However, a change from the public sector to the private sector often—indeed, in most cases—proceeds from a position of weakness. It proceeds because there is some defect in the service or product provided. The service or product may be poor, wrongly priced or badly delivered and the impact of competition is necessary to improve it. That principle simply does not apply in the case of RAF Quedgeley. Everyone knows—I think that it is beyond dispute—that the service and the products that have been provided by Quedgeley over the years have been first class. I am not aware that my hon. Friend the Minister disagrees with that point.

Often, an alternative reason for introducing some private sector disciplines is price. The services or products are not being offered at a competitive level and can be bettered elsewhere. Once again, price comparisons have almost always been to the advantage of RAF Quedgeley. They have shown that it is capable of producing what it has to deliver at an extremely competitive price compared with that of virtually any other source.

Another possibility—this applies particularly to market testing—is that the change from public to private sector is necessary to verify that the existing source of supply is satisfactory and cannot be bettered. That is the principle behind market testing. Yet there is not much point in engaging in market testing unless one intends to take notice of the results that the market tests produce.

All the characteristics that I have described have been conspicuously absent in the case of RAF Quedgeley. That is what makes my hon. Friend the Minister's decision and the way in which he appears to be arriving at it look extremely unfair. If RAF Quedgeley's activities are to be brought to an end, it would be possible to do it fairly and so that everyone could see precisely why the decision had been reached. Instead, it seems that the decision will be coming very soon and we have not heard the rationale behind it. We are not being given the full explanation on why it has been reached.

No proper comparisons have been made between bids from the private sector for repair work and those which could have been made by RAF Quedgeley. RAF Quedgeley has not been given an opportunity to be considered as a regional centre. When the eight regional centres were set up, RAF Quedgeley was not even invited to say what it could do. The preconception seemed to be directly in favour of the private sector. If, as I understand it, the aim is to use competition in the private sector to achieve the best possible value for the taxpayer, it is hard to see why RAF Quedgeley should be excluded from the procedures.

Where is the common sense in introducing competitive bidding if the Government deliberately exclude one possible bidder which, on the basis of long experience, could be expected to put in a good bid? Where is the common sense if one decides, for what appear to be doctrinal reasons, that a potential bidder should be excluded from the entire process?

I have had several meetings with my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. I am grateful to him for the time that he has given me, for answering the many letters that I have written, answering the many questions that I have asked and seeing a delegation from RAF Quedgeley only this week. I am also grateful to him for the undertaking that he gave that representatives from the Ministry of Defence will visit RAF Quedgeley during February to give some further explanation of the rationale behind their proposals.

I remind my hon. Friend the Minister of the history of RAF Quedgeley in winning bids against competition when it has been invited to bid, in delivering its services on time and in providing quality service and reliability, and doing it all against a background of loyalty to the RAF and the rest of our forces that it is there to support. On that basis, I find it extremely difficult to see the good sense, or any sense, in excluding RAF Quedgeley as a potential supplier and placing faith in untried and untested sources to deliver what will need to be a continuous and reliable service.

I place emphasis on the word "continuous". When bids have been invited, it has so often been seen that a private sector source comes in with a competitively priced bid and promises a great deal, but in the event the delivery is not up to the promise or expectation. When one is dealing with the supply of resources and services to the Army, Air Force and Navy, it is essential that there is continuity and reliability of supply. It must be sustained.

I cannot help being driven to the conclusion that it is the intention of the Ministry of Defence to withdraw from such activities completely. It proposes to end the repair function, then end the stores function at Quedgeley, end the stores function at Carlisle and centralise at Stafford. I cannot help feeling that if the principle of bringing in the private sector is adhered to and carried to its logical conclusion, in time the service at Stafford will be terminated as well. That cannot be in the best interests of our armed forces. The Ministry of Defence appears to believe that it is possible to turn its supply of services and products on and off just as it wants to. That is perfectly reasonable so long as it appreciates that, while the Ministry of Defence can turn its requests for supply off and on just when it wants to, so the private sector can also turn on and off its willingness and capacity to supply just when it wishes to do so.

When the MOD examines the principal functions of Quedgeley, it may think that there is overcapacity in the furniture repair and stores sector The Ministry of Defence may think that there are many opportunities to obtain competitive bids from the private sector for that function.

It should not overlook the fact that the prevailing economic circumstances in that sector will not necessarily last for ever.

It may find that the private sector is not as reliable a supplier as, in the short term, it appears to be. No doubt it will say that a private sector supplier is bound by a contract. The purpose of a contract is to preserve a purchaser's rights if something goes wrong. Of course, it provides safeguards for the supplier too, but it is the purchaser's rights about which the Ministry of Defence is concerned.

The existence of such a contract presupposes that, without it, supply might be interrupted at some stage. The truth is that, even with a contract, supply can be interrupted. Indeed, it is almost impossible to expect every private sector supplier invited to provide goods or services to the forces to perform without mishap.

It seems to me that the Ministry seeks to exchange a proven, reliable, competitive and loyal source of supply for one that may well be unproven, will not necessarily be reliable and will certainly be capable of becoming uncompetitive. When one is dealing with the vital function of providing supplies to our services, that risk should not be taken.

At one of our meetings, my hon. Friend the Minister advised me that immediate savings could be derived by running down RAF Quedgeley. He has yet to furnish me with the financial facts, although I am grateful for his undertaking that he will do so to the greatest possible extent without divulging secret information. I hope that information will be provided in such a way that everyone can see how he has arrived at his decisions.

I am grateful for the confirmation by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces that his arithmetic is based on an examination of the trading position, that he sees as a case for taking this action on grounds other than the results of an assessment of potential asset realisation at Quedgeley. Locally, there is a very strong feeling that the question of selling the land occupied by RAF Quedgeley has entered into the calculations. My hon. Friend has assured me that that is not correct—that, on the basis of trading criteria alone, the figures are compelling. I accept what he has said, but I should be very surprised if, at some stage of the calculations, an eye were not focused on what is perceived to be asset realisation potential.

I have asked my hon. Friend previously, and I now ask him again, to recognise that there are insuperable difficulties in the way of any development of the land at Quedgeley. He has only to get his professional advisers to consult Gloucester city council and Stroud district council to realise what great obstacles lie in the way of further development in that area. Indeed, he does not have to go that far—he could simply visit Quedgeley himself and speak to some of the residents. I hope, therefore, that that factor does not in any way enter into his calculations.

My hon. Friend has said that all these developments are the result of a general running down in defence capability. He points to "Options for Change" and to the draw-down from Germany. It is very clear that, for reasons my hon. Friend explained in a recent letter to me, the Ministry of Defence wants to get out of such activities as furniture repairing. My hon. Friend's letter says that furniture repair is

> "demonstrably a task which need not be carried out on MOD premises."

I do not dispute that that activity might have to be run down if all the information available to my hon. Friend points inexorably in that direction. However, in respect of the storage and accommodation functions fulfilled by Quedgeley, there is still time between 1994 and 1998. The Ministry must, at all costs, avoid a situation in which Quedgeley loses the role that it is supposed to play and becomes totally unviable long before 1998. That, in itself, could be used as a reason for not reconsidering the decision. Nobody wants Quedgeley to become a sort of ghost station.

It seems to me that if work has to be phased out, it would be reasonable for a certain amount—enough to keep the base viable—to be sustained for the next four years. That would enable Quedgeley not only to supply the RAF but to build up an alternative customer base—if necessary, outside the armed forces. If it were to demonstrate that it was viable, and I believe that it would, there would be an opportunity to pursue one of the other possibilities, which, at the moment, is regarded as being only theoretical. I refer to privatisation. If that route were followed, RAF Quedgeley could become a going concern with a multiplicity of customers.

It seems to me that another alternative to closing the station is to explore the possibility of a management buy-out. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, in one of his letters, does not rule out that possibility. He is prepared to be amenable to suggestions. I see no reason why RAF Quedgeley, even if one were to go for privatisation or for a management buy-out, and working on the assumption that it will be there for four years—I hope that it will be longer—should not, in the interim, be permitted to bid for current and future private sector work. I cannot understand any objection to that course. Such an approach would certainly cushion the immediate impact of job losses. It would also make a good deal of financial sense and would reward loyalty.

I should like, in conclusion, to turn to a matter that is primarily the concern of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who will reply to the debate. I refer to Dowty Aerospace, where many of my constituents work. Dowty has a major interest in the new C130J Hercules programme. That aircraft is being offered by Dowty and 17 other British companies to meet the RAF's requirement for a replacement for half its existing fleet of C130K Hercules transporters. Dowty will provide the six-bladed propeller system for the C130J Hercules, and, in doing so, will displace the American manufacturer Hamilton Standard, which has been supplying propellers for Hercules aircraft for 40 years.

The C130J programme, if selected in preference to the refurbishment option for the first tranche of the Hercules rolling replacement programme, will create many new high-technology jobs in Gloucestershire and will bring a significant boost to the area's economy within a very short time.

An early decision to replace the first half of the RAF's present C130K Hercules fleet would allow Dowty to capitalise on the 25 years' research and development that went into the development of the C130J all-composite propeller. It would also mean that Dowty would become the world's leading manufacturer of composite propellers within the next five years.

I agree with the MOD officials who gave evidence to the Select Committee on Defence in December that the RAF's

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transport fleet needs urgent attention to ensure that it can continue to carry out its current humanitarian and operational tasks. I therefore urge my hon. Friend to take a decision on the Hercules replacement as soon as he reasonably can.

7.29 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I hope that the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) will not think me discourteous, but as I listened to the first part of his speech I was tempted to intervene to say that many Conservative Members always seem to express enthusiastic support, in principle, for market testing until it reaches their constituencies. The hon. Gentleman, however, then went on to make a powerful argument, and he was perfectly right to serve his constituency interests with regard to RAF Quedgeley and the purchase of propellers for the replacement Hercules.

I should have liked to have followed the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). I have known him a long time, but I did not realise that he was about to surrender his reserve commission for a pensioner's bus pass. I did not realise that he had reached that age, but I hope that he has received great gratitude for the long service that he has given. I endorse his call for some consideration to be given to the air cadets.

Over the past two years, we have become somewhat reassured about the future of the European fighter aircraft. It now also seems possible that a new type of Hercules and new helicopters will be purchased, so, today, there may be more cause to concentrate on personnel matters rather than procurement.

I would be discourteous to the House if I spoke at length, because I have informed my hon. Friends and the Minister that I must leave before the debate is concluded to attend the cremation, early tomorrow morning, of our former colleague, Jimmy Boyce, in south Yorkshire. I felt that I should keep to my wish to speak in the debate, but I will not trespass unduly on the time available.

Manufacturers are keen on the RAF purchasing the C130J, not because it would purchase such a large number, but because they recognise that the RAF commands enormous international prestige. If they can show that the RAF is buying that aircraft, they are likely to receive many other orders. Those potential orders are important, because, as the hon. Member for Gloucester said, a substantial number of British manufacturers would get orders. One sixth of the value of several hundred aircraft is rather more valuable than finding the cost to buy only 30.

The need for the Hercules replacement is essential and acute. I was not being entirely frivolous when I suggested earlier that, if the Government do not place such an order, Ministers should experience the dramatic landings at Sarajevo, because sometimes they are rather frightening to those in the aircraft.

The Minister has heard me talk on many occasions about the ageing Wessex helicopter, which entered squadron service in 1964. I trust that its replacement will not be too long delayed and I hope that it will have heavy-lift capacity. The development of the Air Mobile Brigade at former RAF station Wattisham suggests that heavier lift capacity should be more readily available.

In an intervention, I referred to the number of former RAF stations that had been taken over by the Army. The Air Force is skilled at operating a dual-use station, but the Army never seems to think about carrying out two functions at one station. The RAF has learnt prudence, economy, thrift and management more thoroughly than the Army, but unfortunately it may bear extra burdens because it has demonstrated those skills.

I listened intently when the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said that he had visited south Yorkshire today. I like Ministers to visit only if they come to assist us to deal with our economic problems. I look forward to learning why the Minister visited the region this morning.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement will be aware that RAF Finningley is in south Yorkshire. It is an important base and a number of my constituents and people within the Rotherham area work there, although it is near Doncaster. Navigators and other non-pilot aircrew are trained at Finningley. I learned the other day that the new Hercules C130J, with its splendid cockpit, will have a reduced aircrew of just two pilots. Since Finningley does not train pilots, that announcement made me a little anxious. I made a number of inquiries, and one or two hon. Members who are present now were also present when I made them.

The new Hercules will have significant defence systems. When it is being flown in a war zone, however, in an area of great danger, the two pilots may be hard pressed flying it. There would be a need for a back-seat weapons systems navigator. I hope that the Government are not looking at the new Hercules as a way of getting rid of back-seat non-pilot aircrew, because they could be usefully employed in a war zone flight. RAF Finningley would feel no sense of embarrassment in training those people because there must be a role for non-pilot aircrew for a long time to come. I hope that the Minister will not suggest that we do not need such aircrew, because a long time ago someone suggested that it would soon be possible to manage without pilots. That was a terrible mistake as well.

Finningley is important to us. I hope that the station commander, Group Captain Wilby, will not mind if I suggest that the Minister should acquaint himself with the station. He would find out that it holds wonderful air displays every September—they are the best attended air displays in the country. People visit the station and it does enormous good for the charitable cause that it supports.

The RAF does not exist, however, to serve charitable causes. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Sir H. Walker) said, it exists to defend the realm. I note that the hon. Member for Tayside, North is in his place again. I hope that I was not uncomplimentary to him in his absence. I agree with him that we need to maintain the capacity to defend the realm in an uncertain world.

In addition to all the other dangers in the world caused by rapidly changing circumstances, an appalling conflict is being waged in Europe. We must also deal with the emergence of a raving lunatic in the Moscow Parliament. I therefore hope that the Government will exercise prudence and that those cuts which impinge more severely on the Air Force than on other services will be considered carefully.

I have seen some dreadful newspaper reports, which are not responded to as quickly as they should be. One suggested that the Red Arrows team was being disbanded. That team gives delight to many people at air displays. Surely the Minister recognises that one of the most successful commercial ventures in British aviation history is the Hawk. It has been sold in large numbers and I certainly believe that, whenever there is a chance of an order and the Red Arrows fly, they help to get it. The Hawk has provided thousands of jobs to the aerospace industry.

The Red Arrows team is an extremely economic formation. It employs no more than 80 people in its unit based at Scampton. That tiny team of people gives us an important commercial advantage. As it helps to create thousands of aerospace jobs, it is an economic exercise, and the pilots and ground staff have to be employed anyway. In addition, the team maintains Britain's reputation of having the highest quality, if not necessarily the largest, air force in western Europe. The Red Arrows is the world's premier display team, and it would be an appalling false economy if it were scrapped with the imprudence that some of us suspect sometimes applies.

Some changes are inevitable. My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central spoke about the jet engine. Whittle, who invented the jet engine, was an ex-Halton apprentice and was trained in the division established by Lord Trenchard to train bright boys in the advanced technology of the time. The boys who became Trenchard's Halton brats would today go to university. It is a different and changing world and we cannot ignore such change.

I fear that there will be unwelcome changes in technical training. I repeat that if the service contracts out some of its technological roles in the maintenance of aircraft and avionics, and the contractor comes to depend on those who have left the service and does not invest in training, there will be a problem. If the RAF bows out of technical training, the country will suffer because over the years the Air Force has trained technicians not only for itself but for high-tech industries. That is because when such people leave the service they work for those industries and help them to survive. It would be dangerous to depend upon short-sighted contracts and careless provision.

Mr. Ainger: Is my hon. Friend aware that civil aviation, and especially its repair and maintenance element, totally depends upon RAF-trained personnel? A relative of mine has transferred from the RAF to work for British Airways on maintaining its 747s. If technical maintenance in the RAF were to be reduced, it would have a significant knock-on effect for civil aviation.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The effect that he mentions could lead to problems in maintaining the growth of aviation.

In the national interest, the Minister must look searchingly at any proposed cuts in the training of high-tech RAF personnel. I am not referring to functions such as catering or to many of the jobs that are carried out by civilians in places such as Finningley. The Royal Air Force must have adequate capacity to train the people that it needs to carry out its roles, and it would be most unwise to depend upon contractors who may not train people.

I said that I would deal merely with personnel because much time has already been spent on procurement. Many of those who watch old films seem to imagine that RAF aircrew are all about 20 years old, as they were in the second world war when people were not allowed to fly combat aircraft at ages that would make them relatively junior in today's squadrons. The people who fly the Tornado, the Jaguar and the Hercules aircraft are often in their 30s or 40s and are family men.

The Minister has said that there is a period of 19 months between overseas postings. I know RAF people who have had two or three such postings in the past 19 months, and such frequency creates problems. The men will not complain, at least not directly or loudly because they enjoy their job and its challenge and recognise its necessity. But their wives complain, and their children wonder where their father is. A wife has no idea where her husband will be in three, six or 12 months, but she knows that in three months he will not be where he is now. She also knows that he will be somewhere else three months after that, and that such change will continue. That should make us appreciate the strain that is imposed as the Air Force contracts and Government commitments and obligations continue.

Since the contraction began, the Air Force has been dispersed to more places. There was no conflict in Yugoslavia, no aircraft in Turkey and no combat aircraft in the Gulf when the cuts began. All these burdens have been imposed on the backs of a smaller number of people. They will stay in the service, perhaps because at the moment there are not many alternatives in some trades. I worry about what will happen after the next election when we secure the recovery that we are confident of achieving. A longer view must be taken, and it is not being taken now. It is time that it was. I trust that the Minister will recognise that over the past three years excessive and unaccustomed burdens have been unnecessarily placed on people who deserve a little more consideration than they have had.

7.45 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I declare an interest because I give political advice to Thorn-EMI Electronics in the defence field, and that is relevant to the debate.

One of the pleasures of being called in the latter part of a debate is that one has heard so many good speeches from colleagues that it is possible to make a somewhat shorter contribution than would otherwise be the case.

Labour's Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), understandably defended the constituency interests represented by RAF Carlisle and made two other significant observations. First, he alleged that he had seen a poll which showed that the general public had greater faith in the Labour party for assuring the defence of the realm than they had in the Conservative party. I should not be surprised if the poll is accurate, because, for a long time, many of us have argued that the Conservative party is in danger of losing its traditional constituency, which contains those who have served in the armed forces, are currently serving in them, or who work for the defence industries.

Of course, we believe that this loss of support is a misapprehension on their part, that they misinterpret the policy we are pursuing and do not fully understand the size and effect of the reductions that could be imposed by a socialist Administration or a Lib-Lab Government. Nevertheless, it is a significant erosion of support and we should take note of it. If we do not, it will have serious electoral consequences.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Carlisle spoke about the speech by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon. It was interesting to note the clear sensitivity in certain quarters about what he was saying. As my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) well

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understood—because both were present—Air Chief Marshal Graydon was explaining that it did nobody an good to make facile comparisons between the Israeli air force and the Royal Air Force in view of the worldwide role and varied responsibilities of the RAF compared with the purely regional responsibilities of the Israeli air force. None the less, there is great merit in the Israeli pattern of operation which we should comprehend and act upon at a time of budgetary stringency.

I would urge Her Majesty's Ministers to use the opportunity of a review fundamentally to examine the Air Force which we wish to create for the rest of the decade and into the next century. Of course, the review has already been burdened with a slogan. It is a basic tenet of our political understanding in the Conservative party that slogans have their dangers. I suspect that, "Front line first" will prove yet another dangerous slogan.

If we try to think clearly of the qualities that we are seeking in our Air Force for the next 10 to 15 years, those thoughts may guide us towards the strategic decisions, procurement choices and personnel policies that will be wise and stand the test of time.

Of course, for the United Kingdom, with its geographic position somewhat to the rear of continental Europe, on the flank of the alliance, with security interests in the northern region, the Baltic approaches and the central region of NATO as well as the eastern Atlantic and the territorial seas around the British Isles, air power will aways be a crucial determinant of our security and of our national defence.

As we still have some global responsibilities, and as we take seriously our responsibilities for peacekeeping under the aegis of the United Nations, the qualities of fire power, mobility and flexibility and, I hope, of sustainability and the ability to support operations over a long time, in a well-established, well-trained and well-equipped Air Force will be indispensable for the defence of these islands.

The air defence of the United Kingdom has been run down. From April, when the No. 23 Squadron of F3 Tornados at Leeming is disbanded, we will be down to six air defence squadrons. This is the absolute minimum and probably too few. We have already decided not to replace the medium-range surface-to-air missile, the Bloodhound, which leaves a glaring deficiency in our air defences.

Another potential deficiency looming is the need for an effective theatre ballistic missile defence. Hon. Members will have noticed from the press that the United States Administration is dispatching Patriot missiles for the defence of South Korea.

Given the proliferation of nuclear missiles and nuclear technology and the ease with which dictators such as Saddam Hussein acquired launch vehicles and Scud ballistic missiles, it is surely prudent for the United Kingdom to work towards an anti-ballistic-missile system now.

Furthermore, as a maritime member of the European component of NATO, we need to take seriously the security of the sea lanes across the north Atlantic as a continued national interest. We all know that the Red Fleet is not the power that it was; nevertheless, the Russians are still building modern submarines and we do not know the direction in which Russian policy will evolve.

As my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Tayside, North reminded us so eloquently, we have good grounds to be apprehensive not just through the emergence of the liberal democratic party in Russia today with its nationalistic tendencies, but because of the speeches that are made there, asserting a right to continue suzerainty over the independent sovereign countries, many of them democratic, within what used to be the USSR.

I hope that we will soon address the need to acquire a modern, maritime reconnaissance aeroplane to replace the existing Nimrods in service, or at least to overhaul and refurbish them.

The Royal Air Force will also need to be able to project power and to intervene rapidly, either within continental Europe and the NATO theatre, or under the United Nations or WEU control outside it; or even, if we are to believe the decision of the recent NATO summit, as part of a NATO joint task force operating out of area.

We need a modern transport force and, as many hon. Members have wisely advised the Government, the first tranche of the existing Hercules fleet needs to be replaced now. The replacement already exists. It does not have to be funded by the Government and no RAF development money needs to be invested in it. No fewer than 18 British companies in the C130J programme invested their own shareholders' money in it and consequently stand to benefit not only from the launch of the aircraft by the Royal Air Force, but from third country sales of which we can expect several hundred.

The aeroplane will be more capable, its payload range will be better, its manpower per flying hour will be reduced, and it will be a more economic aeroplane. As some have suggested, refurbishment is no sensible solution.

Likewise, when we consider the need to project power, I remind the Government that it is all very well having modern platforms, and we hope that the European fighter aircraft 2000 will be a success, but we need also modern weapons to go with high performance aircraft.

I ask the Government for an assurance that air staff requirement 1236 for a long-range conventional stand-off weapon will be met soon, as will air staff requirement 1238 for an air-launched intelligent anti-armour weapon in view of the cancellation of multiple-launch rocket system 3, and air staff requirement 1242 for a laser-guided bomb, be it either Paveway 3 or the Lancelot programme.

We are seeking to save money and it is our duty to make sure that the Royal Air Force is not only operationally capable, but an economic force. In that context, I would support remarks made by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) who urged the Government to look again at Royal Air Force Germany. If the Russians withdraw by the end of August this year from the eastern part of Germany, we should withdraw from the western part of Germany.

No fewer than 19,000 German civilians work for either the Royal Air Force in Germany or the Army. I would much rather see those German-based squadrons at stations such as Brawdy or Chivenor, which traditionally have been homes to Royal Air Force flying units and have local communities that support the Royal Air Force, than that they be stationed in Germany as an anachronism, a left-over from the cold war.

On the subject of value for money, reverting to the theme of the Israeli air force and the United States air national guard briefly mentioned earlier in the debate, we now have a concept of a sponsored reserve, whereby personnel in firms who work for the Ministry of Defence will have a reserve commitment.

I believe that there is an opportunity to deploy formed units as Royal Auxiliary Air Force squadrons as part of that sponsored reserve. I shall give some examples. The first is heavy lift cargo airlines which are regularly chartered by the RAF to carry ultraheavy loads—big and bulky cargoes that cannot be lifted by the Hercules. Secondly, if it were decided by Dr. Perry's inquiry that 32 Squadron in my constituency, at RAF Northolt, should be contractorised —heaven forbid—I would urge that it become an auxiliary squadron, the County of Middlesex squadron.

Thirdly, we were told that there would be an electronic warfare and related facilities unit at Middleton St. George-Teesside airport. That, too, could be an auxiliary squadron—perhaps the County of Durham squadron—if Sir John Banham's inquiry would allow it —or the North Riding squadron reformed. There is also the work that is done by pilots who fly training missions to train air traffic controllers at Shawbury. That could be an auxiliary squadron. If we carry the concept further, so could the target towers from RAF Wyton or the pilots from the navigation school at RAF Finningley. There are a number of possibilities along those lines.

We should not forget the Queen's flight. I would not dream, and it would be beyond my remit, to suggest that the captain of the Queen's flight should be anything other than an air officer. The deputy captain, too, should be an officer of great seniority. That should still be the case. Nevertheless, the role of the Queen's flight could be combined with that of 32 Squadron at RAF Northolt. I believe that that would make good sense. What is more, one could reasonably bring the Central Flying School to RAF Cranwell. Barkston Heath has spare capacity. We have already the College of Air Warfare at RAF college, Cranwell. I do not think that my idea would be impossible.

In short, I urgently hope that Her Majesty's Government will not use the opportunity of the review to put in place short-term Treasury-led solutions, because urgent equipment modernisations are required and important changes in personnel policy could be adopted, such as a better and wiser use of reserves. If Her Majesty's Government pursue such a forward-looking policy, they will, as ever, have my full support.

8.2 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I hold a commission in the RAF Reserve as a pilot; I shall say something later about the reserve forces. I am also a member of the council of the Air League and am rather delighted that the league has been given so much publicity tonight, and as a result of the air chief marshal's speech some time ago. I assure the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) that, if he ever requires a copy of a future speech made at the Air League, which is open to many people who want to come and listen, he has only to ask me and I shall use my best endeavours to ensure that he receives one.

Mr. Martlew: As the Secretary of State for Defence has refused to give us a copy, I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will give me a copy of the air marshal's speech.

Mr. Mans: I shall certainly use my best endeavours to do precisely that.

I shall now say a few words about the speeches made by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). I agree with much of what they, and indeed my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), said. I disagree with them on one point, and shall deal with it later. Before I do, I shall make some general observations.

There is no doubt that, with the cold war now over, there was a realisation within the armed services that changes and reductions were inevitable. In the RAF, "Options for Change" was accepted, albeit reluctantly, and personnel generally looked forward to a smaller but better-equipped service once the changes had taken place. Most of all, there was a feeling within the Royal Air Force, perhaps not matched to the same degree in the Army and Navy, that people should get on with the changes as quickly as possible and, having made them, move to greater stability thereafter.

Three years on, things are rather different. Many within the RAF wonder when the disruption will end. The two further reductions in the projected strength of the RAF since the "Options for Change" initiative will mean that the RAF's strike attack and air defence capability will have been reduced by 40 per cent. What has not changed since "Options for Change" are the tasks that the RAF is asked to carry out. Indeed, there is an argument to suggest that they have increased of late. That point was made by a number of Opposition Members and by some of my hon. Friends. In that context, it is worth bearing in mind also the recently published budget of the French defence ministry, which, compared with last year, shows an increase in defence expenditure.

Comparisons are often made between this country's defence requirements and those of France. That should be a clear signal of how the French are seeing the increasingly unstable world in which we live. That should be a clear signal to our Ministry of Defence to look closely at what the French think the threat is in future. It may seem strange that I, or indeed any Conservative Member, should argue in favour of stability. We live in a changing world. If Lady Thatcher achieved nothing else—I believe that she achieved a great deal—she shook this country out of its complacency and made many people understand that, if we are to survive, let alone prosper, in an ever-competitive world, we must accept change and readily throw off old ways and become increasingly adaptable.

The real question is, does that philosophy read across to the armed services? My answer to that question is a mixed one. I sincerely believe that a fairly radical shake-up of the organisation of the armed services is needed. I have said as much many times in the House. I also feel that the climate for such a shake-up was probably better during "Options for Change" than it is now. None the less, I will mention later what I think can be done in the present review "Front Line First". However, alongside that review, I believe that a good case can be made for eventual stability within our armed forces that cannot be made to the same extent outside them.

The case for more stability and more certainty runs something like this. We require our armed service men to be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We expect them to react immediately to go virtually anywhere in the world. We expect them to leave their families behind at a moment's notice and, on arrival at their destination, we expect them to be ready quickly for combat. Those

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expectations, which have in the past been realised, are well illustrated by the way in which our armed forces arrived in Bosnia and how they have performed since.

In the slightly more distant past, within 24 hours of the first Tornado squadron arriving in the Gulf, it was ready for combat. The Foreign Secretary made that point in a different way. He calls our armed services a very important asset which allowed us to punch above our weight in foreign and security matters. Alongside that, I believe that if we are to expect our armed forces to do all that, we should not inflict on them the added burden of not knowing whether they have a job next year, or at least not to have that burden indefinitely.

For example, there were reports of people out on patrol in Bosnia wondering whether they were to be made redundant. Many of those reports were probably exaggerated, but I strongly believe that it is difficult to conceive of pilots and navigators, flying front-line aircraft in a near-combat situation, as is the case in the Gulf at the present time with Tornados flying armed reconnaissance missions over Iran, being able to do their jobs properly if they are wondering all the time whether their squadron will exist in a few months' time. There is a trade-off between stability and the effectiveness of our armed services.

As I have said, change which ultimately results in greater stability is acceptable. Change which appears to be without end is not. Unless we as politicians are prepared to accept a reduction in the overall effectiveness of our armed forces, and through it a reduction in their value for money, we need to understand that significant difference between military and other types of activities within our society.

Much of what I have said could be applied to all three services, but it particularly applies to the RAF, which got on with "Options for Change" as quickly as possible and now very much finds itself in the front line for further cuts.

Before Opposition parties take any encouragement from what I have said, I should add that the confidence of the armed services in the Government, despite the one poll, the origin of which has not been divulged by the hon. Member for Carlisle, remains considerably higher than I can remember it during the previous Labour Government when I was a member of the regular RAF in the mid-1970s. I strongly believe that before the Opposition can draw any advantage from the debate they will have to say much more clearly which commitments, if any, they would get rid of and what size and shape our armed forces would be if they were in power.

The Government are on target to cut expenditure on the armed forces by 25 per cent. in real terms by 1996, but the view—I would argue the realistic view—within the armed services is that the Liberal Democrats and Labour party would cut much further. That lack of certainty in those parties' defence policies means that part of the services' apprehension about continual change applies to them as well.

Bearing in mind what I have said, if we are to provide the sort of armed services in the future that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has mentioned, we need to do three things. First, I support "Front Line First", but it needs to look at the organisation of the armed forces as well as how the existing one can be made to operate more cheaply. I offer a few suggestions.

For example, do we really need 10 levels of management within the RAF when we now have, or soon will have, only 70,000 personnel? Those levels of management might have applied when the force was five times the size that it is now, but they seem unduly bureaucratic at the moment. Could we not, to start off with, abolish the rank of air commodore tomorrow for future promotions and do as the Navy does and promote the best group captains straight to air vice marshal?

Do we really need such a large procurement executive when the front line has shrunk as fast as it has? Most of the front-line experience in the Tornado strike attack force is in one, or at the most two, RAF stations. Therefore, could not we speed up the way in which decisions are made about new equipment by asking the relatively few front-line squadron commanders we have left what they need to do the job properly rather than, as happens at present, have many of their wishes modified and delayed by the procurement process and, I submit, made more expensive as well?

Could not we go further in terms of testing and evaluating aircraft? For example, is it necessary to have separate test facilities within the RAF, in places such as Boscombe Down, which in many ways replicate what is done at Warton and, in the case of the Tornado, at Manching in Germany? Should not we try to move industry and the RAF closer together to save money without reducing the effectiveness of our front-line forces in any way?

Is not it expensive to have separate training machines and career profiles for helicopter aircrew and ground crew depending on which service they happen to join? In many cases, they are operating the same helicopters. Surely we should pool at least the training part of that increasingly important military activity.

Finally, a point touched on by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, should not we take a close look at our real estate requirements? I fully take on board the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood about the importance of having a number of runways around the country so that we can disperse our forces and re-arm easily if we need to do so. None the less, there is a lot of real estate which could be disposed of with little, if any, disadvantage to the operational effectiveness of, particularly, the RAF.

Alongside those ideas and others that should be looked at in "Front Line First", the Government need to reiterate their commitment to provide the RAF with better equipment. Eurofighter should fly for the first time in the next two or three months. In answer to a point made by the hon. Member for Carlisle, who tried to suggest that that prototype aircraft was way behind schedule, I would only suggest that he look closely at the way in which other aircraft programmes that preceded Eurofighter have progressed. In virtually every case, there has been a much longer delay than has occurred with the Eurofighter 2000.

Mr. Martlew: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but does he accept that there is a two-year delay in having the maiden flight?

Mr. Mans: In the 1950s and 1960s, maiden flights were important because there was little computer simulation and little opportunity to test the systems in an aircraft before it flew for the first time. The significance of a new aircraft's first flight today is much less than it was 10 or 20 years ago.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as with all aircraft where one flies by wire and is defended on computers—as is the case now, unlike with the previous generation of aircraft—it is important at the simulator stage to find out what could and might go wrong? No one gets any satisfaction from the fact that two other aircraft of this generation have crashed, the F22 and the Gripen, and that could well be because sufficient time was not spent in the simulator.

Mr. Mans: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is significant that one of the main reasons for the present delay is the software and the flight control system. All separate systems within that aircraft are being tested on the ground to see how they relate one to the other. That was not done with the F22 and the Gripen, with the result that my hon. Friend described.

Going on from there, I hope that the RAF will soon confirm its order for 250 Eurofighters and seriously consider increasing it beyond that so that it can replace some other types of aircraft, such as the Harrier. I am interested in what the hon. Member for Carlisle said in relation to the Eurofighter. Halfway through his speech, he made some interesting points about the imbalance between the north and the south as regards stations. He tried to give the House the impression that undue weight was given to keeping stations in the south open while shutting those in the north. If the hon. Gentleman believes that, he should think carefully about what he said about whether we need 250 Eurofighters. If the Labour party is committing itself to a reduced buy, that will mean a reduced number of jobs in the north of England.

Mr. Martlew The hon. Gentleman distorts what I said. I said that, given Government cuts, there is grave concern in the industry about whether the Government will stick to their commitment to 250.

Mr. Mans: I withdraw at least part of what I said if the hon. Gentleman supports the idea of buying 250 aircraft. I consider that to be the minimum number that will be required to fulfil the roles for which the model was designed.

Much has been said about the replacement for the Hercules. I wonder why that is. It may be because Lockheed has managed to tie a good many British companies into the development of the aircraft. I do not deny that the decision is important, but I think that we should take a close look at what Lockheed is saying. It says that there is a market for 400 aircraft, and the RAF wants only 30. It also appears to be saying that the British companies involved in the project will be involved regardless of whether the RAF buys the 30 aircraft. The total value of that RAF order to British companies is £100 million. I think that we should examine the reasons why Lockheed is pushing this aircraft so hard.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assess the options very carefully. Option one is to buy 30 C130Js now; option two is to refurbish the existing fleet of aircraft, enabling them to last as long as a new buy of Hercules aircraft; option three is to carry out a much-reduced refurbishment, which would allow a decision to replace the aircraft at a rather later date. The replacement might well turn out to be the C130J.

The last option would also allow the RAF and the Ministry of Defence to consider alternatives, bearing in mind an answer given on 16 December by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Services. He suggested then that the majority of the Hercules fleet was capable of lasting until the year 2007. I do not believe that the decision to buy the C130J need be taken immediately. I believe that the decision should be made at the beginning of next year, when we shall have a much clearer idea of the options following the FLA feasibility study.

At present, it appears that—without that information—we are to commit the RAF to buying an aircraft with a 1950s airframe. More important, for the next 30 or 40 years it will not be possible to take a significant amount of the equipment that the RAF has at present—for instance, the Warrior and Saxon armoured vehicles, multiple-role rocket launchers and, indeed, the complete attack helicopter. We should not be tempted to believe that the C130J is the only aircraft that meets the needs of the RAF, in terms of either cost or capability. In about 12 months' time, we shall be in a much better position to take an informed view. In that connection, I disagree to some extent with what others have said.

I think that we should make a more rapid decision about signing a contract for the EH101 helicopter, whose development stage seems to have been rather long. It is high time that we made up our minds to buy it, now that we have been offered a price that we can afford. I also think that, as well as making radical organisational changes and acquiring better equipment, we should introduce more stability in the RAF. We cannot expect officers and airmen to maintain their current level of commitment if we do not give them that increased stability at some point in the future.

As has been mentioned, an element of the changes introduced by the Ministry of Defence is the probability, or at least the possibility, that the Carlisle supply unit will close. As a north-west Member, I regret that. I understand the need for rationalisation, but I hope that hon. Members other than the hon. Member for Carlisle will recognise the pressure put on the MOD by my hon. Friends the Members for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) and for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). Along with the hon. Member for Carlisle, they have engaged in consultations with the MOD about the best method of redeployment and about the possibility of using Konver funds from the European Community. I am sure that my hon. Friends would echo what I have said if they were present.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North, I want to make a special plea for the air cadet organisation in connection with the coming review. Although it cannot be described as a front-line organisation, I believe that—as well as serving as a recruiting ground for RAF officers and airmen—it provides a practical and worthwhile pursuit for many young men and women. It teaches them values and consideration for others which will benefit them greatly throughout their lives. If we are to tackle the problems of teenage crime, we should consider the three cadet movements.

Many hon. Members will know of the recent controversy surrounding a teenage criminal in the care of Gloucestershire county council. First, he was sent to an outward bound centre in north Wales; he was then sent on an adventure holiday abroad. The cost amounted to some £2,000 a week. The stated aim was to discourage the teenager from repeating his criminal activities.

What fascinated me were the pursuits in which that young person was asked to engage, to build up his character and develop his self-reliance. To me, they

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seemed remarkably similar to the pursuits engaged in by many young people who join the cadet forces. Surely many youngsters could be given the opportunity of joining the cadet forces—and, indeed, other youth organisations—to engage in activities that might well discourage them from going down the wrong road and indulging in anti-social behaviour. The cost need be no more than the cost of sending that teenager on holiday—which, as far as we know, did not prove successful. Prevention is better than cure: we should consider the social role of the cadet forces as well as their recruiting role.

Recently, we have heard much talk of traditional values and the moral aspects of society. I have no wish to be drawn into that debate in any detail. Let me say, however, that many people associate "back to basics", or whatever we may choose to call it, not only with better education and more emphasis on law and order but with strong defences. They believe that we should put national security before social security—I think that that has already been mentioned in the debate.

I hold the rather old-fashioned view that service men, both in and out of uniform, are a stabilising force in society. Whether or not we consider military discipline a good thing, it is widely thought to give those who experience it a sense of right and wrong. Service life also provides a sense of community, combined with an above-average ability to organise. The hon. Member for Wentworth spoke of the training carried out in the RAF and other armed forces. Such skills and values should not be underestimated in the wider community.

As the armed services shrink, the assets shrink, too. I am not pleading for more money to be spent on defence, but I am pleading with those who decide how we spend taxpayers' money in general to appreciate the fact that at least part of the savings made in the defence budget are likely to pop up elsewhere as extra expenditure. By that I mean that extra expenditure might be needed for increased social security payments or, perhaps, to deal with increasing crime or higher unemployment or to make up for the fall in volunteers in local government, schools or charitable organisations.

Service life promotes self-reliance and respect for law and order and discourages a dependency culture. Those who promote such values but who have no experience of service life need to take that into account when considering the type of society that Conservatives at least would like to see.

8.30 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and I went to Germany a year or so ago to plead with the Bundestag for the revival of the European fighter aircraft programme there. It seemed that the programme was a goner, but our powers of persuasion were such that the Germans relented shortly afterwards.

The hon. Gentleman's persuasive powers are much better than his analytical powers or his memory. When I heard him talking about being a pilot in the 1970s and about how the Tory-oriented pilots thought much more highly of the then Conservative Opposition than of the dreadful Labour Government of the time, I kept wondering which halcyon days he meant.

Was the hon. Member referring to the affection that the flyers had for the Conservative Government of the 1930s who left us virtually bereft of aircraft? Were the halcyon days of which the flyers of the 1970s were thinking those of the late 1950s when Duncan Sandys was running the Air Force, even though his decisions devastated the force and their consequences took about 20 years to remedy? Or were the flyers looking forward to the RAF's halcyon days under this Government?

The hon. Member for Wyre said that he was not pleading for more money to be spent on defence, but his speech and the speeches of many Conservative Members were catalogues of special pleading for interests that they represent. I suspect that one or two hon. Members are handsomely remunerated for the political or other advice that they provide. We heard a catalogue of demands——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. If the hon. Gentleman had an interest, it should have been declared.

Mr. George: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Do you mean me or the hon. Member for Wyre?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If any hon. Member has an interest, it should be declared.

Mr. George: The hon. Member to whom I am referring declared his interest. I was repeating what had been said and referring to the frustrations of people seeking to promote defence expenditure while simultaneously supporting a Government who have meted out a series of cuts to our defence forces. The hon. Gentleman spoke of recidivism—perhaps there are recidivist Ministers who are constantly cutting defence spending to a level that many people, probably including themselves, regard as dangerous. To argue that the Government should purchase 250 of anything is to whistle in the dark to give oneself a little courage.

Defence expenditure is falling to under 3 per cent. of gross domestic product, so how are we to get the required aircraft, ships or tanks? If the Government can square the circle, I shall be delighted to hear how it is to be done.

Mr. Garnier *rose*——

Mr. George: May I please continue? I am not arguing for a return to the halcyon days of the 1970s when we spent just under 5 per cent. of GDP on defence. Perhaps those days will not come again for some time, but one must be honest and say that if one is prepared to endorse a policy of spending 3 per cent. of GDP on defence, one cannot argue the case for buying 250 of this or 500 of that, because it will never happen. I now give way to the hon. Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier).

Mr. Garnier: I ask the hon. Gentleman please to continue.

Mr. George: As everyone—except, perhaps, the Treasury team—knows, we are living in an exceedingly dangerous and volatile world. If one had said that two or three years ago, one would have been dismissed as an unreconstructed cold war warrior. However, one does not need to be a genius in strategic analysis to be aware of the horrendous developments in Russia. There is a distinct possibility that Zhirinovsky will be to Yeltsin what Yeltsin was to Gorbachev, and the leader of Russia in 12 months' or two years' time.

I do not have to apologise to Zhirinovsky if I say that he appears to be certifiable, but he could, at any time, lead a nation that is still in possession of a formidable array of weaponry about which, under the present Russian Administration, I—thankfully—have no anxieties. However, President Yeltsin might gradually accommodate the military, the old Communist party and the fascist—or the Liberal Democratic—party, with the result that the policies of his party might imperceptibly change.

Many of us will have read the speech made last year by the Foreign Minister Kosyrev. It was a spoof speech meant to frighten the west. It suggested what Russian foreign and defence policy might be in the future unless the west woke up and did more to assist the ailing Russian economy. However, a number of his cynical, ironic and semi-humorous remarks are becoming realities. I am not suggesting that we should abandon our treaty commitments or that we should not help President Yeltsin—far from it; we should do more—but we must remember that the situation there could change at any time.

If we are to run down our armed forces and our defence industrial base, we must bear it in mind that the non-existent shipyards cannot be recreated quickly. The firms that manufactured aircraft which have been wiped out cannot recall their workmen and tell them to relearn their skills and start building aircraft again. I accept that we could not sustain spending 5 per cent. of GDP on defence, but nor can we justify spending only 3 per cent. on defence —not on security or economic grounds.

Lopping £5 billion off the defence budget will not be a panacea enabling us to regenerate British industry or our health and social services. Whatever the ills in our society and whatever the reasons for our economy's underperformance, we cannot heap the blame on the defence budget. Lopping the budget will not lead to a dramatic transformation of our society.

We live in a turbulent world. As has already been said, there are many dangers in the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Why should any third-world country spend a vast amount of money developing a ballistic missile capability, together with the necessary weaponry, if it can take the cheap route and develop chemical or biological weapons which are just as lethal as, or, in many cases, even more devastating than, nuclear weapons? We should, therefore, be a little cautious in the present environment.

I am anxiously awaiting the poll that tells us that the population has more faith in the Labour party than in the Conservative Government on defence matters. I should not be surprised if that were the case. My talking to service men and the public in general has merely confirmed what is patently obvious.

If I could distil 20 years of experience in the House into a sentence, it would be as follows. Whatever one expects to happen, the opposite will take place. We are reaching that situation on defence.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): May I put my hon. Friend out of his agony and curiosity? I am sure that he can use these statistics in his constituency if they are relevant. I have here the most recent Gallup Political and Economic Index, for November 1993, which showed a clear Labour lead over the Conservatives in popular perception on defence.

Mr. George: That must be a salutary lesson to Conservative Members and I advise the hon. Member for Wyre, who has just spoken, that it would be wise for him to retain his flying skills; he might at some stage require them. I do not say that in any malevolent way. He argued that more people should be imbued with the ethos of the service man. If he goes to the Library and examines the statistics provided by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, he will find that Britain has a smaller percentage of civilian and military personnel engaged in the military than any country in NATO bar Luxembourg, which has an army of 750, and Iceland, which has no armed forces whatever. Perhaps he should give that information to his hon. and right hon. Friends.

I am not a statistician, but I occasionally use statistics. Let us consider the NATO figures—not figures produced by the Labour party—for expenditure on defence, showing the percentage of personnel expenditure, the percentage devoted to equipment expenditure, including RAF expenditure, and the percentage devoted to infrastructure and what is called "operating expenditures". Using that classification of expenditure, which differs from that of the Ministry of Defence, one reaches the startling conclusion, considering the statistics, that, according to an estimate for 1993, Royaume Uni will be spending 13·7 per cent. of its defence budget on equipment.

I repeat that the figures use a different basis for calculating expenditure than does the Ministry of Defence. However, Canada spends 19 per cent. of its defence budget on equipment; Denmark spends almost 18 per cent.; Greece spends 25 per cent.; even Norway spends almost 25 per cent.

It is, therefore, not surprising that we are not going to have our 250 European fighter aircraft. We shall not have the aircraft that we need if the percentage of expenditure, being so low, will not sustain an ordering programme that will remotely meet the requirements of Conservative Members or, more importantly, is remotely commensurate with meeting the requirements of the Air Force in the exceedingly turbulent world that we are entering.

Some Conservative Members might have signed a document arguing for the elimination of the Air Force and its merger with the Army. I believe that there is still a significant role for the RAF if we are prepared to sustain it and adjust it to the requirements of the new world.

The Defence Committee, of which I am a member, has produced several reports in recent years of impact to the RAF. At the moment, we have a session on the Eurofighter 2000, we have a session on RAF commitments and resources and we are considering RAF training, including low flying—all of that in the next two months or so. We shall go to see the Tornado F3 and Jaguar detachments in Italy, as long as the war in the former Yugoslavia continues, which it will, and as long as the Whips permit the Select Committee on Defence to travel. I suspect that the former situation is more likely to continue than the latter, but I have no exact knowledge.

We have to consider many procurement problems. The C130 replacement is obviously important. I can understand why the hon. Member for Wyre, who has, no doubt, British Aerospace establishments either in or near his constituency, deems the British Aerospace solution to be desirable. The Defence Committee is examining that and I have not reached a final conclusion. The RAF appears to want the new Hercules and it might be more desirable to have an

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aircraft that one can fly in the foreseeable future than what, at the moment, is more than a concept but certainly is not worthy of consideration as a real alternative for the RAF.

Many problems need to be considered. A decision is needed on the Eurofighter, and I hope that the German order is not pared down even further to make the project even more difficult. I believe that we need to hear some more about the problems of contractorisation. It is obvious that we need the EH101, an excellent support helicopter which the Government have been endorsing for some time. Even the Secretary of State, before the Defence Committee, almost argued the case for an order being given, but he did not give the order. I hope that this evening the Minister will announce that an order will be given so that that much-needed helicopter will enter service.

I am anxious that a decision be made on the light support helicopter and I should like to hear of the future, if any, for the RAF Regiment. That issue causes the Defence Committee some concern.

Conservative Members have mentioned the issue of the Bloodhound replacement. It seems to me rather bizarre: one spends a vast amount of money on a new aircraft, the old EFA, and then one does not provide the defence for that expensive equipment. The Bloodhound was almost a second world war system; it was no longer capable of adaptation. When will an announcement be made of a replacement for it?

Another decision that needs to be made fairly soon is whether the RAF acquires an off-shelf Lancelot or chooses the Texas Instruments alternative. I believe that the Air Force requires decisions.

I reiterate, in spite of a little poking of fun at the Government, that there has been—it is something that I welcome, and I have been criticised for it many times—a considerable narrowing of difference between the political parties. The differences are not enormous. We are creating an environment in which we avoid the yah-boo politics that dominated the House during the 1980s, to the detriment of our defence forces.

I hope that we can do what is done in many northern European countries that may not spend much but have something that we do not—basic agreement on defence issues; the parties reach an agreement outside Parliament and are bound by those decisions. Let us argue about domestic politics, but let us agree on the perception of the threat and the risks in the world in which we live. If we can agree about that, perhaps we can largely agree about the armed forces that are required, not only for the defence of our territory, but for the defence of our interests. It is much broader than the defence of our territory. Yes, we can pull one other's legs a little, but basically there will be agreement.

An agreement is now much more feasible for a number of reasons. The Government are reducing defence expenditure to a level which, as I want to amuse the Secretary of State for Defence by saying, would receive the unanimous and enthusiastic support of a Labour party conference. The Labour party's view of defence is rather different from the view that dominated the Labour party three, four, five or six years ago. The Liberal party is taking a view on defence that is robust compared with its view in a previous era. In those circumstances, I very much hope that we can generate, if not unity or unanimity, at least a degree of agreement about security issues.

The RAF has served this country well and there is an enormous role for it to play in the future—perhaps not its traditional role, largely based in Germany, but a different role that must now be afforded it as a result of the changed security environment.

The hon. Member for Wyre has done a runner. Having listened to his speech, I am not surprised.

Mr. Garnier: There he is.

Mr. George: I apologise; the hon. Gentleman had run only a few yards.

When we argued the case for the EFA, we asked the German Members of Parliament, "Can you truly contemplate sending your young men in aircraft to face an adversary that may have aircraft superior to yours?" What Member of Parliament, either still in Parliament or in retirement, wants to have to say, "I am sorry, but way back in the early 1990s I did not think that the world would turn out quite this way"?

Governments are obsessed with planning a week or a month ahead. Let us try to think what might happen five or 10 years ahead. What might the configuration of great powers be then, and what nations will have bought off-the-shelf aircraft that are better than ours from Russia? What will be the new powers and the new alliances? Where will the United States stand? What will the role of European defence be in that great uncertainty?

I ask Conservative Members whether they can continue to argue that the Conservative party and its supporters represent the party of defence when they are running down our defences to such a level that actions such as the Gulf war or the Falklands campaign could not be contemplated. If the need arises and we are unable to commit our forces, hon. Members who have sustained the Government in running down our forces will, upon reflection—in opposition, or flying their aircraft, or running their whelk stalls—have to ask where the responsibility lies. I suspect that some of it will rest on their shoulders.

8.51 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), but I would listen with more interest were he to make exactly the same speech at next year's Labour party conference. I should be interested to see whether he could get away with it, and whether he would still be alive at the end of it. There is a distinct difference between the defence policies of the Government and the Conservative party, and those of the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party. It is no good the hon. Gentleman offering blandishments to Conservative Members; those differences are as wide as the Grand canyon. It is no good his trying to persuade us that we are one and the same on defence issues.

However, having made those uncharitable remarks to him, I accept that he and I, and his party and mine, are at one in saluting the Royal Air Force, and the part that it has played in securing our defences and in protecting our national interest both at home and abroad. No one who saw on the television, heard on the wireless or read in the press about the exploits of our RAF crews during the Gulf war can honestly do otherwise. I am sure that the hon. Member for Walsall, South will willingly join me in making that salute.

I hope that I shall not be accused of exaggeration or of overstating my case when I say that what the RAF flyers and crews did in 1991 over Iraq, with their unquestioning and unstinting devotion to duty, was on a par with the bravery and quality of service that we saw in our wartime bombers over Germany and our fighter pilots who fought against the odds in the Battle of Britain. This country and this Parliament owe them a debt of gratitude. Certainly I, who reached the dizzy heights of being a clarinet player in the school cadet band—of course, I cannot compare myself to the formation flyers sitting on my left, my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson)—owe them a debt of gratitude. That gratitude should be unequivocal, unreserved and unqualified.

Where do we find the Royal Air Force today? We find it not only in its usual places in the United Kingdom and in Germany, but in Bosnia, taking part in operation Grapple, operation Cheshire and operation Deny Flight, and in Iraq, taking part in the south in operation Jural, and in the north in operation Warden, maintaining the no-fly zones that protect both the marsh Arabs and the innocent Iraqi populations in the north, especially the Kurds.

The current strength and deployment of the Royal Air Force are to be found in the table at annex A on page 89 and at annex D on page 99 of the recent White Paper, "Defending Our Future—Statement on the Defence Estimates 1993". I am sure that the House will be grateful to hear that, for reasons of time, I shall not go through all the figures. I shall simply draw one or two generalised lessons from them.

Broadly, there are now in our RAF fewer aeroplanes, fewer squadrons and fewer people—fewer men and women serving. That is proved both in annex A and in annex D, and, indeed, in paragraph 7.43 on page 84 of the White Paper. I shall refer briefly to paragraphs and 7.41, 7.42 and 7.41 and, faithfully I hope, quote them. I hope that I shall not do an injustice to the draftsmen or to my right hon. and hon. Friends in government who make up the Ministry of Defence team.

Paragraph 7.43 says:

> "The Services are now generally able to attract and retain the skilled and well-motivated men and women they need, although some shortages still remain."

If that is true I am glad of it, but I ask whether it is strictly true. It continues:

> "Voluntary wastage is at a record low level. In the 12 months to 1 April 1993, the proportion of officers who left on PVR"—

that is, premature voluntary release—

> "fell from 2·9 per cent. to 2 per cent. and the rate of applications fell from 2 per cent. to 1·2 per cent. The proportion of noncommissioned personnel leaving on PVR fell from 6 per cent. to 4·7 per cent. and applications declined from 5·8 per cent. to 4·2 per cent. Total outflow in the 12 months to 1 April 1993 was 33,655."

That is a big number, in anybody's arithmetic.

Paragraph 7.43 says:

> "Our current manpower plans are based on a forecast requirement for Service manpower in 1995 totalling around 240,000".

The RAF element in that is 70,000. It continues:

> "Beyond 1995 the manpower requirement will be kept under review in the light of changing circumstances, including any new operational commitments. Where developments in technology mean that new weapon systems require less manpower to operate or maintain them, this will need to be reflected."

I hope that there can be flexibility up as well as down, and if any new developments require additional manpower or equipment I trust that the Minister of Defence will be able to persuade our financial masters in the Treasury that that must be arranged.

Sadly, the defence debate is not often heard. As the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said earlier, the absence of hon. Members during our debate perhaps reflects the sad lack of interest in such issues throughout the country. Although I say "sad lack of interest", there is a constituency out there that is very concerned about our defence industries and about our defence. It is vital that we have such debates a good deal more often than we do at present. I am very pleased to have been called, even at this late stage in the debate, to represent that constituency to some extent.

I do not speak today on behalf of a particular local base, depot or constituency MOD establishment. I trust that I can speak on behalf of the bigger picture and try to explain some of the concerns affecting people of all political persuasions. With such large reductions in defence spending, there is a fear that there is severe overstretch and that the morale of our armed forces personnel is falling. It must be uncontroversial to say that our armed forces are institutions in which Britain has hitherto taken considerable pride.

I regard the defence of the realm as the primary responsibility of Government. Again, I trust that that is not a controversial remark. The discharge of that responsibility involves the triple task of analysing the potential threat, providing a defence capability commensurate with it and co-ordinating defence and foreign policy to ensure that each supports, and does not contradict, the other. Only if there is clarity about the rationale and role of the armed forces, including the RAF, the confidence that it will have the means to fulfil foreseeable assignments and coherence between foreign and defence policies can a national consensus on defence matters be nurtured and the morale of the fighting services be maintained.

The main incident in foreign policy and defence terms over the past few years must be what is called the end of the cold war. I believe that that can more accurately be called the end of the third world war. Great issues for debate arise following that change of circumstance, and great questions of foreign policy and defence issues flow from it. They affect our consideration of the RAF just as much as they affect our consideration of the other armed services and the merchant marine.

There are several questions which, at this stage of the evening, I will not ask. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement and other hon. Members who take an interest in defence matters will readily have such questions at their finger tips. I believe that those questions were not properly or fully addressed in "Options for Change". Some vital issues were addressed in that document, but it did not deal with all the very interesting and important issues that might have been asked.

"Options for Change" set out the savings that it was believed we could make if we no longer had to be prepared for war with the Warsaw pact. However, defence spending in real terms and as a proportion of gross domestic product has been reducing precipitously since the fall of the Berlin wall. In the mid-1980s, as hon. Members have said, defence spending averaged 5 per cent. of GDP. By 1995-96 it will amount to only 3·2 per cent. The most important

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point to bear in mind is that, within that total, the proportion spent on equipment is at its lowest since the 1970s. In the mid-1980s, we spent about 45 to 48 per cent. of the defence budget on equipment. I am told that equipment now accounts for about 39 per cent. of the defence budget and there are signs that it is due to fall as low as 34 per cent.

I can understand the argument: smaller defence forces, smaller RAF, but better equipment. However, I find it difficult to square smaller defence forces with much less equipment. We must address that issue. Can we afford our percentage of equipment spending to fall further when the calibre of our defence forces must be tip top? The RAF will have lost 40 per cent. of its strike attack capability and 30 per cent. of its air defence capability before very long. We cannot simply allow those issues to be glossed over.

I am determined that the House should come to terms with the difficulty of many Conservative Members—I am speaking only for myself at the moment—who are loyal Conservative party and Government supporters, but who on this one issue find themselves in a dilemma. We want a credible defence force and a credible RAF which can meet the commitment that the public and our foreign policy requirements demand of it. It is no good having endless or open-ended commitments throughout the world but trying to meet them on the basis of diminished forces. I would would not mind having a small RAF if we had fewer commitments. But I cannot content myself with wide-ranging commitments with incompetent—I use the word neutrally—forces to deal with the problem. It affects not only our capability to deal with commitments but the morale of those who serve within the forces and those who wish to see the country prosper at home and abroad.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre said that national security is as vital as social security.

Mr. Mans: More so.

Mr. Garnier: We can agree or disagree on that, but it is an issue.

Despite the financial exigencies under which the Ministry of Defence has been labouring, nobody doubts for a moment that the Royal Air Force will continue, to the best of its abilities, to defend our shores and our interests overseas, but we must not send RAF personnel to perform tasks that they are no longer equipped to perform. Nothing that I have said is new, and, I dare say, nothing that I have said is original, but some verities demand restatement from time to time.

9.5 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I apologise for not being present for the opening of the debate. As some hon. Members will know, I had the joy of attending a public inquiry concerning the Boundary Commission.

Like other hon. Members, I pay tribute to the RAF. I have always found it to be a professional and expert service. If the Government had a fraction of the expertise of the RAF, the country would certainly be flying higher than it is at present and we would not have such appallingly low standards of government.

The JP233 weapon was used in the Gulf war to destroy Iraqi runways. It requires that aircraft fly in a straight line along the length of the runway, and at a constant height. That makes the aircraft highly vulnerable. The weapon has been implicated in the loss of Tornados in the Gulf war. The JP233 works by releasing hundreds of "bomblets" on the runway; some break up the runway surface and others make the job of repairing the runway harder. Although there is no doubt that the JP233 caused the Iraqis problems, it was not the only means of damaging runways. The United States air force attacked roughly the same number of runways as the RAF did and lost not a single aircraft on such missions.

The JP233 is a product of the RAF's obsession with low flying. I said as much in early-day motion 351 in the 1990-91 Session, for which I was greatly criticised. I said that the Tornados

> "have become easy prey for maching gun and anti-aircraft fire when operating at low levels"

and were the result of

> "the blundering blindspot of Conservative defence ministers obsessed with low flying."

Now, with the clarity of hindsight, I still believe that the facts bear me out.

The JP233 cost millions upon millions of pounds to develop and produce. Nobody other than the Saudis wants it. The Americans did not buy it. Instead, they purchased a French weapon, the Durandal. Anyone who follows United States military politics will appreciate that the purchase of a French weapon is rare. That shows what the Americans think of the JP233. The weapon costs millions of pounds to use because its very nature makes aircraft vulnerable. Each Tornado costs between £25 million and £35 million. The most expensive part of the JP233 is the lives of the pilots. Lives are too valuable to be measured in pounds. But many more lives are currently being affected by that dubious weapon. Some of the JP233's "bomblets" are anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cohen: I do not have time to give way; I want to continue. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

Anti-personnel mines, such as part of the JP233, are causing a world-wide blight on humanity, and I support a world-wide ban on their production. Two weeks ago, at Question Time, I asked the Department of Trade and Industry about curtailing the export of land mines. I pointed out that thousands of lives were being lost every week as a result of the use of those mines.

The Minister for Trade replied:

> "We have the capability to make land mines that are self-destructive and self-neutralising as part of a runway denial system, which we believe is a perfectly proper use of land mines in making equipment for defending our forces."—[*Official Report*, 12 January 1994; Vol. 235, c. 168.]

The sole reason given by the Government for not acting to ban the export of land mines and their design was that they were part of a runway denial system.

The Minister for Trade is a clever man—he insulted Mrs. Thatcher and got away with it because his timing was right—but he is not clever enough to have said that without prompting, and his prompting came from the Ministry of Defence, which uses that fall-back position to try to deflect the argument when people realise that the use of anti-personnel mines is immoral. It is outrageous that the Ministry of Defence is briefing the DTI to stop a ban on immoral weapons by defending a dangerous weapon. That is a major scandal for which the Minister and the MOD should answer.

The Government should not underestimate the depth of feeling in the House about land mines. Last Monday I tabled early-day motion 361, which calls on the Government immediately to prohibit the export of all anti-personnel mines from the United Kingdom and to ratify the inhumane weapons convention. I wrote that early-day motion at about 9.30 in the evening, and by the time the House rose it had attracted 118 signatures. The current total is 160. That shows the strength of feeling against land mines among Labour Members. I know that there are Conservative Members who feel the same. Bill Deedes—hardly a member of the Labour party—has written a number of articles in Conservative newspapers exposing the land mines policy.

The JP233 should be scrapped immediately and there should be a worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines.

9.12 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): We have had a wide-ranging debate, covering the changing international scene, key constituency issues of importance to hon. Members, particularly weapons systems, and, of course, basic procurement policies—a matter for the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who is to respond to the debate.

I do not know whether I could go as far as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) who proposes that we seek a consensus on defence outside the House and then place it before the parties. It has been apparent during the debate, however, that there are some areas of agreement. Hon. Members have shown a willingness throughout the debate to praise the skills, dedication and commitment of our RAF personnel—although such sentiments from the Government have to be watched carefully because they are often the prelude to cuts. We fear the Government even when they bring praise.

It is significant that, so soon after the talk of turning swords into ploughshares and of the peace dividend, every type of RAF aircraft should be in operation somewhere in the world: we have Harriers over north Iraq; Tornados over south Iraq; Jaguars, Tornados and E3 AWACS on patrol over Bosnia; Nimrods monitoring the Gulf and the Adriatic; and old war horses being used in transport and supply. As the hon. Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said, the commitments collide with Treasury pressures for further reductions and there is already the fear of overstretch.

The second area of consensus that emerged during the debate was the unpredictability of the international scene as the old certainties of the cold war disappear. The pace of change is perhaps best illustrated by reference to our last three debates on the RAF. In February 1990, Mr. Alan Clark—we have all read his diaries on the subject—talked of the diminution of the threat. That was before "Options for Change" and President Gorbachev was still in office in what was then the Soviet Union.

The last but one RAF debate was in May 1991. The Gulf war was over. The Warsaw treaty organisation no longer existed. By that time, President Gorbachev was no longer in office. In January last year, the debate was effectively and understandably hijacked by the events in the Gulf.

Thus the speed of change is breathtaking. The international context is moving beneath us. How can one then make decisions which are credible in the light of the point made by several hon. Members about the long research and development periods and the long period during which the planes are eventually expected to see service? That is the sort of problem that we have with the Hercules replacement, to which I shall refer shortly. I thought that that point was well made by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell).

There are problems of choices, as stated by Philip Sabin in the recent book "British Defence Choices for the 21st Century", of readiness as against reconstitution, independence as against integration, flexibility as against specialisation, mobility as against punch and quality as against quantity. The certainties which led to a certain force structure, which led to certain deployments and a certain mix of aircraft, no longer exist.

As for the threat, the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South and others said how real and relevant was the Zhirinovsky threat. Clearly there will be a greater nationalism in Russian defence and foreign policy. The Russian economy has crumbled to such an extent, the likely obsession with internal problems is such and the lead times and alert times are so much greater that at least we can step back a little from the threat as perceived in the 1980s, although, as several colleagues have said, it would be prudent to watch this space carefully.

Obviously we are now in the middle of a period of great choice. The Royal Air Force is highly relevant to that, with the need for greater flexibility and mobility. NATO itself is in a period of profound transformation, as was exemplified by the communiqué from the January summit. Increasingly, our role will be a United Nations role—humanitarian, disaster relief and so on.

On the domestic side, we in the Opposition, together with a number of major voices on the defence side, have called for a strategic defence review rather than ad hoc cuts forced by the Treasury. That is one of the key differences between the Government and the Opposition positions. Why are the Government so adamantly against the R word? Why do they feel that a review must be avoided, in their parlance, at all costs?

On the international side, the recent international changes have particular relevance to the size and nature of the Royal Air Force. The perceived role of defending the island against Soviet bombers is no longer, or hardly, a relevant consideration in current circumstances. Yet we need to maintain our reputation for excellence and be perhaps even more ready to see all our policies in an alliance context. What was most clear in the NATO summit in Brussels was the smokescreen, if one will, of transition from an Atlantic to a European position, with again and again the leitmotiv "the European pillar". We shall have to adjust to that.

As President Clinton said in Brussels:

> "We must build a new security for Europe. The old security was based on the defence of one bloc against another bloc. The new security must be found in Europe's integration. An integration of security forces, of market economies, of national democracies".

The message for us in Europe is clear. Indeed, it has already been accepted by the French, whose anticipated White Paper—the first for 20 years—states that the defence of France's vital interests can be envisaged with Britain and Germany. Perhaps this sea change was the motive for yesterday's meeting between the Secretary of State and his French and German counterparts, which was initiated by

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the right hon. and learned Gentleman. However, basic questions remain. Will the French, in their procurement policy, be as nationalistic as they have been in the past? What is the relevance, in terms of co-operation, for the RAF and our other services?

The Minister replying to this debate will deal specifically with procurement policies. Will our procurement policies be seen increasingly in a European framework? Is the new spirit of co-operation relevant to decisions such as that concerning the United Kingdom's Hercules replacement programme? Clearly the C130Ks, which were bought in 1967, are coming to the end of their life, with an increasing utilisation rate. Ours is one of the oldest Hercules fleets in the world, with outdated technology.

Are we now on target for the decision on replacement or refurbishment? Presumably the tender documents will be issued in the very near future. It is to be hoped that if the contract goes as a number of hon. Members have suggested, the first orders will be placed by the end of the year.

Lockheed has a proven track record. There will be a gap—financially, in terms of the Government's procurement programme, and industrially—before the Eurofighter 2000 comes on stream. The peak years will be around the turn of the century. Hence the relevance in this context. But will our decision to give the first tranche of, say, 30 aircraft to Lockheed pre-empt a decision on the later tranche and force out the proposed European rival—the future large aircraft programme, the FLA? I concede that this is not a flying aircraft; it is only on the drawing board and will not fly until about 2004.

What are the options? Could the Ministry of Defence charter civilian transport planes for routine tasks? Much spare capacity is now available. What are the prospects for leasing? This is a matter that the Secretary of State mentioned to the Select Committee on Defence in December last year. Would leasing be simply a financial device once the basic decision about refurbishment or purchase of new aircraft had been made?

What can the Minister say about the Eurofighter 2000? My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South has already mentioned the problem of the reduction in defence expenditure and the question mark over whether the Ministry will be able to meet the commitment figure of 250. The aircraft is already behind schedule. If other countries reduce their purchases as a result of their own financial pressures, that will only increase the unit costs and boost our procurement costs when the European fighter aircraft, because of its size, is already shouldering out much other potential procurement over the relevant period.

We have heard mention of the EH101 support helicopter and of the importance to Westland of a speedy decision to end the long saga of delay. When is it likely that a decision on attack helicopters will be made? The absence of a United Kingdom attack helicopter capability was very noticeable during the Gulf conflict.

I will not rehearse the well-judged comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) about the current low morale within the RAF. As the hon. Member for Tayside, North said, there is a huge sapping of morale. That is relevant to our questions about the remarks of the Chief of Air Staff. Why did he feel the need to intervene as he did? Did he feel that his access to the Secretary of State was insufficient? He obviously made his point, because he had to go on his knees to apologise thereafter. He spoke of a "disreputable campaign" and he pointed the finger at the Treasury. That is why he was specifically asked to apologise to the Treasury. There was great rejoicing among RAF personnel throughout the country and the world that he had spoken up on their behalf. He said what they wanted to say, but felt unable to say.

Other reasons for loss of morale include the proposal that the RAF should lose its sub-strategic nuclear role to Trident. Morale has also suffered because of the extent of the cuts to which the RAF has been subject, which have been spelt out by hon. Members.

The plea from the Air Chief Marshal to the Government was quite clear: stop undermining the services, because there are few enough institutions in the country of which we can be justifiably proud.

The quality of life of our service personnel and their families—this is within the competence of the Minister—is also relevant to morale. Mr. Alan Clark told the House in February 1990:

> "we are intending to improve the entire stock of married quarters and single-service living accommodation in the next 10 years."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1990; Vol. 168, c. 291.]

Now the plan is to sell not just the family silver, but all the housing as well, in 1995-96, to a private sector housing trust. Thus assets will be sold off and thereafter counted as revenue. It represents a once-and-for-all increase in the resources of the MOD.

What progress has been made in planning that major sell-off, which will create the largest housing association in the country? Much of the property is probably unsaleable or in remote areas. Who will carry out the valuations? The figures that I have seen reveal that working assumptions relate to 70,000 properties, to be sold at £7,000 each. That means that roughly £500 million must be raised from City syndicates. Have the Government worked out the full implications of that by discussing it with the Department of the Environment, the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office, as appropriate?

The fact that this massive sell-off of property was not mentioned in 1990, in the afterglow of Thatcherism, suggests that it is a relatively recent decision which has been forced upon the MOD by the Treasury as a revenue-raising operation.

Many implications of the sale may not have been worked out yet. For example, how will it affect local housing programmes? What about tenant participation? Formidable management problems will arise because of the size of the proposed housing trust. What about the sale of properties to service men? Will they have the normal right-to-buy facility? Will priority be given to local housing authorities or housing associations if the stock is not needed by the MOD? The way in which the sale has been introduced into the argument suggests that not only is it a fairly recent decision but one whose implications have not been fully thought through.

The market testing of support services is another source of concern, because of the threat to jobs. I accept that it is a case of horses for courses, because there are examples where the case for that testing can be properly made, if not welcomed. The fear is that ideological zeal, spelt out so well by the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) in relation to his own constituency, will push the process of market testing further and faster than is warranted, particularly in relation to the RAF's role in servicing its own aircraft. There is already RAF resentment, particularly about the civilian contractors servicing Tornados in Saudi Arabia. The RAF has cancelled a contract with Airwork, saying that it had caused damage

"of a very serious nature"

to the Tornados during modification.

Only one third of the Ministry of Defence personnel questioned about cleaning contracts by the National Audit Office considered that the Government were getting value for money. My advice to the Government, therefore, is that they should be careful and not be pushed headlong, as if they were still enthralled by a type of Thatcherdom, into ways that were spelt out by the hon. Member for Gloucester which would have adverse effects, examples of which have been pointed out.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South said, diversification is another subject about which there is a profound difference of principle between the Government and the Opposition. The Opposition recognise the strategic role of the defence industries. There is a key interface between the defence industries and employment. For example, as recently as Tuesday this week British Aerospace announced 421 job losses at Chorley. The United States President has promised $500 million dollars in the summer to help towards conversion of the US defence industries. The US has a defence conversion commission.

Because of the size of the rundown—about £30 billion to be cut from our defence budget over the decade—there is a potential threat to perhaps 25 per cent. of the United Kingdom engineering industry. The free market has little role in defence purchases, which depend on Government contracts. There is a clear national interest, therefore, in working out the implications for regions, industries, and particular skills arising directly from the effects of the cold war and the substantial reduction in the proportion of the gross domestic product given to defence.

All we had from the Secretary of State was, "We leave these matters to market forces". The Government appear to be accepting no responsibility for assisting in the process of conversion. There have been signs of movement from pure Thatcherism in other policies, such as the recent decision on the financing of the channel tunnel link, but there is no such sign in the Government's unwillingness to intervene in diversification. They do not appear even to recognise the problem. Their do-nothing stance is in contrast to that of a number of our allies and is failing the nation.

The Labour party is fully convinced of the case for defence diversification, and the agency that we propose is promoted by industry, the trade unions and local authorities. It is absurd that the Government should fold their arms when faced with a national problem of such magnitude.

9.33 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): This has been a valuable and interesting debate and, having listened to all 16 speeches made since 4 o'clock this afternoon, it is good to be able to begin this winding-up speech by saying that the whole House has been genuinely united in the tributes that have been paid to the professionalism, dedication and achievements of the RAF. Even the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), who made a carping, whingeing and sneering speech, redeemed himself for a few seconds by paying tribute to the service. I agree with his statement that 1993 was a good year for the RAF.

Not since the 1960s has the RAF been actively engaged in more concurrent operational deployments than today. I am glad to add the Government's tribute to the Royal Air Force and to express our appreciation to its service men and women, from the Chief of the Air Staff downwards, for the excellence of their achievements, often in carrying out missions of considerable risk and danger in places such as Iraq and Bosnia. The whole House and the country are grateful to them for their superb job.

In the time that is available, I hope to respond to as many as possible of the issues raised by hon. Members. Before dealing with individual speeches, it is appropriate to tackle the two or three major procurement issues that have run through the debate. I shall refer in particular to the Eurofighter 2000 and the Hercules replacement and, if I have time, I shall refer to support helicopters.

Eurofighter 2000, formerly known as the European fighter aircraft, is the cornerstone of the RAF's future capability and is one of the Government's major procurement projects. The House is aware that in 1992 and 1993 there were changes to the Eurofighter 2000 programme. In 1992, there was a great deal of uncertainty about its continuation as a four-nation project. There was much speculation about Germany's willingness to continue and there was even speculation about the imminent demise of the project.

Throughout that period, the Government's view remained constant—that there is a clear and continuing need for an aircraft of Eurofighter 2000's capabilities, both for the defence of the United Kingdom and to meet the RAF's commitments in other theatres. That view enjoyed support in all parts of the House and was also supported by industry and trade unions throughout the United Kingdom. I am grateful for that all-round support for a project which is vital to the future of the RAF.

Over the past year, the process of reorienting the Eurofighter programme has moved on and good progress has been made. We have reacted to the significant changes in the international security environment that have taken place since development of the Eurofighter 2000 began in 1988. In the light of the changes in eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, chiefs of staff of the four partner nations were invited in December 1992 to review the operational requirement.

That work was carried forward in 1993, and some minor relaxations in the operational requirement have been identified and incorporated in the revised European staff requirement which the four chiefs of air staff signed last week. For example, we have slightly relaxed the requirement to operate on damaged runways, although the aircraft will still be capable of operating to NATO standards. We have also agreed to some relaxation in the engine thrust requirements. The revised requirement recognises the continuing need for a fighter aircraft for the RAF with Eurofighter's capabilities.

It was also necessary to reorientate the time scales for the Eurofighter 2000 programme to reflect the budgetary difficulties of the four partner nations. That has led to a revision of the first delivery dates of production aircraft about which the hon. Member for Carlisle asked. It is now

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planned that the United Kingdom and Italy will receive their first aircraft in the year 2000. Spain and Germany will receive their first aircraft in the year 2002.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) asked about the cost of each aircraft. Based on our planned off-take of 250 aircraft, the unit production cost of Eurofighter 2000 is today estimated at some £33 million.

Advances continue to be made on the technical front, but to expect progress on a project as complex as the Eurofighter without any technical difficulties would be unreasonable. Over the past year, there have been well-publicised problems with the flight control system. That is the heart of the aircraft which allows this highly agile and, therefore, potentially unstable aircraft to remain stable in the air.

Eurofighter 2000 has not been alone in experiencing such difficulties. Similar problems have beset the Swedish Gripen and the American F22 programmes. It was with great sadness and horror that we heard of the disasters involving the Gripen and the F22 last year, which we believe were largely due to immature flight control software.

In such circumstances, although the delay to the first flight of the Eurofighter is disappointing, it is understandable. Therefore, it was unfair of the hon. Member for Carlisle to criticise it so much. Industry is rightly being cautious and is double checking the software. Industry's work in the area is now in its final stages and I am pleased to announce that the flight control system is undergoing final testing prior to clearance for the aircraft's first flight.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend has just made an important announcement to the House confirming reports that have been appearing in the technical press for some time. What estimate has he made of the effect of the delays on the likely export potential of the aeroplane, as the JS39 Gripen and the Rafale will have been in the marketplace for some time before the Eurofighter 2000 comes into service with the Italian air force and the Royal Air Force? Is it expected that the prototype Eurofighter 2000 will be flying at Farnborough?

Mr. Aitken: If the first flight will be in April, it will certainly be possible for the prototype to be flying at Farnborough later this year.

We have always believed that the Eurofighter 2000 has considerable export potential, and none of the delays has seriously adversely affected those prospects.

More generally, there is no sign of any major design problem and the delays that have occurred should not be of great significance in the overall programme. The first delivery of production aircraft to the RAF is still forecast for the year 2000.

I move on to the Hercules replacement, in the context of future air transport requirements. In order to overcome increasing problems with the availability and maintainability of the Hercules, we have been giving active consideration to how we can replace or refurbish up to half —that is some 30—of our Hercules C130K fleet.

We let a contract last year to define the refurbishment work including an austere refurbishment. The only new aircraft available in competition with the refurbishment in the necessary time scale are the Lockheed C130H and C130J.

I can announce tonight that an invitation to tender has been handed over to Lockheed executives in the United Kingdom this afternoon. It will enable us to compare on a life-cycle basis the costs of refurbishment and those of buying new aircraft. We are also looking at the possibility of leasing transport aircraft. We hope to be in a position to take a decision later this year.

I am well aware of the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), in whose constituency I visited the factory of Dowty and saw the excellent propellers. Centrax is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). There are several British companies—18 to be precise—in the C130J industrial group that hope to benefit from the order, if it is placed.

Replacement of the second tranche of the fleet will be considered later in the light of future requirements for large aircraft. By then, the number of new-buy options should have opened up to include the European future large aircraft which has strong supporters in the House and the country, and others, such as the McDonnell C17.

Most other aircraft are somewhat larger than the Hercules, so both operational mix and cost factors will need to be taken into account.

The House will know that the Government withdrew from the future large aircraft project in 1989. It has often been suggested since then that we should rejoin, but we feel that adequate technology for transport aircraft already exists without the need for Government funding of further development and that it would be difficult for us to maintain an open competitive stance if we were seen to be supporting one particular option.

It was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) that we should wait for production of the future large aircraft before updating the current Hercules fleet, but the pressing availability and maintainability problems will not allow us to do that. That is why we have taken the decision to go forward in the way we have.

Mr. Mans: I was suggesting that we should wait not until the aircraft was produced, but until the beginning of next year, when the full feasibility study on the aircraft is complete and a clearer decision can be taken on the three options that I mentioned in my speech.

Mr. Aitken: I am glad that my hon. Friend has made clear by that intervention what a paper-only stage the future large aircraft has reached. Sure, we will look at the feasibility study when it appears, but this is pie that is not even near the sky at the moment. Therefore, I cannot be too sanguine for its chances for the first tranche of our transport fleet replacement.

I shall now deal with various points raised by hon. Members.

Mr. Ainger: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Aitken: I must go steadily on. I will refer to the hon. Gentleman's speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) spoke eloquently of the debt that we owe to the Royal Air Force nationally, and locally in his constituency. I am able to give him some of the reassurance that he sought about the closure of RAF Stanmore Park. I can assure him that the disposal of the site will be done in a way that will try to preserve various important features such as tree preservation. I have noted his points about the historic site of Bentley Priory and will write to him about those matters in due course.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East made a characteristically thoughtful speech. I have covered some of his points already. He asked about the low-level, laser-guided bomb. The position there is that invitations to tender were issued in May 1993. We now have a short list of two leading contenders: one in the United Kingdom, GEC Marconi Dynamics; and one in the United States, Texas Instruments. Those tenders are currently being considered. Our aim is to complete the selection process in time to place a contract by April 1994.

The hon. and learned Gentleman asked, in a rather philosophical way, what the future role of the Royal Air Force would be, and made some good points about the size of our presence in Germany. Earlier in his speech, he answered his own question by pointing out that there was no shortage of sophisticated combat aircraft falling into the hands of troublesome and sometimes hostile nation states all over the world. Even though some of the domestic defence role may be diminishing, there is still a key overseas role in the world.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on his many years of service in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. I even join him in his heartfelt tribute to Mrs. Walker, who has put up with his weekend absences all this time. He was right to draw our attention to the period of great uncertainty that we face, and to emphasise that the RAF requires a period of stability in it. That theme was touched on by several hon. Members. The defence costs study—"Front Line First"—which we are now undergoing unfortunately means that there will be some three more months of uncertainty. After that, I hope that one will be able to answer favourably the good point that he made.

The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) raised a long point about RAF search-and-rescue helicopters. I heard him with more than a passing touch of sympathy as a constituency Member of Parliament, as RAF Manston in my constituency has had many of the same problems. I know how high emotions can run on these issues. These matters have been fully considered and debated. I refer particularly to the very good Adjournment debate of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) about the Dover strait. Whether it is the Welsh coast or the English channel, the response times are considered adequate by Her Majesty's Coastguard and the DTI. I shall draw the hon. Member's comments to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

Mr. Ainger: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Aitken: I am sorry, but I must move on. I will give way later if I can.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester drew our attention to his concern about the proposals for RAF Quedgeley and the changes in support arrangements there. He wants access to some of our figures. My understanding is that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Armed Forces has undertaken to provide certain financial information within the bounds of confidentiality. I shall certainly draw his attention to the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester has raised in the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) made a thoughtful speech, which was characteristic of him, with his expertise on RAF matters. I was much taken with his suggestion, with which I agree, that we must use the defence cost study to look fundamentally—not just from a savings only point of view—at the future of the Royal Air Force. He made a good many rather ingenious suggestions for restructuring, not only for savings, but other reasons. I am very much in sympathy with the theme that he has struck.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) said that the French defence budget has increased. I am sure that we all take note of that. He, too, made the compelling case for the need of the service to have more stability and more certainty. I hope that this chapter of frequent change will come to an end at the end of the defence costs study.

I accept my hon. Friend's point that the levels of management in the RAF are somewhat excessive. I shall not today go into whether we should abolish any particular ranks, but I am sympathetic to his view that the procurement executive might need to be reduced in size and its decision and evaluation processes accelerated. That is a thought which we could well take further in the defence costs study debate.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) for reminding us how he and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre championed the cause of Eurofighter 2000, or the European fighter aircraft as it was then known, among German parliamentarians. We owe both of them a debt of gratitude for that.

We are always glad to hear the hon. Gentleman's voice in favour of more resources for defence, but it is rather like a performance of "Robinson Crusoe" because he is stranded on his desert island articulating his pro-defence and more spending views among a sea of cutters and slashers who want to reduce our defence budget by more than a third. However, long may he survive and flourish.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) drew our attention to paragraphs 7.41 to 7.43 of the White Paper and asked whether there could be flexibility up as well as down in the figures that he quoted. The answer is yes, there can be and there might need to be if there are strange political developments in Russia of the kind that some people have forecast and might even happen if the Zhirinovsky group were to come to power.

My hon. Friend then argued that the great questions of defence and foreign policy that arise from the new and somewhat unstable situation that exists in the aftermath of the ending of the cold war need to be more carefully considered. He is right.

What is the right percentage of GDP that we should be spending on defence and how much of the defence budget should we be spending on the equipment budget? The Government think that we have the answers to these questions right, and that about 40 per cent. is the right figure for the equipment budget. However, we consider those matters continuously in relation to events.

Winston Churchill, once being accused of inconsistency, said, "No, certainly not. My thoughts are an harmonious process in relation to current events." So should any defence planners thoughts be. If there are political changes in Russia or anywhere else, we must take them into account in such matters as the equipment budget.

The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) produced his latest bogey, the JP233 bomb. He is following the media crowd in focusing attention on it. The criticism among the

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media critics is that that weapon should not be used, as it contains an anti-personnel element. But I should point out that that element self-destructs. It is not used indiscriminately and is, therefore, perfectly consistent with our support for the United Nations resolutions and the weaponry convention.

The JP233 aircraft denial weapon was used successfully in the Gulf conflict during the early stages of the air campaign and it played a part in the rapid success of the overall allies campaign against the Iraqi air force. Clearly, the RAF must select the most appropriate weapon for any given mission and the JP233 is uniquely suited to cratering runways and taxiways, preventing enemy aircraft from taking off. In the Gulf war, after only four days, air supremacy was achieved. Clearly that was a key factor in minimising allied casualties and in bringing the conflict to a speedy end.

It should be stressed that the JP233 was a strictly military weapon, used exclusively against Iraqi military air bases. Clearly, as with any weapon system, or most weapon systems, there is an anti-personnel element in the JP233, but that must be set against the fact that Iraq was prevented from mounting effective air operations during most of the war.

Moreover, as I said, the anti-personnel element of the JP233 has a self-destructing and self-neutralising system, making its use perfectly proper and posing no threat to the civilian population when used against military targets. Our current stringent controls on the export of defence equipment are sufficient to prevent the sale of such weapons to countries that might conceivably use them irresponsibly.

I welcome the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) to his new responsibilities. He made some thoughtful comments about Europe's new security architecture following the NATO summit, and, in that context, asked whether our procurement policies would be set in a European framework. That sounded a little Europhile for my taste; but we are not at all Euro-sceptical about procurement issues in the Ministry of Defence, as our championship of the Eurofighter makes clear. Moreover, I have excellent political and personal relations with the German State Secretary for Defence.

That is a good example of a European defence project that is working well. Another is Project Horizon—the Anglo-French-Italian frigate project. The hon. Gentleman, however, seemed to suggest that we should automatically put a European spin on all procurement. Under the treaty of Rome, defence equipment buying is not covered by any Brussels rules—thank heavens. I think that we shall continue our present sensible approach, which is to embark on European collaboration when it is right to do so.

The hon. Member for Carlisle began by mentioning——

Mr. Martlew: Helicopters?

Mr. Aitken: I fear that I shall have no time to deal with helicopters. In any case, we have really said it all already: we have announced our plans for helicopters. We are now engaged in a NAPNOC negotiation with both Westland and Boeing in regard to, respectively, the EH101 and the Chinook. Obviously, much depends on price and on further evaluation. I share some of the frustration that hon. Members have expressed, but we are not backsliding in the way that some have described.

Mr. Donald Anderson: What about attack helicopters?

Mr. Aitken: That is an Army project; we are debating the RAF. It seems that Opposition Members are keen to stop me from having a go at them.

The hon. Member for Carlisle began his speech with a quote from Dickens. The character in Dickens of whom he most reminds me is Mr. Micawber, who was always waiting for something to turn up. I was longing for something to turn up in the hon. Gentleman's speech—an idea, a correct fact, even a policy. I have been longing to know what Labour's defence policy is, but it is a well-kept secret: Labour Members do not make policy statements. Indeed, they do not make many speeches—although they occasionally ask questions, which give us a clue about the way in which their minds are tentatively working.

An interesting signal was given this week when a Labour Member asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State a telling parliamentary question. The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) asked on how many occasions the Ministry of Defence purchased soft-pornography magazines for distribution to members of the armed forces. I know that my official title is "Minister of State for Defence Procurement", but I must disappoint the Labour party: we certainly do not spend taxpayers' money from the defence budget on porn magazines.

I was, however, so stimulated by the hon. Gentleman's question that I thought I might make an exception to that policy. I am thinking of distributing a certain magazine to our armed forces—and, indeed, to the whole electorate, if I can find the money. It is not quite a soft-porn magazine, although it has made one or two strange lurches in that direction; but I would certainly call it a political porn magazine. I refer to *New Statesman and Society,* whose 12 November issue carried a long interview with the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark).

I read the piece—in which the hon. Gentleman gave his views on Labour's defence policy—with a quickening pulse, searching early for the hard core of that policy. When I reached the point where the hard core should have been, lo and behold! It had been airbrushed out. Just listen to this:

> "Fifteen months into his job as Labour Defence Spokesperson, David Clark gets annoyed at the suggestion that he has been keeping a low profile."

The interview goes on to deal with defence spending, which—surprise, surprise—the hon. Gentleman is in favour of reducing. Indeed, he has to be: composite motion No. 49 commits Labour to reducing defence spending by a third. The party is ready to wipe out all our spending on one of the three services. The interviewer then presses him for details, and this is where the airbrush comes into play. The article states:

> "Clark is vague however as to where the cuts should fall . . . he says, 'Just now, I simply don't know.'"

Those six words are the beginning and the end—the alpha and the omega—of Labour's defence policy. The clarion call—

> "Just now, I simply don't know"—

has been heard loud and clear from the Opposition Front Bench tonight and, indeed, has been evident in the Labour party's vacuous statements for many months.

By contrast, the Government know that we are proud of the Royal Air Force and we know what our policies are for its future. We believe that our air power is a vital ingredient in Britain's defence which will continue——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Textile Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

10 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I am extremely grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for selecting this topic for debate because it shows how important it is to have as Speaker a daughter of Dewsbury. You well understand the textile industry and its problems.

I am pleased to see one or two of my hon. Friends here tonight and I am grateful for their support and for that of the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). I am pleased to see here my hon. Friends the Members for Keighley (Mr. Waller) and for Harborough (Mr Garnier). My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) had hoped to be here and is sorry that she cannot be.

The textile industry is still very important and wool textiles in particular dominate the scene in west Yorkshire. The 1991 census revealed that nearly 7,000 people are employed in textiles in the Huddersfield travel-to-work area and that approximately 2,500 people work in textiles in my constituency of Colne Valley. In the country as a whole, the clothing and textile industries provide about 400,000 jobs. The future of the industry is, therefore, of enormous importance to us all.

Let me make it clear from the outset that I am absolutely delighted that it has been possible to reach a general agreement on tariffs and trade. People on both sides of the political divide are increasingly coming to appreciate the benefits of free trade, not only in this country and in the European Community but across the world. GATT has made and will continue to make an important contribution to the ending of barriers to trade and I am pleased that, after a number of hiccups and disagreements, an agreement was possible.

As Britain is a major exporting nation, the deal will be good for British industry and British jobs. However, I have to report that the textile industry is not happy about the way in which GATT will affect it. As part of the agreement, the multi-fibre arrangement is to be phased out over 10 years. The industry is relatively sanguine about the fact that the MFA, which currently provides some protection against foreign imports, is to go. In return, however, the industry had hoped and expected a significant increase in market access in other countries. Sadly, that does not appear to have happened.

The industry is extremely happy with the strengthened rules on the protection of intellectual property and with the new anti-dumping regulations. Its disappointment relates to GATT's failure to result in significant reductions in the tariffs being levied on British exports to a number of countries. One of the problems is that we have not yet received full details of the agreement; perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will be able to fill in some of the gaps in our information. However, one thing is obvious, and that is that the high tariffs remain in place in many countries.

I welcome the gradual reduction in the American tariff of 36 per cent. on wool cloth, which will be reduced to 25 per cent. over 10 years, but that is a fairly slow reduction, which does not go far enough when compared with the

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tariffs charged by European Community countries of 3·8 per cent. on yarn and 13 per cent. on woollen and worsted cloth.

As far as we know, the tariff of 85 per cent. in India will remain. Similarly, Pakistan levies 80 per cent. on wool cloth from the United Kingdom with an additional 15 per cent. import tax and an extra 15 per cent. sales tax on top of that. Indonesia levies 25 per cent. on cloth from the United Kingdom and up to 40 per cent. on other textile products. Australia levies 29 per cent. duty on imported cloth, New Zealand 22 per cent.—to be fair, to be reduced to 20 per cent. by July 1996—and South Africa levies duty of 32 per cent. on worsted cloth and 45 per cent. on woollen cloth.

I mention those specific countries because they all represent excellent potential markets for British textiles. In reality, however, British sales are dramatically lower than they might be because of the high prices caused by those high tariffs. India, for example, has a burgeoning middle class of more than 200 million people, many of whom would be only too happy to buy high quality woollen and worsted cloth made in Huddersfield. The absurdly high tariffs, however, make it extremely difficult for British exporters to all those countries.

Furthermore, we have the ridiculous situation that a great deal of Indian yarn comes into the United Kingdom, where only 3·8 per cent. duty is payable or, if it has a general systems preference certificate, it is free of duty. That yarn is then made up into cloth in this country. That cloth could be sold to India. If it were sold to India it would incur a duty of 85 per cent., but the sale of that cloth back to India is conditional on an undertaking to guarantee 100 per cent. re-export. In other words, once the cloth has been made up the Indians are saying that it has to be re-exported out of India. The result of all that is that Britain exports very few textiles items to India. That is unacceptable.

There is no doubt that the GATT round provided the best opportunity to tackle the problem of those high tariffs. I am extremely disappointed that the European Community negotiators failed to secure significant reductions. However, all is not lost. I understand that the European Community is to undertake bilateral negotiations during the next few weeks with the countries that I have mentioned and I strongly urge the European Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan, to push for massive tariff reductions in those countries.

I very much hope that my hon. Friend will draw the attention of Commissioner Brittan to this debate and make it crystal clear to him that more progress is required. I notice on today's Order Paper that the question to the Trade and Industry Ministers that I have tabled is due to be answered in two weeks' time. I think that it is No. 6, so I hope that my hon. Friend will then be able to report some progress.

I do not believe that we should take lying down a refusal by those countries to reduce their tariffs. If no progress is made, the European Community should consider what steps can be taken, in spite of an outside-of-GATT agreement. There is a case for refusing to reduce any of the EC's tariffs for those recalcitrant countries. In addition, some of the emerging third world countries enjoy the benefits of the European Community's tariff preference scheme, where no duty is payable, and there is a strong case for saying that that should be withdrawn from the countries which refuse to reduce their tariffs.

Free trade benefits producers and consumers alike. GATT has given a massive boost to free trade in the world but, sadly, not to free and fair trade in textiles. While we have agreed to phase out——

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) *rose*——

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend wish to intervene?

Mr. Garnier I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way during his important and illuminating speech, although I would have waited until he had finished his sentence.

My hon. Friend will appreciate that in my constituency of Harborough a fair percentage of the working population is engaged in the textile, hosiery and knitwear industries. Will he accept from me that, despite some disappointment with the result of the recent GATT round, there is none the less a great sense of optimism in the domestic textile industry? Many people are finding new markets, both within the United Kingdom and externally. Perhaps significantly, unemployment in my constituency is below 2,000. I trust that my hon. Friend will agree that we should not paint to gloomy a picture, because he has as much of an interest as I have in increasing British exports of textiles.

Mr. Riddick I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and delighted to learn of the success of the textile industry in his constituency. I can report to him that several companies selling wool textile items in my part of the world are doing extremely well. However, Adjournment debates provide an opportunity to encourage Ministers to get the best possible deal for British companies and British industry in general —and, of course, that is the purpose of tonight's debate.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South) I support what the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) has been saying about the GATT arrangements, especially the reservations that he has expressed. I was at the same meeting of the Confederation of British Wool Textiles, and employers there clearly expressed strong difficulties with, and reservations about, the arrangements reached so far for textiles, exactly as the hon. Gentleman has been describing.

Mr. Riddick: It grieves me somewhat to say this, but I agree with the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). We do not often agree, but I am delighted that we can agree tonight. Yes, we were at the meeting together, and much concern was expressed by employers in the British wool textile industry. That is why we are having the debate. Without that briefing during the Christmas recess, I would not have realised how disappointed employers were with the GATT deal. The debate is an excellent opportunity to flag up some of the problems that have arisen and to ask the Government, and in particular my hon. Friend the Minister, what we can do about it. Can we, even at this late stage, encourage the countries concerned to reduce their tariffs? That is what we should aim to do.

As I have said, GATT is most important, and will give world trade a massive boost, so it is disappointing that the textile industry has not been able to give it a wider welcome. While we have agreed to phase out the multi-fibre arrangement over 10 years, many potential markets are protected by the punitive levels of tariff imposed by their own Governments, as I have tried to illustrate.

I much deplore that, and I hope that in the short time still available for negotiations between the European Community and those countries, progress can be made to create more of a level playing field. I am confident that where there are open markets and fair trade, the British textile industry, especially the wool industry, is as capable as any other industry in this country of creating new markets and generating new business, because it is dealing in quality products at competitive prices.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade for meeting representatives of the British wool textile industry 10 days ago, along with members of the all-party wool textile group, and I am grateful to him for being here tonight. I look forward to hearing his response to what I have said.

10.13 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) has put a robust case and his arguments were forceful. The industry on whose behalf he spoke has a remarkable record. He referred to the large number of people, some 400,000, employed in the industry. That is only half the number employed in the industry 10 to 12 years ago. Things have moved on since then and the industry has become very effective and productive.

In the interests of free trade, the industry has always been prepared to see the phasing out of the multi-fibre arrangement. However, it has always stressed that that must be accompanied by strengthened rules and disciplines in GATT. It is fair to say that there is serious disappointment that the rules so far announced are not sufficiently strong. We await further announcements about the disciplines which will be brought to bear to ensure that the rules are enforced. Too often in the past there has been a failure in that respect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley was right to draw attention to the lack of market access which so far appears to have emerged from the Uruguay round and to the fact that, in too many of the burgeoning markets of the world where there is a rising middle class with considerable buying power, our exporters face insuperable barriers and enormous tariffs which are almost impossible to overcome. Even with regard to the United States, over a 10-year period, the reduction in tariffs will be gradual and inadequate.

In the further GATT negotiations which are bound to take place, I hope that a robust line will be taken by the Commissioner and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues will press to ensure that the agreements which have been reached are fully enforced and that the disciplines are strengthened. At the end of the 10-year period, I hope that we will not say that the agreement reached this year was a failure in terms of its ability to ensure that free trade could operate in the interests of textiles and clothing in this country.

10.16 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): The importance of this debate can be seen by the number of hon. Members in the Chamber. My hon. Friends and Opposition Members will appreciate that, having been responsible for the textile and garment industry in Northern Ireland for several years, I have it very much as part of my heart and soul, as they do when it comes to discussing the wool and worsted industry in Yorkshire which is one of this country's great industries.

Although I accept that GATT overall is of enormous benefit to the industry or our country and that the safeguarding and anti-dumping regulations in the new agreement are significant improvements on what went before, I must accept that there are considerable disappointments in the agreement with regard to the textile and garment industry.

As for the multi-fibre arrangement, those of us who were involved at the time will be aware that orginally we were not considering a 10-year phase-out; we were considering a five-year phase-out. The fact that we have achieved a 10-year phase-out is a benefit to the industry as a whole.

Nevertheless, I accept that we have not achieved everything that we would have wished to achieve in the present GATT. We fought hard in Geneva, right up to the last minute, to force the Indians, Pakistanis and Indonesians to allow market access for our textiles and clothing at a maximum of a 35 per cent. tariff. We involved the Commission, the United States and Peter Sutherland, the head of the GATT negotiating team, in negotiations right up to the very last second. Unfortunately, we felt that the whole deal could have unravelled if we pushed the point, but at that meeting we received a commitment from the Pakistanis, the Indians and the Indonesians to continue negotiating.

I can tell my hon. Friend, even though his question will be answered in two weeks, that, although 15 February is the final date for schedules to GATT to be approved, the Commission has assured me that it is determined to continue arguing until Ministers have to sign the final Act in April. I assure the House that the strongest pressure will be brought to bear on those countries. I have asked my senior officials to meet representatives of the textile industry next week to discuss with them the details of exactly what we intend that pressure to be.

Unfortunately, this is not the only disappointing news. As hon. Members know, in July last year, at the Tokyo summit we agreed a framework market access deal which included the objective of 50 per cent. cuts in tariff peaks. That appeared to be an important breakthrough, securing what we believed at the time were substantial reductions in the crucial United States textile tariffs. Despite strong pressure from the European Community and, most important, from ourselves, the United States refused to honour the Tokyo deal in respect of textiles. It claimed that there was an oral understanding in Tokyo that its offer —I will not go into details, but it did not do it. That was extremely disappointing to us, and we continued to ask and press for improvements. Our position was not particularly helped by the news in September that the European Community and the United States had come to an agreement over United States tariff reductions on textiles.

I thank the industry for its support in making our case and for the warnings that it gave its European colleagues. Unfortunately, they were not listened to, and the result fell far short of United Kingdom industry requirements and was far below the objective of 50 per cent. reductions in peak tariffs that had been put forward in the Quad in Tokyo. I repeat my thanks to the industry for the way in which it worked with us to try to achieve that which,

[Mr. Richard Needham]

unfortunately, we did not manage to get; but we agreed a cut which, although disappointing, was substantial. Wool fabric tariffs were cut from 42 per cent., 36 per cent. and 33 per cent. to 25 per cent.. That must be of real value to our industry. Wool clothing tariffs were cut from 22 per cent. and more to 17·5 per cent. and from 17 per cent. to 14 per cent. That will help our companies in the American market.

As for other countries, we have some successes to report —Thailand, 100 per cent. to 30 per cent. We will not find many people wandering around in thick woollen suits in Thailand, and the same argument applies to India, I suppose. I accept that the results in respect of India, Pakistan and Indonesia were disappointing but, as hon. Members know, the South Koreans increased their wool and textiles tariff rate to 19 per cent. I protested to the Korean Government when I went there in April, and I wrote to the Korean Finance and Trade Industry Ministers only last week, expressing our dismay. Sir Leon Brittan has also complained to the Koreans. We are considering how we will respond to the Korean tariff increases. We have some ways in which we think that we will retaliate against what they have done. I shall continue to raise the matter with the Korean Ministers.

Mr. Cryer: The Minister touches on an important point. I have written to Ministers on several occasions about both the actuality and the threat of the increase in Korean tariffs, which has been hanging over us for some time. An employer has informed me that, if the tariff does not revert to its pre-increase level, the number of jobs in the textile industry may well be reduced. As the Minister knows, in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), there are 11,000 jobs at stake, and the figure for the whole of the west riding of Yorkshire is 20,000 or more. The matter is vital, and I am pleased to hear the Minister say that the Government are considering retaliation.

Mr. Needham: We have bilateral agreements with the Koreans whereby, if they have oversupplied in one area, they have been able to move goods across to another. We are looking at ways of stopping that. The problem comes not from the British industry but from the Italian industry, as my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) knows. But that is not the point. What the Koreans have done is not acceptable.

As hon. Members have said, the industry has achieved enormous success across the world over a very long period and is well renowned. The circumstances in which it finds itself make it even more important for the Government and the industry to develop a partnership to support the industry's exports and help it further to improve its international competitiveness.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The Minister referred to the need for the industry to become more competitive. Does he think that there is any mileage in trying to persuade the Indians and Pakistanis in particular to lower their tariffs in the context of growing mutual trade between the United Kingdom and those two countries? Might we be able to secure lower tariffs in that context?

Mr. Needham: That is exactly what we intend to do, not only up to 15 February but thereafter. That will be the general context in which we shall argue these points, which we shall also argue through the Commission. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that those countries want access to our markets, not only in textiles but in other goods.

The partnership to which I referred is under way. The Department's textiles division has the closest working relationship with the British Apparel and Textiles Confederation and we are working on a number of initiatives, as I explained last week. One of the aims is to bring the United Kingdom textile and clothing manufacturers and retailers into closer partnership to boost home sourcing, which is most important. By their very nature, large parts of the clothing industry face constant change in what customers want. That is what high street fashion is now all about. To meet those changing demands, a rapid response is needed on the part of clothing suppliers and those who supply them with fabric. Where better to provide that rapid response than at home? We should be able to read across to other United Kingdom retailers the potential opportunities that, for example, Marks and Spencer has provided over the years.

We are already working with BATC to home in on the export markets in Japan and Germany in a concentrated effort to promote exports of British clothing and textiles, and we plan to expand that targeted approach to 10 other overseas markets next year. We are talking to the woollen and worsted sector about its long-term prospects, and I was in Leeds today talking to Mr. Ackroyd and others about ways in which we can develop initiatives that will meet the industry's needs. Moreover, we are working with the clothing and textile sector as a whole on how we can consider aspects of competitiveness such as benchmarking, quality, design, research and technology.

In case anyone thinks that the Government have not put their money where their mouth is, I inform the House that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has decided to increase significantly the number of staff involved in textile and clothing sponsorship work in the Department.

I understand the disappointment of my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley about GATT. Nevertheless, we have an immensely strong industry. We are working with vertical integration as between retailers and textile and garment manufacturers not only to boost our exports but to find ways to improve our sales at home. There is a new sense of confidence in the industry and a new feeling that it has a long-term future. As I said, the industry is vital to many of the areas that hon. Members represent. I can assure the House that the Government will do all that they can to support it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 28 January 1994

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Privilege

9.34 am

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have raised this matter with your office and I am grateful for the advice that I received. I appreciate that you are not able to deal with a question of privilege on the Floor of the House, but I seek your guidance on a related matter.

I sought guidance from the Clerks, and I appreciate that there is another remedy regarding statements made in the House on Wednesday by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), and I have sought that redress by means of early-day motion 477. I seek your guidance on whether a question of privilege is relevant in reporting the proceedings of the House.

I understand that the Select Committee on Procedure, in Session 1988-89, indicated that, in reporting the proceedings of the House outside, defence against an action for defamation

"will not extend to the reporting of a selected passage, if the selection can be shown to have been made with intent to injure."

I seek your guidance, Madam Speaker, on whether outside repetition of the inaccurate allegations by the hon. Member for Billericay would be privileged.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that it is impossible for me to give legal advice across the Floor of the House. I appreciate the way in which he has put his point of order. He knows that he cannot resuscitate an earlier debate by means of a point of order and, as he rightly says, he has expressed his views by means of early-day motion 477. If he will allow me to look at what he has said this morning, I will be in touch with him.

Orders of the Day

Bank of England (Amendment) Bill

[Relevant document: First Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on the Role of the Bank of England (House of Commons Paper 98-I of Session 1993-94)]

Order for Second Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am sure that those who follow the proceedings of the House would take the view that the Bill appears to be a narrow and technical measure, perhaps concerned only with the uninteresting and arcane workings of the Bank of England. However, I hope that consideration of the Bill will be based on the belief that monetary policy is important, not just to the Bank of England but to every citizen.

It is an irony that, while we rightly deal in detail and at length with the technicalities of taxation policy and look at the way in which, for the sake of argument, the increase in taxation on fuel may be mitigated by compensation schemes, the enormous importance of interest rates to our fellow citizens is not often debated in the House. Certainly it is not subject to detailed parliamentary control.

Perhaps we could think for a moment about the effect of interest rates upon an ordinary family. In recent weeks, much has been made about the increase in taxation that will occur in April. It is said that the average family will suffer an increase in taxation of about £9 a week. Of course that is a serious increase in taxation, but it is one which most families will, with difficulty, be able to contain, perhaps by doing a bit of extra overtime, perhaps by denying themselves some of the luxuries of life. I do not wish to underestimate the strain of that extra taxation, but it is an imposition which is considered in detail by the House.

Monetary policy may have a much greater effect on individual citizens. For instance, we know that, because interest rates have decreased to 5·5 per cent. from their high point of 15 per cent., the mortgage interest payments of an average family with an average mortgage may have dropped by as much as £170 per month. That has been an amazing relief.

On the other hand, when interest rates increased from 7 to 15 per cent., the person who had the average mortgage found, first, that he almost certainly was suffering negative equity in his house and he could not move, and, secondly, that the most important payment that he made every month had about doubled. When that happened, it was not a question of having two or three pints of beer fewer a week or doing a bit of extra overtime; he found that he simply could not meet the payments, and unless he could persuade his clearing bank to lend him a bit more money or to get the building society to roll over the interest for a bit longer, he was in real trouble.

Therefore, monetary policy matters. It matters for every citizen. Even if he lives, for the sake of argument, in a council house, he probably has a young son who is buying a house on mortgage, or a cousin who is struggling with a small business and finding that the small business is being hit by higher interest rates. It is odd, is it not, that the procedures of the House were built up at a time when we

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

were preoccupied with the desire to prevent the monarch from raising taxation without our permission, and yet now the Executive is able to control monetary policy—which I would argue is at least as important to citizens—without our having much control or influence on the way in which it is operated? As a result of the ups and downs of monetary policy in the past 20 or 30 years, there has been increasing interest in finding a better system for creating stability in monetary policy.

The proposals that I make in the Bill are very slight. They do not seek to put the control of monetary policy on a permanent or revolutionary footing. They proceed from a very Tory attitude about the fallibility of individual wisdom; the uncertainty that even apparently wise men have got it right and a belief that it is better to take one tiny, moderate step in the right direction than to take a large number of steps, most of which may be in the wrong direction. The detailed proposals are very modest indeed.

Hon. Members must know that in 1946 the Bank of England was nationalised. That measure was supported by all sections of the House of Commons at the time. Many people, such as Mr. Macmillan and Robert Boothby, felt that during the 1930s the Bank of England had imposed on the country too stringent a monetary policy, and that the independent Bank of England had made the slump deeper and more ferocious than it might otherwise have been. They hoped in the post-war settlement to gain political control over the Bank. That view was, of course, much supported by the Labour party, which felt that there had been a banker's ramp in the 1930s.

One of the more important parts of the Bank of England Act 1946 was section 4, which gave the Treasury the general power to give directions to the Bank of England. My Bill, by clause 1, amends the 1946 Act to provide that subsection (1) of section 4 shall cease to have effect; but in its place is clause 2, by which the primary objective of the amendment Bill will be to impose upon the Bank the duty

> "to formulate and implement monetary policy directed to the economic objective of achieving and maintaining stability in the general level of prices."

To that end, by clause 3,

> "The Treasury shall, after consultation with the Governor, set policy targets for the carrying out by the Bank of its primary objective."

That means that if, for the sake of argument, there is general inflation of 11 per cent., it will not be suggested by the policy targets that it is possible to achieve sound money within a year—it is not politically possible and socially possible to do so. Of course it would be perfectly possible economically. If there were a general interest rate of 25 per cent., no doubt one could achieve price stability in six months or a year, but the social and economic consequences of that squeeze would be horrifying. The targets would, therefore, be agreed between the Governor of the Bank, taking into account its statutory obligation to achieve stability in the general level of prices, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Then, by clause 3, once that policy objective had been agreed, the policy would be recorded in writing. The details of the policy would be tabled at the first meeting of the court of directors of the Bank, and then published in the *London Gazette*. It would mean that everyone could follow the objectives and the way in which the objectives were implemented.

However, of course, that would not be enough in a parliamentary democracy, and it is laid down by clause 4 that the individual responsible for the implementation of the monetary policy shall be the Governor. He would be personally responsible for the agreement and then carrying out the agreement, but—and that "but" is important—by clause 5 there is an override. It acknowledges that, wherever monetary policy is agreed and implemented, there may be more important considerations than the mere attainment of price stability. We saw how the apparently independent Bundesbank was overridden by its political masters. The monetary terms of the settlement made at the time of the reunification of Germany were not at first to the Bundesbank's liking. The independent Bundesbank was told that it would have to grin and bear it. The politicians decided, quite rightly, that the temporary maintenance of price stability was less important than a generous settlement on reunification.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): They will pay for it.

Mr. Budgen: And they will pay for it.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): We paid for it.

Mr. Budgen: That is a different point. There was no reason for us to have paid for it, in my opinion. I shall deal with that issue later. I am merely explaining the details of the Bill and do not wish, for the moment, to reopen old wounds.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Why not?

Mr. Budgen: I am hoping to reopen old wounds later. At this very moment, I am trying to be helpful and moderate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Very unusual."]—which, as my hon. Friends say, is very unusual.

Under clause 5, the Treasury may, from time to time, lay down a statutory instrument to direct the Bank of England

> "to formulate and implement monetary policy for any economic objective"

other than that of price stability. It is an override power which takes account of the argument for public accountability. It deals with the legitimate argument about whether in our democracy, with a sovereign Parliament, we should have something approaching an independent or autonomous central bank.

I now advance the general arguments for granting the Bill a Second Reading.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Before the hon. Gentleman proceeds, will he clarify clause 5? I may have missed some details when he went through it, but my query goes to the heart of his argument. Is his suggestion identical to that of the Treasury Select Committee's report, which talks of the power being used temporarily and in exceptional circumstances? It is important that hon. Members know to what extent it is envisaged that such an override power would be used.

Mr. Budgen: Clause 5 is based on the Select Committee's recommendations. It is true that the Committee talks of a temporary override, but, as the hon. Gentleman will know, in politics, things that are supposed to be temporary turn out to be quite well established—

income tax or, for example, rent control in the 1914-18 war. Under the Bill, the Government would state that the overrride was temporary and, under clause 5, they would have to return to the House every six months to obtain the powers for that override.

Ms Diane Abbot (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington) *rose*——

Mr. Budgen: I shall of course give way to the hon. Lady in a moment.

If the Government wished to do so, they could ask for the powers every six months. For the sake of argument, let us suppose that a Government had been elected with the open promise to create hyper inflation. In such circumstances, they could obtain the necessary powers every six months. As with all measures in our constitution, there is no element of entrenchment in the Bill. Even if the House agreed to my proposals, an incoming Government who wanted to go for growth and get the economy moving—and accepted the consequent advantages and disadvantages—could amend the Bill.

Ms Abbot: I have listened with interest to the masterful way in which the hon. Gentleman deploys his argument. Will he clarify the way in which the override would work? If any Government told Parliament that they were, in effect, going to let inflation rip, would not their currency drop like a stone?

Mr. Budgen: That is true. The currency would, or might, drop like stone. At any rate, the object of the proposals is to achieve openness and ensure that, if a Government say they are going to do one thing, they cannot give directives to the Bank that do something quite different.

We have had two periods of serious inflation in the past 20 years—between 1972 and 1974 and between 1986 and 1988. In both periods, when interest rates were too low they had an advantageous effect on the retail prices index in the short term and enabled the Government of the day to say that they were adamant about trying to control inflation, while creating the monetary conditions that ensured that within 18 months or two years the underlying rate of inflation would pick up substantially. The proposals would not prevent a Government from giving instructions to the Bank to let inflation rip, but if the Government do so, they must do so openly and everyone must understand the consequences.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): If my reading of the Bill is correct, I think that my hon. Friend might be understating the extent to which the Bill would entrench the—to my mind—entirely laudable objective of maintaining price stability. Clause 5 would allow the Treasury to introduce two orders of the type that he describes, but neither may last more than six months. The Treasury would not be allowed to introduce more than two orders within the space of 13 months. Therefore, as I understand it, the Bill would provide that there would be at least one month in any 13 when the overriding objective of clause 2 would not be suspended by the Treasury. It is not something I criticise, but it is important that my hon. Friend deals with that issue.

Mr. Budgen: If it is obvious that after the expiry of the month the Government will return to the previous policy, I do not think that the month represents a very large break. I was using the word "entrenchment" in a technical sense. I meant that, because we have no written constitution, we could abolish the provision of the Act—if the Bill becomes an Act—without there being an extra-constitutional impediment to that abolition. I meant that my proposals were different from the entrenched position of, for example, the Bundesbank in a written constitution. That is the sense in which I used the word, and I am sorry if I did not define it properly.

Discussion of the details will, I hope, emphasise the fact that the Bill takes fully into account the necessity for parliamentary accountability in our system. Those of us who support the Bill believe that it would assist the House by providing openness and giving the House the opportunity to criticise what the Executive are doing. It is only by knowledge and by openness that the House has the opportunity to bring its criticism to bear.

For example, during the battle between Lady Thatcher and Lord Lawson, as they are now known, about what occurred and what went wrong in the middle to late 1980s, Lady Thatcher said that when Lord Lawson began the policy of shadowing the deutschmark she, as Prime Minister, did not know that it was being done. She said in her memoirs that she found out only as a result of following the exchange rate policy chronicled in the columns of the financial press.

Whatever the reason for that may have been, if the Prime Minister of the day was not fully informed of the interaction between exchange rate policy and monetary police, how much less was the House of Commons informed? Therefore, I hope that the proposals in the Bill will lead to greater openness in the Treasury and between the Government and Parliament.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is not openness at least as important from the point of view of subsequently knowing whether people were informed or not as not allowing them to pretend that they did not know when they did? Is not the account that the hon. Gentleman gives difficult to square with Lord Lawson's comment, which appears in the corrigendum to the second Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report? He says of himself and Lady Thatcher:

> "Although we had some fairly robust exchanges on a large number of occasions, because she did not like interest rates going up as a general rule, there were only two occasions during the whole of my time as Chancellor in which in the event I did not have my way and interest rates did not go up."

That does not suggest that Lady Thatcher did not know.

Mr. Budgen: I am not here to stir up ill will over that controversy. One can only say that both proponents will be able to make their case more effectively in future. Previously there was never an open instruction from the Treasury to the Bank of England and, inevitably, there was a good deal of mystery about what was going on. As to the extent to which the mystery was shared between the First Lord of the Treasury and the Chancellor, we shall never really know, but I hope that I was arguing effectively that monetary policy affects every citizen in a most important way. It is extraordinary that we argue in detail about the minutiae of taxation policy while we have no influence whatever over present monetary policy.

I should like to emphasise the importance of ministerial responsibility in our system. Not only is the Executive accountable to a sovereign Parliament, but individual Ministers are personally and collectively responsible and

[Mr. Budgen]

there is nothing in the Bill that undermines the personal responsibility of the Chancellor of the Exchequer for monetary policy. If the override provisions of clause 5 need to be brought into effect, it is clear that the House of Commons will be able to tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer that, regardless of the monetary policy being pursued in response to agreed targets, there are perfectly satisfactory powers under section 5 of the Bank of England (Amendment) Act which will enable him to override those policy targets to produce the monetary conditions appropriate for the state of the economy.

As I explained, I hope that this is a not a revolutionary measure and that there is nothing exciting or interesting in it. I hope that it builds, in a modest fashion, on the practices that have already been adopted between the Bank and the Treasury since the great release of 16 September 1992. The Bank of England now publishes a quarterly inflation report. That may seem to be a relatively unimportant change, but the quarterly bulletin in the past was the subject of most detailed negotiation beween the Bank of England and the Treasury. It was the daily duty of countless persons, each with double firsts in classics, to pore over the exact meaning of particular words so that when a warning was given it could be in language that appeared adequately to rebuke the Government and would send a small message to the market without deeply disturbing it. That was an intellectual game which was thought to be of the greatest importance and certainly employed many of our finest brains for many weeks, months and even years.

Freedom has now been granted to that activity. The inflation report is now drawn up and published by the Bank of England without the preliminary surveillance of the Treasury. It is important to consider the content of the report. It deals with recent price developments, with monetary and fiscal policy, with demand and output, with the labour market, with price dynamics and with prospects for inflation, which are important. Therefore, if the Government were setting too lax monetary targets, which would result in an increase in inflation, the prospects for inflation would have to be set out in the Bank's assessment of the consequences of that too-lax monetary policy. That is an important innovation, since and perhaps as a direct result of, the splendid activities of the speculators on 16 September 1992.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the test of the credibility of the Bank of England's quarterly report will not come until the Bank feels it necessary to fire an overt warning shot over the Government's bows? Suppose that, by the end of this Parliament, the inflation target of 2·5 per cent. that the Chancellor has set himself is not being reached. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the Bank will have the courage, perhaps just before an election, to fire a warning shot? Might it not resort instead to a form of words not dissimilar from that to which the hon. Gentleman has referred?

Mr. Budgen: I agree that that is a risk. All constitutional changes that occur in a country that has an unwritten constitution take a little time to bed down. It is very proper that we should move slowly and steadily and by incremental steps, and we may realise the direction in which those incremental steps are taking us only with the value of hindsight. In Stuart times, the judiciary emerged as an independent force. With the advantage of hindsight, it is easy to look back on the various incidents and say that they were all moving in the same direotion, but it probably did not appear to people at the time that that was what was happening. Practices get slowly embedded. They get noticed and perhaps applauded; then the chattering classes say that they are a good thing; then, later, the man in the pub may take a transitory interest in them.

It is possible that, at some later stage, pressure will be put on the Bank of England to modify the judgments that it publishes in its quarterly inflation report, and no doubt some consideration will be given by the Bank to the modification of that report, just as in Stuart times some judges no doubt regarded themselves as no more than the handmaiden of the Executive and from time to time did not support the independence of the judiciary. But that will not stop the general trend, which I suggest will lead to more stable monetary policy.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): Surely the real dilemma is a dilemma within the Bank. If it produces an unfavourable inflation report, its prospects of successfully conducting gilt sales at favourable prices will be jeopardised. That is one reason why many who argue in favour of giving the Bank of England an independent role in monetary policy have suggested that the role of selling Government debt should be taken away from it. Can my hon. Friend explain why that proposal is not in his Bill?

Mr. Budgen: My Bill is based on the recommendations of the Treasury Select Committee and on the belief that one small step in the right direction is better than a great number of steps in the wrong direction. Many people will say that this is in any case far too large a matter to be dealt with in a private Member's Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Some of my hon. Friends have strong views about that. A great many subsidiary issues—for example, the Bank's role in supervising other banks and selling Government debt—may come to the House for consideration in future, but I do not think that it would be necessary or wise for my Bill to deal with those secondary problems. I say that even though I agree that once the Bank becomes more distant—I think that that is a better way of describing it—from the Treasury, many of those issues will arise.

I have dealt with the importance of the quarterly bulletin and its inflation report. A second change has occurred recently—a change in the way in which the Bank implements agreed changes in interest rates. As the House knows, the custom that has grown up is for the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor to meet monthly. In the past, that was often the point at which the Chancellor announced any agreed change in interest rates. A new practice has arisen, however. Now, when there is agreement to change the current rates of interest, the Bank decides when it will announce the change and it has a month in which to do so.

That is important in relation to the Bank's function in managing Government debt, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) referred. If the Chancellor of the day finds that the Government are in a bit of difficulty and there is general pressure to lower interest rates, he may say, "Okay, Governor. We have agreed to lower interest rates by 1 per cent. Whoopee. Let us get it announced as quickly as possible." That may prove very expensive in relation to the sale of Government debt. It may lead to great difficulties in managing the gilts market.

I have referred to two steps in the direction that I hope the House will take by giving the Bill a Second Reading. We ought not to dismiss the growing interest in the country at large in some form of independent or autonomous central bank. Every week brings a new high-powered report suggesting the advantages of such a bank. Most of those reports are based upon the academic interest in fancy foreign institutions, which, it is wrongly believed, can be easily grafted on to our constitution. I should be the last person to say to those who were previously unthinking supporters of the exchange rate mechanism, "Here is another splendid foreign institution. If we get on the bandwagon, there will be a major change for the better in the management of our monetary policy." But those honourable academics who give up much of their spare time to produce influential pamphlets do it because they see that monetary policy has created so much instability in the past 20 years, and perhaps because they do not recognise the overwhelming necessity in our constitution of both ministerial responsibility and parliamentary accountability.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to the report of the Treasury Select Committee. The Bill is based—I hope accurately—on that Committee's recommendations. It is important to remember that that Committee represents all sections of opinion in the House.

I see the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) in her place. She is a distinguished and vigorous member of that Committee. Hers was the only voice dissenting from our report. She will speak most eloquently for herself I am sure, but I think that she feared that the Committee's recommendations would lead to a British Bundesbank. The hon. Lady nods in agreement, and I certainly do not wish to misrepresent her position. It is true that there are some members of the Treasury Select Committee who would like to see a British Bundesbank, but the last thing in the world that I want is a British Bundesbank.

The proposals that I support are designed to create openness and accountability, but not as a preliminary to a free-standing independent British central bank or, even worse, to a European central bank.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Does my hon. Friend agree that the key to the parallel between the ERM and the gold standard before the war is that it was a Government decision to enter that particular form under the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, and it was the Bank which operated within those constraints? The Bank was subsequently criticised for having a too stringent monetary policy. The pre-war decisions and problems about which many people criticise the Bank were set by a political decision of the Government. They were not caused by the Bank and, when they were eased, the situation changed very quickly.

Mr. Budgen: When the Bank was independent in the 1930s, it had all the faults of the accumulated tradition of being the spokesman for the City interests. It was a very powerful pressure institution. It did not have its present characteristic of being a servant, albeit a very superior servant, of the Treasury. Therefore, it is not surprising that some politicians agreed with Keynes that Winston Churchill was an outstandingly disastrous Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, they also said that people should consider the rotten advice that the Bank gave to Winston Churchill and the way he, as a very powerful politician, gave way to that even more powerful vested interest. We can understand why, in 1946, many Keynesian Tories felt that the influence of the Bank had been harmful in accentuating the depression in the 1930s.

I want to conclude with two arguments to show why the Bill should receive a Second Reading. If the Bill goes into Committee, I will welcome all suggestions for its improvement. The last thing I want to do is to suggest that the Treasury Select Committee or any other small partial body has a unique wisdom in producing legislation. Indeed, most of the legislation that is bashed through this place in a hurry is disastrous.

In relation to monetary policy, I do not want my Bill to be an example of the wisdom of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. If the Bill enters Committee, all suggestions for its improvement, modification and even its scaling down will be considered very carefully. However, I suggest that the Government should allow the Bill to go into Committee for two reasons.

First, if the economy picks up as we all hope it will —and there has been a major relaxation of monetary policy since 16 September 1992, so we are entitled to hope and believe that the economy has picked up and will pick up further—the consumer will save less, spend more and be less inclined to buy Government debt. That means that the deficit of about £1 billion a week will be increasingly funded by foreign holders of sterling, most of whom come from countries that have independent central banks. They will find it very difficult to understand how a Government can say to them on the one hand, "Please lend us £1 billion a week" and on the other, "The last thing we want is a system of more open relations between ourselves and our subordinate, the Bank of England."

Secondly, if the Bill goes into Committee, it will give the Government a splendid opportunity to explain their present thinking about the Maastricht treaty and the move towards a European central bank. I know that the Government will grasp that opportunity. It is interesting to remind ourselves that the Government's position on that matter is still based on their very clear expressions revealed in the Conservative party manifesto issued before the last general election.

I have detained the House for a long time and I do not wish to continue for much longer——

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South) Shame.

Mr. Budgen: Well, if my hon. Friend wishes me to continue, I will remind the House of the clear expression of principle set out in the Conservative party manifesto. It states:

> "But the treaty goes on to say that monetary union will come about automatically in 1999, for all who meet the conditions. We did not want to exclude ourselves from membership; but we could not accept such an automatic commitment. By the end of this decade the EC's membership will have changed; the economic performance of many of its members may have changed. We cannot tell who the members of such a union might be.
>
> We therefore secured the freedom to make a proper judgment on events. We are as free to join if we wish as any other member. We would have to meet the same conditions—no more, no less.

[Mr. Budgen]

> We will play our full part in the discussions of the monetary institutions Europe may create in the 1990s. But we are not obliged to join in a single currently if we do not want to."

I hestitate to repeat this and I hope that I will not be criticised in private.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Gentleman would be well advised to hesitate. I need to know that his comments relate directly to the terms of the Bill.

Mr. Budgen: Indeed they do. The proposals in the Maastricht treaty are, first, for a half-way house to a European central bank and, secondly, by stage 3, the possibility of our joining a system in which there is a single European central bank. That is directly relevant to our consideration of the rôle of the Bank of England, which is our domestic central bank.

I draw the attention of the House to that section in the Conservative party manifesto because the Government, very properly, have argued against the very limited proposals in my Bill on two grounds. On 16 December, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

> "We should consider it with care, also taking into account such matters as parliamentary accountability for an increasingly more autonomous Bank of England."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1993; Vol. 234, column 1257.]

On an earlier occasion, when the Prime Minister was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he said that he was against any form of independence for the Bank of England because

> "the man or woman responsible for monetary policy should be available to the House of Commons to answer for his or her policies."—[*Official Report*, 5 July 1990; vol. 175, column 1110.]

Each of those arguments is important and compelling.

I hope that I have persuaded the House that those two general principles should not defeat this very modest measure. But when we apply those two principles to the European Monetary Institute and to the European central bank, we see how extraordinary it is that the Government agreed to the proposals for stage 2 and left open the possibility that we might join stage 3. It is quite obvious that stages 2 and 3 are completely inconsistent with the two arguments of principle that were so properly brought forward by the Government in considering the Bill.

Much has changed in Europe in recent months. We have had the great freedom that has resuscitated our economy and given hope to our people since 16 September 1992. The unfortunate peoples of Europe suffered a terrible setback during the first weekend of 1993, when their exchange rate mechanism was blown out of the water and has been left but a broken shell waiting only to sink. We need an opportunity for the Government to restate their position. We want to know whether, once again, we are to be subordinated to the Bundesbank, and whether, once again, we are to go back into the exchange rate mechanism. We want a bit of openness between the House and the Government.

This is a narrow, consensus Bill based upon, as legislation should be, agreement of a very narrow, carefully defined nature between persons of very different views. It allows the Government, not of course to say, "Sorry for the ERM"—that would be too much—but to explain their changed position.

Mr. Michael Spicer: And to say "Thank you".

Mr. Budgen: As my hon. Friend reminds me, let us say "Thank you" to the Opposition for their support of the Government over the Maastricht treaty. It would not have been possible for the Government to maintain us within the ERM, to thrust the Maastricht treaty down the throats of the British people, but for the unswerving support of the Opposition parties. It was selfless. Whenever the Government were in difficulty, we always knew that the Opposition would be there. Their support for the social chapter and for the single currency was unswerving. It was the most splendid demonstration of gallant principle that we have seen for a long time.

Perhaps the Government will now look for an opportunity to explain their thinking. We should accept the closure motion, which I am sure will be necessary at the end of the debate, and we should give the Government an opportunity to explain themselves not only to the House but to the British people.

10.32 am

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): When the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr Budgen) waxes so eloquently about the green pastures which he believes we have entered since we left the exchange rate mechanism, he is inclined to forget that our time in it was actually the source of the degree of control of inflation that we have been enjoying in recent months and that, therefore, there are two sides to the story.

Indeed, one of the significant points about the Bill is that it is designed to provide another means of building a bulwark against inflation, which we might need not in the immediate circumstances but in foreseeable circumstances, especially if, by that time, we are still not within any other sort of constraint that effectively links monetary policy to keeping prices stable.

It must be unusual for the hon. Member who has the second slot in the private Member's Bill ballot to be such an enthusiastic supporter of the first Bill in the ballot and quite so keen even for it to be considered in Committee, although, for my own reasons, I hope for only brief Committee proceedings on this nevertheless important Bill. I have energy conservation matters that I know the Government will want to discuss in detail in Committee, and which the same Committee will have to consider as soon as it has disposed of the necessary work on this Bill.

At least the Liberal Democrats cannot be accused of advocating an independent central bank in response to fashion—unless, that is, we are the setters of fashion, which we like to believe we are, because we put that proposal in election manifesto commitments when it was the preserve of only a few. It has taken a spate of ex-Chancellors to give the concept some respectability, which it did not previously enjoy, and dispassionate and careful analysis in a Treasury Select Committee convinced some hon. Members who might initially have been sceptics that we should make moves in that direction.

Our commitment arises, first, from the belief that stable prices should be part of the general framework for economic management. Secondly, we believe that such stability is more likely to be achieved if we have an institution that conducts monetary policy with that sole or primary objective. Thirdly, we believe that such a system would make for greater accountability for monetary policy; at the moment, monetary policy is divided between the Chancellor and the Bank.

Fourthly, we believe that the experience of the present system, which was acknowledged by the Bank during questioning by the Select Committee, is that Chancellors will be influenced in at least the timing of interest rate decisions by such political events as party conferences, hostile debates coming up in the House of Commons, and so on.

Fifthly, we believe that markets are well aware of that fact and will exact an interest rate premium in proportion to their fears about the reliability of anti-inflation policy, so that rates are sometimes higher than they would be if those fears could be removed or reduced.

The evidence that interest rate decisions have been determined by possible events is now in the open. It was the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) who said:

> "While my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have been in general agreement on interest rate policy, I do not believe that even the timing of interest rate changes should ever be affected by political considerations. Interest rate changes should never be used to offset some unfavourable political event. To do so undermines the credibility of policy and the credibility of the Chancellor."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 1993; Vol. 226, c. 284.]

Why did he say that? That was not said in an abstract theatre; it was not in an Institute of Economic Affairs pamphlet; it was not in an Adam Smith Institute tract that those words occurred. They occurred in the resignation personal statement of a Chancellor who was reflecting on what had gone wrong while he had been in that position and how much of that was other people's fault rather than his own. He said those things in order to indicate that they happened.

In order to get that statement verified, I put it to the present Governor, who was deputy Governor of the Bank at the time, Mr. Eddie George. I asked:

> "Does your experience confirm that such a warning was necessary?"

Mr. George said:

> "I think I have to say yes . . . It is undoubtedly true that there are times when the short-run tactics are adjusted to take account of events which are actually not a lot to do with a monetary policy. In any single incident, in my experience, that can be damaging for a little while. . . . Provided actually it was not an unreasonable thing to do in a strategic sense, that does not last for very long, but it has a corrosive influence over time. People tend to think that these decisions are made on that basis."

What clearer evidence could we have than that? The Chancellor warns that interest rate decisions should not be taken on that basis. The man who was deputy Governor at that time and who is now in charge of the Bank said, "Yes, that is a danger, it does happen, at least in respect of timing, and, because people know that it happens, that fear affects market perceptions about anti-inflation policy." We could not have a better tested case of the dangers.

Of course, the terminology of all that is confusing. Hardly anyone is attempting to introduce into this country a totally independent institution carrying out all the present functions of the Bank on a totally autonomous basis. Nor is it conceivable that we could devise a British clone of the Bundesbank or the "Fed". The term "independent central bank" has become shorthand for various models in which the central bank has allocated to it the operation of monetary policy in pursuit of declared objectives and is then held to account for its effectiveness in carrying out those objectives.

The consensus in the Select Committee was that the remit should be price stability, but that targets, which could take account of other objectives, should be publicly set by the Government, with parliamentary approval. It is arguable that any qualifications of the price stability objective and any use of target mechanisms and "overrides" risks losing a significant part of the increased market confidence and the reliability of the policy. At least the process is explicit and open, and that in itself is a considerable improvement on what we have now. One can imagine that the Government might have some difficulty in winning the political argument for what the Bank thought were weak targets.

If one brings that debate into the open, it becomes much more difficult for the Government to let inflation rip by surreptitious methods or by subterfuge. The slight difference of view over how far one should go has been reflected in the amendments that were tabled in the Committee. I was glad that the Committee accepted a raft of amendments of mine which were supported by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg). Those amendments were then sub-amended in various ways. It was a complicated process, but it arrived at a decision between people of varied points of view but with a shared belief that what we needed was a more open process in which the Bank has a declared objective of stability which is open to some public modification. That is what most people are talking about when they use the shorthand of "independent central bank".

None of that will affect directly the other functions of the central bank. Those include bank supervision, serving as the banker to the Government and safeguarding the health of the banking system. Those in themselves do not require changes in accountability, though there are arguments in favour of hiving off banking supervision to a different institution, a change which people might think necessary.

It has been pointed out that there is a possible danger from the Bank's role as the banker of the Government to its independence in running monetary policy. What will be certainly required by a change to greater autonomy in monetary policy will be a change in the internal structure of the Bank, with a clearly distinct monetary committee. The basis for that requires further discussion, as the Committee acknowledged.

The process is easier to see in federal countries. I know that that term causes some embarrassment to Governments, but many countries run their affairs on a federal basis quite happily. In federal countries, it is easier to see how an element of independence may be drawn from the federal components of a country in forming the monetary committee of one's bank. Despite my support, and that of my party, for a federal system within the United Kingdom, let alone Europe, I do not wish to rely on potential developments, but rather to look for ways of getting the job done here and now. We have to look for ways of making the monetary committee of the Bank an appropriate one for carrying out those tasks.

Let us get rid of two myths. First, in delegating monetary responsibilities to the central bank, Parliament certainly would not be throwing away accountability. Where is the parliamentary accountability now? Even with greater openness, we do not know whether the Chancellor is acting on or rejecting the Bank's advice.

Shared responsibility is the death of accountability. We can see that theme running through all of the stories about accountability in every kind of field, whether it is central banking or arms to Iraq. If several people are responsible, they can all say, "It was not me, it was him . . . he didn't tell me . . . he sent me the memo, but I did not fully

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

appreciate its contents." When responsibility is divided, it becomes diffused, and one gets less effective accountability.

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that shared responsibility means that the exercise of power is unaccountable. That is quite right, but the right hon. Gentleman is wrong in describing our present arrangements as "shared responsibility". It is clear that responsibility for the conduct of monetary policy lies with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Chancellor's accountability to the House is the accountability mechanism at present. The problem with what is proposed in the Bill precisely involves the issue to which the hon. Gentleman has referred—responsibility would become more diffused than it is at the moment.

Mr. Beith: Up to a point, that is true. The former Chancellor, Lord Lawson, made that point to the Committee in his usual modest way. He said that the policy was that when he believed interest rates should go up, they went up, and when he believed they should go down, they went down. He subsequently qualified that by revealing that, on two occasions, Baroness Thatcher did not let him have his way, but, generally, that was how it was to be.

What the Bank is saying at any one time is crucial to the matter. We do not want to know whether interest rates went up or down, because we know that the Chancellor made the decision. We want to know when he made the decision, and whether the Bank told him to do that, or to do something else. If we do not know that at the time, clearly we cannot understand the nature of the decision and we cannot have a public debate about it. Obviously, that would be destructive to the market perception of what is going on.

We cannot have bankers issuing press releases saying that they are on their way to tell the Chancellor that interest rates should go up, and then the Chancellor does not put the rates up. One can imagine the consequences of that. It is much better to have responsibility lying where the advice comes from. We would then know that, whatever happens, the decision is being taken by the institution that has been charged with working out what the effect will be on price stability. The institution can subsequently be held to account for how far it has achieved price stability by the methods.

There is always the hint that the Chancellor may or may not be acting with the support of the Bank. Under the system that is proposed in the Bill, the Chancellor is answerable to Parliament for the more specific responsibility of setting a target or, for that matter, for whether he is using an override if he chooses to do so. The Bank's carrying out of its duty can be questioned in a Select Committee and debated on the Floor of the House. I believe that it is a myth that, under the proposals, there would be less accountability than there is now. I believe that there would be more, and I have no doubt on that at all.

The second myth is that unemployment would be kept lower if the Government had direct disposal of the instrument of monetary policy. That means that the value of money would be destroyed to meet short-term crises, with the result that property investment and reckless borrowing became more attractive than saving and industrial investment. We have been through all that in the recent experience of the country. That is the route to long-term unemployment and to failure. In the short term, price stability targets can assist by taking account of the need to move at an unmanageable speed to price stability. Big external shocks to the system could justify an override, or a change in the target.

Nobody is suggesting that a system be devised in which it is impossible for monetary policy to take account of something dramatic; for example, the oil shock which hit the world economy. Some of those who like to regard themselves as latter-day Keynesians seem to assume that Keynes would, for precisely those reasons, have no truck with the use of monetary policy. That is quite false. Keynes is recorded by Chamberlain, for example, as arguing for a very long and continuing hike in interest rates in 1920. Even as his views evolved during the later crisis, Keynes never lost a degree of commitment to the use of monetary policy to maintain price stability. He had an overriding concern with the management of demand, but that did not make him someone who would advocate lax monetary policy in the face of raging inflation. It is a total abuse of Keynes when some, including the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), appear to suggest that Keynes might have favoured an extremely lax monetary policy when faced with severe inflation.

Under the proposed system, fiscal policy could not be operated at total war with monetary policy, so both the Government and the Bank will have to take the economic circumstances and each other's decisions into account. Stable money is just one of the building blocks for a stronger economy. An autonomous, but accountable, central bank with responsibility for the conduct of monetary policy is a big step towards stable prices. For much, but not all, of the time, that should enable lower interest rates because of greater market credibility. That is not a panacea for other economic problems, but it leaves the Government free to tackle the problems within a more stable framework.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West is well known for his rigorous critique of Britain's participation in anything European. He pointed out that, for many people who take his view, there would be attractions in having an independent central bank in this country, rather than our being involved in a European central bank. I take a different view. I believe in the great merits of a single currency. We can secure the economic conditions to make it feasible, and I believe that it is an appropriate and necessary component of a single market. It would be of great advantage to British industry if it could operate in one market with one currency, and I should like to see that come about.

However, we need that to come about by a different mechanism from the ERM—the ERM is a draughty waiting room in which to stay for a long time. Experience has demonstrated that the final stage of entry into a single currency needs to be a shorter one. We cannot operate a single currency as a nearly-single currency for any length of time, unless there is a commitment from all participants to safeguard each other's currencies. Without that determination, the currencies can be picked off one by one. A change of route will be essential if we are to get a single currency. That is a safe bet, whether one is in favour of a European single currency or opposed to it. The one thing that the two sides of the argument seem to have in common is the determination to build a non-inflationary economy for this country.

Whether we do that as an island, strongly separated from what is happening in the rest of Europe, as some believe is possible—I do not—or as a full participant in Europe, we need to have monetary policy primarily dedicated to price stability. That is what the mechanism in the Bill can do. It can do it on a basis that gives greater openness and accountability. It would be far clearer and more understandable than our present system.

10.49 am

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Many types of Bill come before the House: Government Bills, private Bills, personal Bills, hybrid Bills, attainder Bills—rather underused nowadays, especially in the case of Treasury Ministers—and private Member's Bills. When I first heard that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) intended to produce this Bill, knowing his well-known opposition to the Maastricht treaty, with its great emphasis on the establishment of, first, an independent British national central bank as a stepping stone to a still more independent European central bank, I assumed that we would be presented with a new category of Bill—a sardonic Bill.

Now that I have read my hon. Friend's article in *The Times* yesterday, heard him on the "Today" programme this morning and listened to his admirable speech, I realise that the Bill is not a sardonic Bill but a probing Bill, rather like a probing amendment. With his characteristic modesty, my hon. Friend described the Bill as a very narrow and technical measure. But my feeling is that it represents the not so thin end of what would prove to be a very thick wedge.

It seems to me inconceivable that any such change in the status and powers of the Bank of England could be brought about by anything other than a major and most important Government Bill. Nevertheless, it is extremely helpful that my hon. Friend has given us the opportunity in the Bill, which I hope will not reach the statute book, to have a valuable discussion of the principles and issues that the Bill raises.

In his article in *The Times* yesterday, my hon. Friend referred to something that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was reported as saying in the Select Committee report. He said that the idea of an independent central bank, a more independent central bank, or a central bank with power to look after at least monetary affairs, had become fashionable. My hon. Friend queried in his article what the word "fashionable" meant. I should have thought that it was fairly clear what it meant. Lord Healey made the same point to the Select Committee. He described the idea of an independent central bank as a gimmick. He said that it was an apologia to be used by failed Chancellors to shuffle off their responsibility onto the Bank of England.

Lord Healey went one better. At an early stage of his Chancellorship, he shuffled off responsibility for both monetary and fiscal affairs on to the International Monetary Fund. I am bound to say that if one starts moving responsibility away from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, one should make sure to move his fiscal responsibilities along with his monetary responsibilities. I shall return to that point later.

The question of passing fashions in economic affairs is a real one. One thinks of prices and incomes policies, control of the money supply, medium-term financial targets, the shadowing of the deutschmark, joining the exchange rate mechanism and then the attempt to establish a single European currency. They are all fashions which have come and gone. They have all been extremely disruptive and damaging to the management of the British economy. I have not the slightest doubt that the idea of transferring monetary power to the Bank of England falls happily into that category.

All those economic panaceas are designed primarily to achieve price stability. No one doubts that price stability is a highly desirable objective. It has been an objective of all Governments since the Stuarts, who set up the Bank of England and to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West referred. Most Governments, starting conspicuously with the Stuarts, have failed to produce price stability. Even during the long period in which Britain was on the gold standard and had an independent central bank, the price of wheat and the purchasing power of wages often fluctuated greatly. That shows that price stability is an infinitely complex problem which is not susceptible to any simple or single solution.

The fact is that stable prices, even when achieved, are a necessary, but not sufficient, element in the pursuit of steady industrial growth and general prosperity. Many different factors affect price levels. A successful economic policy requires a wide variety of interconnecting financial and economic policies constantly in need of modification in relation to each other.

I argue that to hive off control of monetary policy and interest rate movements to a so-called independent central bank would reduce our ability to co-ordinate fiscal and monetary policy. The Bundesbank is often cited as an example of an admirable independent central bank. No one denies that it has done a good job in Germany or that it enjoys enormous prestige due to Germany's experiences of appalling inflation in the early 1920s. However, in the past three years, Germany has demonstrated the great disadvantages of placing power and responsibility for monetary affairs and fiscal affairs in separate hands.

Ever since the reunification of Germany, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West referred, the Germans have run a far too lax fiscal policy, combined, partly as a consequence, with a far too strict monetary policy. That has caused tremendous problems within Germany and throughout Europe. It was, of course, the reason why the exchange rate mechanism impinged so harshly on Britain and continues to impinge harshly on France.

In my judgment, to give special separate monetary powers to the Bank of England would tend to produce exactly the same results for Britain. My basic technical criticism of all moves towards an independent Bank of England, particularly in monetary affairs, is the disadvantage of separating monetary policy from fiscal policy. The act and the art of balancing monetary and fiscal policy produces good economic performance.

Any fool can create stable prices or falling prices by plunging the country into slump conditions. That is precisely what the independent Bank of England under Montagu Norman did during the 1920s by its obsession with the gold standard and maintaining sterling at an overpriced parity against the United States dollar. Montagu Norman, the Governor of the day, took the view that the consequent unemployment was no responsibility of his.

[Sir Peter Tapsell]

That was a matter for the Ministers, whom he so despised, to grapple with. It was for them to shoulder the blame. His diaries make that absolutely clear.

By the same token, one may be certain that, while the modern Bank of England is happy to be given an inflation target—I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West is now the hero of the Bank of England hierarchy—it would be horrified if, at the same time, it were given an unemployment target or a growth target. Indeed, senior people in the Bank of England—I do not talk to quite such senior people in the Bank of England as my hon. Friend does—have indicated to me that they would not be prepared to accept any such contract about unemployment or growth. I use the word "contract" in the New Zealand context.

I was honoured earlier this week to receive a letter from my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, dated 25 January, which started by reminding me that tax and spending should not be separated from one another and must be viewed together.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of that very important fundamental economic and financial fact. I suggest that the same argument applies to fiscal and monetary policy. That is the crux of the problem. The 1944 White Paper on employment, produced by all the political parties, is, in my view, still the best modern state document on economic policy. I recommend it to any right hon. or hon. Member who has not recently read it; it makes excellent reading, partly because, in addition to being exceedingly wise men, Keynes and Beveridge had the rare capacity in public servants of being able to write good English.

The White Paper laid down four objectives. It did not just try to pick out monetary arguments alone. It laid down the four objectives of post-war economic policy of trying simultaneously to achieve stable prices, high levels of employment, a healthy balance of payments and an expanding economy. Surely those are the objectives which every Government of whatever political persuasion should pursue in this country.

Only briefly, from 1952-54, under the Chancellorship of Rab Butler, at the time when I first joined the Conservative research department, of which he was also then chairman —we used to see a lot of him personally when he was Chancellor—have those objectives been achieved simultaneously in Britain in the post-war period. There was a considerable element of luck about that, because of the ending of the Korean war and the tremendous shift in the balance of payments and terms of trade in our favour. Nevertheless, it happened under Rab. I often heard him talk in private about the great difficulty when juggling with the economy of keeping all four balls in the air at the same time without dropping one. Harold Macmillan used to say the same thing. Those four balls need to be juggled with. It is no good thinking that one can just toss one of them across to the Bank of England and leave the politicians to play with the other three.

If the Bill became law, it would, by tossing away one of those balls, make the management of our economy more, not less, difficult, because it would separate monetary from fiscal policy.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): On my hon. Friend's key point about the inadvisability, from his point of view, of separating monetary and fiscal policy, will he care to comment on the current reality, rather than that which pertained in the early 1950s? With the exception of Britain and Japan, no other leading member of the OECD now shares his view that it is necessary institutionally to concentrate monetary and fiscal policy, and the prime responsibility for those policies, in one institution, whether it be Government or bank.

Sir Peter Tapsell: My hon. Friend dismissed Japan, which, until recently, has been the most successful country, economically speaking. In a few moments, I will quote Mr. Paul Volcker on the American experience. As to Europe, because of the dominance of the Bundesbank, there has been a fashion to allow the central banks much more power to control this, but that has recently had disastrous results. One has only to look at the economies of western Europe. Spain now has an unemployment rate of 22 per cent. France, my in-laws tell me—I have a French wife—is on the brink of revolution.

Despite the popularity of Mr. Balladur personally, the French people are desperately unhappy with the present economic situation. That is partly because the central banks of western Europe have been allowed to have too much power, and the Ministers, for a variety of reasons, partly perhaps through a lack of understanding of economics, have been pursuing a far too deflationary policy which is causing widespread unemployment through western Europe, and may, in due course, cause political instability.

Mr. Budgen: May I take up with my hon. Friend his point about the role of the Government in agreeing these targets? Of course, under clause 2, it is the duty of the Bank to attempt to achieve and maintain price stability. When the agreement is reached, the Chancellor comes to the decision with his knowledge of employment considerations, fiscal policies and all the rest, and brings into the agreement all those points that my hon. Friend makes about the three other balls. If, at a later stage, he finds that his consideration of the three other balls was not sufficiently taken into account in the agreement, there is the override power.

I hope that my hon. Friend will not be too much taken by the arguments of those who want an independent central bank. We considered an independent central bank in the Treasury Select Committee. Some of us were initially attracted towards that and the New Zealand model. But when we came to agree to the final recommendations, we abandoned that. This is a much more modest proposal.

Sir Peter Tapsell: It is a much more modest proposal, but it is, in fact, a stalking horse for a much less modest proposal, if I may use a term familiar to my hon. Friend. It is undoubtedly the case that the great majority of the people outside the House and in the City of London—Lord Roll's committee produced an extremely distinguished report on the subject recently—are the same people who were so enthusiastic for Britain to join the ERM, who argued that we should stay in it and rejoin it, are in favour of the Maastricht treaty, want us to go for a single European currency and want us to have a single, independent European central bank.

My hon. Friend is being wholly naive, which is a rare quality in him, if he believes that this modest measure is not regarded outside the House as something that will take us down the federalist path. That is my judgment.

Mr. Jenkin: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. On the point about the four objectives of the 1944 White Paper, and maintaining those in balance, can he point to a period when we have ever allowed an unchecked rise in inflation? Has that ever assisted in the achievement of the other three objectives?

I point out to my hon. Friend that, during the period to which he refers, under the former Chancellor, Rab Butler, we were in a fixed exchange rate system, secured to a very solid and dependable anchor—the United States—during the 1950s. We are now in a period of floating exchange rates and, therefore, are dealing with more variables. Therefore, there is a stronger need for an anchor on one of those four policy objectives.

Sir Peter Tapsell: I certainly do not advocate inflationary policies, and I accept what my hon. Friend says; there has never been a period when, by running a lax monetary policy and allowing prices to rise, we have in any way safeguarded the other three areas of economic activity. Of course not. As I have said, stable prices are a necessary, but not sufficient, basis on which to establish success in the other three spheres.

I have not yet replied to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West about the override. It is cloud cuckoo land to believe in an override, where the Chancellor of the Exchequer or, in some other countries, the Minister of Finance, can suddenly publicly announce that he has had a flaming row with his central bank and that the Government are going to take emergency powers to override the bank. The Governor of the day would resign, the gilt market would collapse, there would be a run on sterling, the Opposition would table a motion of censure and I would vote against the Government.

One need only read the history of flaming rows between Prime Ministers, Chancellors of the Exchequer and Governors of the Bank of England in the first 46 years of the century to discover that the one thing that they were determined not to do was to let the market know what was happening. No doubt the Mr. Soroses of the day would have a pretty good inkling of what was happening. One should not institutionalise an arrangement whereby the Treasury of a country will have public rows with its central bank.

As one of my hon. Friends has already said, there would not just be a problem with the tremendous increased cost of funding the borrowing requirement; it is also important to consider the wider political, financial and economic repercussions of a public dispute between the Prime Minister of the day, the Chancellor of the day and the Governor of their central bank. Those repercussions are so horrendous as to be unacceptable.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): If the hon. Gentleman shifts his scenario to black Wednesday, does he really think that it would happen quite in the way that he has described? Surely the Governor of the Bank of England would say, "For Christ's sake take this shambles off my hands. Something must be done and it obviously affects your parish. Over to you." That is the reality of the situation.

Sir Peter Tapsell: From all accounts, although we have not yet had frank accounts of what happened on 15 and 16 September 1992, there was a panic. We do not know who said what to whom. The world realised that there was a financial crisis in Britain, set off by the president of the Bundesbank, Mr. Schlesinger, who gave an extremely unwise press conference a few days before.

There is nothing new about such crises, because a similar situation arose when we went off the gold standard in June 1931. As it happened, Montagu Norman was on a Cunard liner in the middle of the Atlantic. When all the experts at the Bank of England decided that they had to go off the gold standard they told poor Mr. Philip Snowden, the Labour Chancellor—no one had ever told him before that that could be done and he had not thought of it for himself. They wanted to know how to get that news to Governor Norman, in the middle of the Atlantic, without anyone knowing. They spent a lot of time concocting a telegram and eventually Mr. Cockayne, the deputy Governor of the Bank of England, sent a cable which read, "Old lady goes off on Monday."

Montagu Norman was sitting in a deck chair on the promenade deck of the liner when that telegram was handed to him. He had spent the whole of his central banking career trying to keep Britain on the gold standard, having ensured that it was put on it in the first place. He read the message and assumed that it referred to a change in the holiday plans of his mother.

That incident shows that the crisis of September 1992 had honourable predecessors in our history. Nothing very much changes in the practicality of the management of economic and financial affairs whether the Bank of England is nationalised or independent.

Most changes in interest rates in this country have, in practice, been driven by external factors, not by domestic ones. They are usually connected with the exchange rate of sterling, which will remain a Government responsibility under the proposals of the Bill. So far as I know, there have seldom been serious differences of opinion between the Treasury and the Bank of England about interest rate policy, despite what the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said. Arguments have arisen about the timing of an announcement, but the main arguments have been between No. 10 and No. 11 Downing street. That has happened under all Governments.

The most serious blunder in monetary policy since an independent central bank persuaded Churchill to return to the gold standard at the wrong dollar parity in 1925 was our decision, strongly urged by the Bank of England at the time, to join the exchange rate mechanism in 1990. To join it at all was a mistake, to join it at the wrong parity to the deutschmark was a blunder and to remain within it throughout the first nine months of 1992 was a folly, as I said at the time. Nevertheless, that policy, as far as we know, was fully supported by the Bank of England and by the leaders of the Labour and Liberal parties. They had urged the Government to join the exchange rate mechanism for a long time before we did so in the autumn of 1990.

My hon. Friend the member for Wolverhampton, South-West warned against that decision at every stage of the proceedings. He was much wiser——

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills). He voted against it.

Sir Peter Tapsell: I only spoke against it. I did not have the courage to vote against it. I have only fairly recently got into the habit of voting against my Government. I learnt at the feet of the master. However, my hon. Friend was right

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when the Treasury officials and the Bank of England were wrong. Even Baroness Thatcher was converted and we joined the exchange rate mechanism.

If we had to choose an expert to run the monetary authority, we should not choose the Bank of England but my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, because he has a much better track record on such matters than most of the rest of us. He knows that I had a good deal of sympathy with his arguments throughout those years, as I said in public from time to time.

Short-term interest rate movements and fluctuations in the sterling exchange rate impinge much more directly on the political scene in Britain than they do in Germany or the United States. All the attempts to bring in bits of foreign countries to Britain are rather like heart transplants —they are extremely difficult operations which tend, in the course of time, to go wrong. The United Kingdom is a unique country. We cannot look at New Zealand, Germany or the United States and decide that we rather like a bit of their arrangements. We cannot plant that down in the British context in the hope that it will work.

I shared the views of Michael Foot and Enoch Powell, who were against the establishment of Select Committees, if I may say that in this gathering, because I thought that that was an attempt to introduce an American system into our way of life. It did have the result of emptying the Chamber of the House, as Michael Foot had predicted.

Our system is different. I have enormous admiration for Mr. Paul Volcker, who was chairman of the Fed for 10 years. In an recent lecture on the centenary of the Bank of Italy, he said:

> "Economically large nations, relatively less exposed to foreign trade than the closely knit economies of Western Europe, may be less concerned about what the pursuit of an independent monetary policy does to their exchange rates."

That is undoubtedly true, because sterling and the exchange rate have largely determined the level of interest rates, not the other way round. Almost all the crises about interest rates that I can recall have resulted either from sterling being under pressure or because it was thought to be getting too strong.

Neither Germany nor the United States has a close link between its short-term interest rates and its exchange rates. Nor is there a close link, as there is in this country, between their short-term interest rates and the home-owning millions and home-buying millions. I remind my hon. Friends that those people are crucial to the future of the Conservative party. They are potentially, and have traditionally been, loyal Conservative voters and I am not keen to hand them over to the tender mercies of the Bank of England.

Mr. Budgen: A new social and economic factor is the rise in self-employment. Most self-employed people are borrowing their money short term from the clearing banks, and will be very much affected by interest rate changes.

Sir Peter Tapsell: That is absolutely true. Home owners and small businesses in this country are tremendously concerned with short-term interest rates— probably much more, in a political sense, than those in any other country. Also, we export much greater proportion of gross domestic product than other countries, even Japan. In America, the foreign exchange aspect hardly affects domestic politics. When the Americans had a huge double deficit under President Reagan, of which we heard so much—and of which I was rather an admirer—they had no difficulty in financing it, through vast sales of US Treasury bills to the Japanese. We have never been able to do that when we have been in a similar position; we have always had to raise interest rates to a high level to protect ourselves. Analogies with foreign countries are often irrelevant to the British position.

Mr. Forman: Is not the volatility of interest rates— particularly short-term interest rates—most damaging to a country such as ours, which has something of a housing fetish? It also damages small and medium-sized business men, who depend on short-term money. Does not the record show that such volatility is reduced when monetary policy is the sole responsibility of a more or less autonomous central bank? Given a record—under this or any other Government—of abrupt interest rate movements, we must surely favour a more autonomous banking institution.

Sir Peter Tapsell: I do not know whether than can be said with any certainty. I agree that interest rate volatility has been one of the banes of economic management in this country, but I do not think that it would necessarily be much reduced if responsibility for interest rates were transferred to the Bank of England, which would still have to face crises as they came along.

In the German crisis over reunification in recent years, the central bank tried to counterbalance the expansion and slackening of fiscal policy with an excessively stiff monetary policy. There is no historical proof that interest rates would be less volatile if they were controlled by the Bank of England; they must reflect the balance of payments, among other factors.

Britain, as I have explained, is different, because of the importance of our exports, our exchange rate problem and our house mortgage position. Moreover, the Bank of England is different from other central banks: that is often overlooked. I described the ways in which it was different at great length in one of our Maastricht debates, on 24 March 1993, so I shall not fully cover that ground again. It is a fact, however, that the Bank of England has an entirely different range of responsibilities from most other central banks—a much wider range.

For instance, neither the Fed nor the Bundesbank has supervisory responsibilities. They would have had nothing to do with BCCI or Johnson Matthey. There may well be a strong case for removing the Bank of England's supervisory responsibilities; but that is a different argument, and I shall not go into it now.

In comparing the Bank of England with other central banks, we must remember that we are not comparing like with like. The Bank of England is responsible not only for banking supervision, but for the management of the Government's borrowing requirement, the operation of the foreign exchange portfolio and what used to be one of its most important functions—exchange control. In many other countries, those four responsibilities would be carried out by organisations other than the central bank.

The enormous range of the Bank's responsibilities has been one of its great strengths. That is why it has had its finger on the pulse of the City and the international markets, and why—despite the embarrassment that its supervision role has caused it in recent years—it wishes to retain that role. The Bank of England does not think that it can know all the detail of everything that goes on in financial markets unless it can supervise the banks.

The Bank of England is more or less unique in that regard. The proposition that an independent central bank need only focus on its role in monetary policy does not apply to it. Conversely, giving the Bank freedom in that one role but not in the rest of its wide range of roles would produce an administrative dog's breakfast. It reminds me of my later days in stockbroking, when Chinese walls were introduced. It was almost impossible to speak to some of one's colleagues; a separate lift had to be installed in my firm, so that we would not meet any of the chaps in the corporate finance department. I do not think that such moves are administratively sensible, apart from other considerations.

Monetary policy is only one of the many instruments of policy that have a bearing on inflation. If beating inflation is so important—and I agree that it is—and if politicians cannot be trusted to give it the priority that it deserves, logically we should take out of their hands not only monetary policy, but a range of other policies, starting with fiscal policy. I take the opposite, traditional view, however. It is said that war is too important to be left to the generals; I believe that national prosperity is too important to be left to the bankers. That is what makes all these panaceas and gimmicks so fundamentally undemocratic, however much effort is made to disguise the truth by means of artificial and inevitably ineffectual devices to achieve occasional accountability.

One reason for the present level of support for a more independent central bank is the idea that monetary policy is different from other policies. It is seen as a simple technical operation with a single clear-cut objective, and with well-understood and reliable techniques of operation. Let me tell my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, who has been a passionate monetarist over the years and with whom I used to clash in the early 1980s, that that is a delusion. It is the same delusion which led to excessive reliance on monetarism in the early days of the present Conservative Government and the latter days of Lord Healey's Chancellorship.

I frequently used to point out to Keith Joseph, Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher at that time—both in public and in private—that, while control of the money supply was an important instrument of economic management, it was exceedingly difficult even to measure the money supply, and virtually impossible to control it with any accuracy. Over many years, the Government have tried all the Ms, from M0 to M6, in an effort to prove me wrong; and they have failed. We hear very much less now about all these wretched Ms.

Historically, when high inflation has existed in the United Kingdom, it has not been only, or even mainly, the result of lax monetary policy—except, briefly under the Chancellorship of Lord Lawson; and that mainly reflected his mistaken exchange rate policy rather than his interest rate policy. Nor have I ever heard it suggested that interest rate policy has ever been conducted for long on terms of which the Bank of England disapproved, or that interest rates would have been significantly higher or lower in the past 15 years if the Bank had enjoyed monetary independence over that period—although, admittedly, the Bank was a good deal more sceptical about monetarism in the early 1980s under Lord Richardson's governorship than were the politicians, rightly in my view.

The idealised picture of monetary policy that exists in some quarters extends further to the notion of the supposed infallibility of the men who would practise it within an independent central bank. In the same lecture to the Bank of Italy's centenary meeting, Mr. Paul Volcker also said:

> "There are those who look upon monetary policy as a kind of abstract process conducted by a kind of special priesthood imbued with concepts about the money supply and inflation but somewhat removed from contact with the real world."

That is a good satirical description of the view of some convinced monetarists on the subject.

One does not have to look into a crystal ball when one can read the book to see what happened when the Bank of England made all those monetary decisions. People sometimes forget that we had an independent central bank until quite recently. When I first started writing essays at school about the money supply we had an independent central bank—it was not nationalised until 1946. The "special priesthood", to use Paul Volcker's mocking phrase, was epitomised by the two Governors who dominated the Bank of England for most of the preceding years of this century: Lords Cunliffe and Norman.

Andrew Boyle, generally regarded as the best biographer of Montagu Norman, wrote on page 122 of his biography, which I have with me:

> "Cunliffe proved himself a turbulent, mischief-making force to the end."

Montagu Norman described Cunliffe in his diary as a "dangerous and insane colleague". Cunliffe said:

> "The idea of Montagu Norman as Governor simply terrifies me".

Those were the men who ran the independent Bank of England for virtually the first half of this century and made such an appalling mess of the British economy. They helped to bring Hitler to power and brought Mosley marching down Threadneedle street with his blackshirts. Now, some of my idealistic hon. Friends want to give back those powers to that source. That seems to be an incredible misreading of British history. Those were the special priests who ran the Bank of England.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am listening attentively to my hon. Friend. The process of joining the gold standard, maintaining our membership of it and subsequently coming out of it was the result of a political decision. It was the Chancellor who took the decision, and many people around him advised him not to do it, although I accept that the Bank was not one of them. The decision to enter the gold standard was, therefore, a political decision, much like the recent political decision to enter the ERM. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not altogether true that the so-called independent Bank of England was wholly responsible for those problems prior to the war? It was implementing a political policy.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Yes, but it was Montagu Norman who persuaded Winston Churchill to do that. In his old age, Winston Churchill told me that it was the biggest mistake of his political career—bigger even than that over the Dardanelles. He said that he had always regretted that, but the technical experts—Montagu Norman, the banking establishment and the City of London—unanimously advised him to do it.

Such unanimity has now prompted the Select Committee to recommend that we transfer monetary

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powers to the bank of England. We must be extremely cautious about that, as the historical omens have not been good.

It was not only Winston Churchill who had problems with the Bank of England. Andrew Bonar Law as Chancellor of the Exchequer found Lord Cunliffe intolerable. Bonar Law wrote to Lloyd George, then Prime Minister, accusing the Governor of

> "an act of extraordinary disrespect towards the British Government and as I think a direct insult to me."

Churchill, as Chancellor, found Montagu Norman, as Governor, almost as intolerable as Bonar Law had found Cunliffe. The Governors were utterly contemptuous of their Chancellors. If we were to recreate the independent Bank of England in the far more political and democratised atmosphere of contemporary Britain, those tensions would certainly return, probably in heightened form.

We must guard against the danger of the exceptionally agreeable character of the present Governor of the Bank of England misleading us into building permanent institutional arrangements that will one day be operated by much less emollient people. If I want sound advice on monetary policy I go to Sir Alan Walters. My experience of him over the past 10 years has shown me that, on monetary matters, he is nearly always right. He has enabled me to make quite a lot of money for myself by operating in foreign exchange markets following conversations with him—not when he was in office, as it were—on what was about to happen, when everyone else disagreed with him.

If one wanted an expert on monetary affairs with a good track record, and did not choose my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, one would appoint Sir Alan Walters to run monetary affairs. However, much as I admire and like Sir Alan Walters, I would not appoint him as Governor of the Bank of England. Such appointments have to be made on an institutional, not a personal, basis.

Tensions do not simply arise between independent governors and Chancellors; they arise directly between independent Governors and the public and the press. As Andrew Boyle says in his book on the life of Montagu Norman, by 1931 the Governor was "execrated" by everyone outside the top echelons of the City of London. His monetary policy, and that of his close friend and colleague Dr. Schacht, the governor of the Reichsbank, had been seen to be an absolute disaster for years.

Now, with the much more intrusive tabloid press and the immensely sophisticated corps of financial journalists, which did not exist in the 1920s and 1930s, a Governor of the Bank of England who was responsible for a highly contentious monetarist policy, in difficult times of rising interest rates and rising unemployment, would attract an astonishing degree of personal opprobrium. *The Sun* newspaper would take a keen interest in the private lives of even the most staid clerks in the Bank of England. I do not think that those working in the Bank of England have any concept of what they would be letting themselves in for if they accepted responsibility for monetarist policy.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): I fear that my hon. Friend may be contradicting a point that he made earlier, when he argued that the Bill would put monetary policy in a different compartment and seal it off from other aspects of monetary policy. My hon. Friend is now saying that a Governor of the Bank of England with the incremental increase in powers suggested in the Bill would be subject to the pressures and consensus that exist in society in general.

Sir Peter Tapsell: He would be subject to pressures, but not parliamentary discipline. He would certainly attract all the unpopularity that we politicians rightly attract when we get economic policy wrong. But the Chancellor of the Exchequer can be dismissed by the House of Commons if we lose confidence in him. The Prime Minister of the day can dismiss him, as we have frequently seen. But the Governor of the Bank of England is virtually irremovable from office. I do not think that that contradicts anything that I said earlier.

Mr. Legg: My hon. Friend earlier referred to the many mishaps in monetary policy that have occurred over a considerable period. Can he name one Chancellor of the Exchequer who has been dismissed by the House because of his incompetence in dealing with monetary policy?

Sir Peter Tapsell: I believe that the dismissal of the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), occurred because many people in the House felt that he had not made a success of monetary policy. Selwyn Lloyd was dismissed by Harold Macmillan because many of us had lost confidence in Selwyn Lloyd's monetary policy—that is exactly what happens. Irrespective of whether it should have happened, the fact is that it can happen. It would be made much more difficult if an independent Governor of an independent bank were running these matters. He would attract enormous personal opprobrium and Threadneedle street would become very much like Rupert Murdoch's Wapping. The Bank of England would not like that.

In practice, the Bank has escaped virtually unscathed from the recent ERM crisis because of its consitutional position. I welcome that, because, of all the nationalisation measures put on the statute book by the Labour Government following the 1945 general election, the first and least controversial and the most successful was the one nationalising the Bank—the Act which my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West now wishes to amend.

Winston Churchill had five years of unhappy experience as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1920s dealing with an independent central bank. On 16 August 1945, as leader of the Conservative Opposition, he made his first speech in the House after the 1945 defeat. It was one of his greatest speeches and what he said in it about the Balkans could be said today. It was the speech in which he first mentioned the iron curtain. He did not, as is often claimed, first mention it at Fulton, Missouri in 1946. In the course of that great speech on the Loyal Address, Winston Churchill said:

> "The national ownership of the Bank of England does not in my opinion raise any matter of principle.—[*Official Report*, 16 August 1945; Vol. 413, c. 94.]

Oliver Stanley, speaking later on Second Reading, as the Tory Front-Bench spokesman on finance—another great lost leader of the Tory party—did not make any severe criticism of the proposed nationalisation of the Bank.

It has always been accepted by the more numerate Conservatives—I use a neutral phrase—that the 1946 Act that nationalised the Bank of England is a good basis on which to operate our economic affairs.

Mr. Forman: Many of the earlier arguments in my hon. Friend's magisterial speech were devoted to excoriating the power of fashion in economic doctrine, but he has just given a vivid example of that same point. It was fashionable in the post-war consensus to approve of nationalisation, but the world has moved on and it is time to denationalise this institution and give it greater independence.

Sir Peter Tapsell: My hon. Friend is not quite right. It was not fashionable in the Conservative party to favour nationalisation. We bitterly opposed every nationalisation measure in the 1945 Parliament, except the one for the Bank of England. That was because Hugh Dalton, the Labour Chancellor, on moving the Second Reading of the 1946 Bank of England Bill, said:

> "We do not intend any day-to-day interference by the Government or the Treasury with the ordinary work of the Bank. On the contrary, we intend to leave that ordinary daily work, much of it of great importance, with confidence to the Directors and to their efficient and well-trained staff."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 1945; Vol. 415, c. 44.]

The post-war Labour Government were as good as their word. All Governments have supported Hugh Dalton's concept of how the Act should operate.

In the English way, much has depended on the personalities involved. My experience of the City, which stretches over 35 years, has been that attempts at codification, of which this Bill would be another, are usually counterproductive. The Governor's eyebrows were a great deal more efficient than sterling M3 or the Securities and Investments Board. Strong Governors such as Lord Cromer and Lord Richardson may have shown more independence than some other Governors, but, in practice, the Bank has never been, over a wide range of its responsibilities, either the Treasury's poodle or just its City office.

The Bank has performed its many roles with efficiency and distinction. At a time when many of our national institutions are under attack by cynics, as the Chief Secretary to the Treasury pointed out in his admirable lecture a fortnight ago, the Bank of England, along with the armed services, is still a part of our national life which is greatly respected. In addition, the Bank is immensely admired throughout the world. Those who attend, as I have attended, almost every IMF meeting in the past 30 years, will know that, in private, all the central bank governors speak with enormous respect of the Bank of England. Of all the central banks, it is the one which is most admired.

As a good Tory, I am instinctively reluctant to tamper with the roots of healthy trees, a point of view that I would have expected my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West to share. My hon. Friend has performed a service by giving us the opportunity to debate these matters, but, for the practical, historical and philosophic reasons that I have given, I hope that elected Members of Parliament who are temporarily appointed to ministerial positions in the Treasury and fully answerable day by day to the House, will continue to conduct the monetary, as well as the fiscal, policies of our great trading nation.

11.44 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The nature of the debate has changed somewhat from that of Second Reading of a private Member's Bill to a general review of the evolution of monetary policy during this century. I should like to return to the Bill and I commend the initiative of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) in airing what has become a fashionable idea.

The hon. Gentleman's initiative appears to be part of a concerted campaign. We have had reports from the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service and from the CEPR under the chairmanship of the noble Lord Roll of Ipsden, and a new Governor of the Bank of England has been appointed. All that has led to an opening up of ideas and the running of this hare.

Both the Select Committee and the Roll committee started work last spring in the aftermath of Britain's withdrawal from the exchange rate mechanism in September 1992. Their work was reinforced by the difficulties of France and other countries in July 1993. That wrecked the Maastricht timetable and postponed the prospects of early monetary union in Europe.

In that situation, the Chancellor, robbed of his nominal peg of an exchange rate target, having long since abandoned money supply targets, had to find another nominal peg by which to control inflation. he took the ultimate one, inflation itself, and adopted the target of 1 to 4 per cent. per annum as a practical, operational objective of current economic policy.

Previously, that had been dismissed as impossible because there is so much else that affects inflation. To bolster the credibility of that peg, the Chancellor invited the Bank of England to produce what it said would be an independent report on inflation. The first inflation report was issued in February 1993 and gave the Bank's view of the inflation process. It still makes good reading. The Bank argued that inflation is a monetary phenomenon, and that in the long run, monetary policy determines the rate of inflation. It argued that there was no necessary long run causality from costs to prices but that both reflect underlying real and monetary shocks. In other words, it has shifted its ground. Real shocks affect prices—affect inflation. But in the short run, it argues, the dymanics of the inflation process mean that changes in costs are a leading indicator of changes in prices. In other words, money may cause the increases in prices, but we will see the changes in costs first. Therefore the inflation report contains a consideration of the costs of imports, of the exchange rate, of commodity prices, of unit labour costs, of business margins and of indirect taxation.

Having dealt with such a wide background to the whole economy, the Bank reverts to saying:

> "Monetary conditions are the principal determinant of inflation in the long run."

It makes

> "an analysis of monetary and fiscal policy. The former [monetary policies] relates to short-term developments in monetary conditions and the latter"

—that is fiscal policy—relates

> "to expectations of future monetary conditions in the medium term."

In other words, it is not monetary policy that is creating the medium-term prospects of inflation; it is fiscal policy that is creating those medium-term conditions.

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

So the Bank considers in its inflation report monetary policy instruments, interest rates and monetary aggregates, but then it continues to consider fiscal policy. It argues that the rate at which inflationary pressures respond to the monetary stance depend on demand and supply conditions in product and labour markets. So it considers business and consumer optimism surveys, debt, capacity utilisation, unemployment and inflation expectations. Initially, therefore, the Bank, in its outline of inflation, said that it was examining virtually the whole economy.

It is true that initially, in February 1993, there was fleeting reference only to competitiveness and to the balance of payments, but that increased in August to November once the Bank became a little more confident about what was happening in the balance of payments, because we had the black hole of no trade figures early in 1993. There is still no mention of total factor productivity and of endogenous growth, but one may be sure that it will not be long before the Bank climbs on to those bandwagons.

Effectively, the Bank is mapping out a picture of the entire economy in the context of its so-called independent inflation report. I do not argue with the pattern of its exposition. It is a straightforward and fairly eclectic view of the inflationary processes, but it is no basis for the assignment of the instrument of monetary policy simply to control inflation. There is no attempt to justify that in the Bank's inflation report.

Further, in its background argument, the Bank has published no research that I can find—not in the reviews at least—during the past year which has any bearing on that. There is a bit of work on something called VAR—vector autoregressive estimates of forecasts—but that is a "black box" method for checking on the forecasts made by more economic and less handle-turning methods, and there is an exercise in the assessment of divisia measures of money.

The hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) referred to the sorry history of the Members. The current fashion is that no particular Member will do. One tries different averages of all the Members and one searches for an average of all the Members which behaves as one expects it to behave. That was considered recently by the Bank of England, but nothing here considers the actual ways, given one's objectives, in which one sets instruments. The Bank in its own internal research is not equipped to do that. It is narrowly defined, a fairly technical thing—given these objectives, how does one adjust the instruments to achieve what one wants?

The Treasury can do it. The Treasury has been doing it for years, but the Bank has never equipped itself to do it. Further, the economist in the Bank of England—Brian Henry—who has the best published track-record of work in that field has latterly been posted to Washington. As far as I can see, the Bank has no one who is expert in that area at all. The talk in the inflation report, in technical economic terms, is just so much waffle.

I am sorry that the Treasury Committee does not get round to examining those things in the way in which we used to in the early days of that Committee. As a founder member, I well remember the efforts that we made to get at the underlying economic argument. Unfortunately, little attention is paid to that in the report on which the Bill is based.

Inflation is affected by just about everything and by all the instruments used by the Government in their economic policy. Those instruments affect just about everything else, so technically to assign one instrument to one objective is bound to produce an inferior solution. Let us consider the practical situation on black Wednesday. Given the stance on fiscal and monetary policy, the notion that the Bank could control the exchange rate was not on. In such circumstances, there is not a public row between the Treasury and the Bank.

To reminisce, I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to George Brown in 1964 and during the first sterling crisis I witnessed the half-hourly telephone calls between George Brown and the Bank of England, stating that so many hundreds of millions of pounds had gone. George Brown made frantic and hectoring calls to Dr. Blessing in the Bundesbank. That is not the image that the public have of what happens during a sterling crisis, but there is no public row. The damage is done in the months and years beforehand in which the conditions are created that make such a situation inevitable in today's speculative financial markets.

Where do we go from here? The Roll committee is a different animal from the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. Incidentally, Eric Roll is not inexperienced in the handling of fashionable ideas. He was the permanent secretary to the Department of Economic Affairs when George Brown produced the national plan before later going on to other things in the City. Realising that one could not build a case on the assignment argument of using monetary policy to stabilise inflation, the Roll panel appealed to credibility.

Before black Wednesday, we were told that interest rates would be higher if we devalued because of the loss of credibility. Had I known that the ex-Chancellor was going to be here today, I would have dug up the speeches that he made at the time assuring us that that would be the practical effect, that we should have higher interest rates if we abandoned the exchange rate mechanism.

Of course, the real problem was that before black Wednesday the policy stance had ceased to be credible in the financial markets because the markets had ceased to believe that a Government would continue paying the cost, in jobs, growth and output, that resulted from our trying to maintain the exchange rate. The real economy made the monetary stance incredible.

Credibility has nothing to do with the degree of masochism with which one is prepared to take the slings and arrows of outrageous financial conditions; it is about one's ability, in the political reality, to continue to do what one says that one is doing. The Government ceased to be credible. It was not simply a matter of commitment to a financial target. One can scarcely restore one's credibility, in real or political terms, by assigning the instrument of monetary policy to the particular target of inflation and parcelling it up to hand to the Bank of England.

The metaphor of juggling balls is confusing and misleading because it suggests short-termism and that there is something clever in what one does this week and next week and what one did the week before.

It is not that kind of game. If they are balls that are being juggled, they are huge balls of dough, which flump around and cannot be pushed down the corridor, but, nevertheless, roll and sweep people out of the way. Such vast, amorphous tides in the economy need to be anticipated and sensed in the months and years ahead.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and the Roll panel sought to tackle that problem by correcting the economic argument and by altering the political accountability of the Bank of England. That was to be achieved by appearances before the Treasury Committee, by debates in the House, by approval of orders, and by an emergency override for the Treasury. I am a supporter of Select Committees. I was a founder member of the Treasury Select Committee and was a member of other Committees before and have been since. The Bill, or an amendment to a Government Bill, presents a more realistic picture of the real powers and the ways in which they are exercised. Select Committees cannot act as an executive override with present concepts of parliamentary accountability.

A recent example of a Committee that came nearest to moving in that direction was the Select Committee on Industry which discussed the coal crisis. It produced a well-argued and practical report which appeared to have the support of Government Members, and there was some indication of dissatisfaction on the Government Back Benches. Potentially, that Select Committee report could have shaped Government policy, but political pressures overrode it. One can wager that we shall see in future that the Whips' office will be at it to ensure that future appointments to the Industry Select Committee do not include those subversive Tory Members who might undermine the Government's ultimate control over that Select Committee. That was what happened in the Treasury Commitee in 1983. It was overruled by the Whips' Office and never allowed to exercise its degree of independence. At the time, we had Kenneth Baker, Terence Higgins and a number of others who——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that Members are not referred to by their names but by their constituencies.

Dr. Bray: I beg your pardon, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was unforgivably lapsing into informality.

Select Committees cannot possibly act as a short-term check on executive mistakes in the way in which the Bill outlines. Clearly, the Bill argues for the assignment of instruments to enable the Bank of England to formulate and to implement monetary policy and to stabilise prices, and for the Treasury to set inflation bands and have a temporary override and to direct the Bank to aim monetary policy at other objectives if things come unstuck.

I give half a cheer to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West for raising the issue, but I am afraid it comes nowhere near the right diagnosis or answer. I encourage the Treasury Committee to look further.

There is a void in the economic and financial objectives of the Government. Simply having an inflation target of 1 to 4 per cent. is not an operational guide, because inflation is such a long-term phenomenon. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are committed to low inflation, but we are also committed to the other objectives of growth, managing the balance of payments and restraints on public borrowing

There was an operational framework in the Maastricht treaty to which hon. Members on both sides of the House were committed. It did not encompass growth and it did not deal with the balance of payments in the same way as it dealt with borrowing requirements, the debt-income ratio and the rate of inflation. Nevertheless, it was a set of objectives which was achievable within the field that it tackled.

The difference within the parties related not to the reasonableness or desirability of those objectives or to the process of convergence in Europe in a common move towards the achievement of greater stability in underlying conditions. The difference within the parties related to the whether it was appropriate to abandon elements of sovereignty and our ultimate control of the exchange rate.

The Maastricht framework is still on the statute book —a commitment to the outline of European policy. It may not appear very relevant in the short term, but nothing stays still for very long in the world's economy and, sooner or later, we shall have to get back to the formulation of reasonable objectives. I believe that the framework set out in the Maastricht treaty is one to which we shall return. We shall be forced to do so and we shall find ourselves able to do so because we have had a bit of a fright. The political effects of that are only just being realised by Conservative Members, who express incomprehension at the fact that their party is being labled the party of economic irresponsibility by comparison with the Labour party. Perhaps we have both changed.

At the moment, people differ not on the objectives but on the technical question of how we can shape our economic policy in pursuit of those objectives. It is at this time of doctrinal uncertainty about the underlying shape of policies that Select Committees can play their most useful role in analysing the problems and pointing the way ahead. The Treasury Select Committee did that in its 1981 report on monetary policy, which pointed out that one cannot ignore the exchange rate. The Government followed that advice.

The steps that the House can take are perhaps best illustrated by an amendment that I moved to the Industry Act 1975, which required the publication of forecasts, access to models and so on. The amendment, as originally moved, required the Government to set out their priorities. Once Governments have described their priorities, we can proceed to the technical task of finding the instruments that will be most likely to achieve those objectives. That is the kind of work that the Treasury and the Treasury Select Committee can do now, but which the Bank has abandoned.

I hope that the Bill will get no further than Second Reading. The debate on it has been useful but I hope that the public debate will now shift from the gimmick of the concept of the independence of the bank to address the much more important question of how objectives of economic policy should be formulated and how instruments of economic policy should be directed at achieving them.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order of which I have given you brief prior notice, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish to draw to the attention of the House the killing in Bosnia of a British aid worker, Mr. Paul Goodall, and the injury of two other British aid workers. As we express our sympathy to Mr. Goodall's relatives and friends, I am sure that the British public will want us to ask what the Government propose to do to ensure that all aid workers and United Nations personnel in Bosnia, including British forces, are protected. With that in mind, would it be possible for the Government to make a statement later today? If not, can we be assured that a

[Mr. Max Madden]

statement will be made by the Foreign Secretary on Monday to provide information about the background to this tragic incident and to tell us what action is to be taken in the matters to which I have referred?

Madam Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman will know, it is not for the Chair to call for statements from Ministers. I have had no indication that a Minister wishes to make a statement to the House today. However, there are Ministers on the Treasury Bench and I have no doubt that they will have heard what the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) has said.

12.10 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I shall be very brief because several of my hon. Friends wish to speak and because my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) has made most of the points that I wanted to make.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) presented his Bill very eloquently. I particularly enjoyed the dying phrases of his speech when he pointed out some of the paradoxes that might be thought to exist between the Government's defence of responsible Ministers—in this case, Ministers responsible for the monetary policy of this country—reporting to Parliament and the decrease in that responsibility through the foundation of the organisations of the EMI and the progress that that has made through the Maastricht treaty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West made a clear, precise and pleasing presentation. However, he was disingenuous. The idea that the Bill does not give greater autonomy to the Bank of England is disingenuous. The Bill starts by saying that it is a Bill to

> "Amend the Bank of England Act 1946 so as to remove the general powers of the Treasury to give directions to the Governor of the Bank".

My hon. Friend made it clear in an intervention that, for some time, he has had it in mind, for various reasons, to give greater autonomy to the Bank. Quite properly, the Bill should be seen from that perspective on both sides of the argument.

At one point, my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West said that the Bill was all about openness. However, I see it in rather a different light. I believe that the Bill removes openness, but I will return to that point later.

I have two arguments against the Bill. I want first to focus briefly on the European dimension. It is not wrong to do that, because if the Bill received a Second Reading and there were further moves towards an autonomous Bank of England, it would be that much more difficult to argue against this country finally joining a single European monetary organisation run by a single central bank of which we would be part.

I do not want to re-run the Maastricht argument, but there is a specific point which I should like to draw to the attention of the House in respect of a single European monetary policy, which would be made easier if we had a single central bank in this country. It relates to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey. He said that there is a relationship between fiscal policy and monetary policy. Nowhere is that clearer than if we conceive of a single European monetary policy run by a single central bank.

If we had such a single monetary policy, there would be a single pricing policy throughout Europe. As there would not be a single wages policy throughout Europe, within the framework of Maastricht, the cohesion fund and so on, there would be the increasing introduction of compensatory fiscal policies. For instance, Greece, which had Greek wages but German prices, would be compensated for the very unsatisfactory position in which that would put Greek wage earners, so a massive fiscal undertaking would inevitably follow.

We cannot distinguish or compartmentalise monetary policy, vital though it is. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West used the word "important", not "exclusive". That point is highlighted by the European dimension in which a separate central bank would lead us.

Even if I am wrong, surely it is plausible that central banks, particularly those that become autonomous, operate as a co-operative. The inevitable result of a co-operative of autonomous central banks is that they focus on a common and fixed exchange rate between their various currencies. The excuse that they use—they certainly used it during the ERM period—is keeping inflation under control. I think that a quiet life is at the centre of the policies that automatically occur when central bankers get together—that is, fixing the exchange rate between their various economies. Even if I am wrong in suggesting that the Bill would make it easier to move to a single currency for this country, a more autonomous central bank, working together with other central banks, is likely to lead us straight back into managed and fixed exchange rates.

Mr. Duncan: Will my hon. Friend consider the other side of the Bill and answer a question that I should like to hear teased out? On one side there is the argument about independence and the question whether there is such a thing. I accept that, to a degree, that matter is ambivalent and not necessarily provable. However, the key point about the Bill is the accountability aspect, which, whatever happens to the idea of independence, is vital and might answer some of the charges about what happened in the run-up to the ERM and subsequently exercising policy within that. I refer to accountability to this Chamber.

Mr. Spicer: That is my second point, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for leading me to it, now that I have dealt with my European worries.

I now refer to the second important issue—accountability. The independence that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West offers would lead to the Bank of England becoming a quango in spades. We must examine the Public Accounts Committee's report on quangos. I have great sympathy with that report. The Bill contains the concept of autonomous operational responsibilities. All hon. Members have written to a Minister on certain matters, for example the Child Support Agency, and received an answer saying, "I am not responsible for day-to-day management. Operational responsibilities have been passed elsewhere"—let us say to the chairman of the Legal Aid Board. I just happen to have had a lot of correspondence with him recently.

If one writes to the chairman of the Legal Aid Board or to the CSA board director, he will say that he is responsible for the day-to-day running, but that he is working within parameters and policies that have been laid down by Ministers and that he cannot answer your question in that respect. The tone of that letter would be different from that which one would get from a Minister. If a Minister is rude to an hon. Member, he can ask rude questions back to the Minister on the Floor of the House.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that we have a lack of responsibility in the case of the Bank of England. However, his claim that by setting up greater autonomy, we would get more responsibility is the reverse of the case. There are so many examples of organisations that have been set up and given something called "operational responsibility". Those organisations must work within parameters that are not their responsibility. We do not get proper answers, and no one is apparently accountable.

I am concerned with the idea that somehow one can hive off something called "operational responsibility", but leave behind apparently the responsibility for setting parameters. That way lies the muddle that we are getting into. I am all in favour of privatising as much as possible, but, ultimately, one leaves the Government with certain responsibilities. The major responsibility that one leaves an autonomous Government is that of managing the economy.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I want to make the point again that this place has, in a sense, been a spectator of so much of what has happened with regard to the setting of interest rates during the past four or five years. In reality, the House would have wanted to have much more say in that. Perhaps if we had had more say, some of the ERM arguments would have been exploded earlier. Does the Bill contain an essence of that, and does my hon. Friend agree that it is a salvageable element, whatever else he may feel about the Bill?

Mr. Spicer: I accept that there is a party structure and a whipping arrangement within Parliament which makes it difficult for individual hon. Members to get across views that are off-centre. I accept that that is the way in which we manage things. The history of the two-party structure sometimes makes it difficult for individual hon. Members to hold Ministers directly accountable for their policies.

It may well be the case that, because of that, Parliament was not effective in holding Ministers properly accountable during what I would see as the debacle leading up to the ERM period, and our exit from it. I do not think that that is an argument in favour of hiving policies off to a great extent, or hiding them behind the closed doors of the Bank of England. I think that it was our fault collectively, although there were individuals who fought against the ERM policy. There is the structure within Parliament of forcing a uniform view, and I accept that entirely.

The question is whether we will obtain greater insight into policy by hiving off large chunks of it to the Bank of England. In my view, we are totally capable of holding government to its collective responsibility, because we have the means.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West has done a great job in exposing an issue that has been lying dormant in many of our discussions for several years. My hon. Friend and others are right in believing that there is a fashion for saying that all our problems would be resolved by hiving off fiscal and monetary decisions to the Bank of England. I disagree with that view. I am glad that the matter has been brought out into the open by my hon. Friend and that we have had an opportunity to discuss it in the way that we have.

12.24 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Bill is best understood as a paving Bill for the independence of the Bank of England. It is for that reason that its deviser is a hero in Threadneedle street. It is to the value of increased independence and autonomy for the Bank of England that I propose to address my few remarks this morning.

I listened with some wonder to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) speaking in the unfamiliar persona of a man who is both meek and mild. I wondered whether this could be the savage disciple of Enoch Powell, the lion of Maastricht that the House has come to know so well. We were presented this morning with a mere humble handmaiden of the Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George.

I put it to the House that both the conclusions of my colleagues on the Treasury Select Committee and the underlying premise of the Bill are based on certain false assumptions. Let me state first and foremost why the issue of monetary policy is so important. One might imagine from the poor attendance in the Chamber this morning and from the looks of puzzlement of some of the members of public in the Strangers' Gallery that monetary policy was a mere arid, technical matter. One might wonder why there should be such feeling, concern and focus on the issue among practical politicians.

Monetary policy is not an arid, technical matter. It is a crucial matter for industry, for which interest rates are vital, and for home owners, who are particularly important in Britain, with its high proportion of home owners. I can do no better than quote some of the evidence on monetary policy given to the Select Committee by an ex-Treasury knight, Sir Douglas Wass. He said:

> "making decisions on monetary policy involves judgments about social welfare and the allocation of costs and benefits on a large scale between different sections of the population—judgments of a kind that we all recognise as essentially political."

The fact that decisions on monetary policy are essentially political led me to dissent from the view expressed in the Treasury Select Committee report and leads me to oppose the Bill.

Monetary policy is not an arid, technical matter which a few bankers in a back room can deal with quietly. It is a matter at the centre of the political debate in Britain. The first fallacy that underlies the conclusions of my colleagues on the Treasury Select Committee and which underlies the Bill is the notion that there is some automatic causal relationship between an independent central bank and a strong economy and low inflation.

My colleagues on the Treasury Select Committee were so enthusiastic, gently nudged by Mr. Eddie George, to scramble on the bandwagon of independence that they did not take the trouble to read and listen to the evidence brought before the Committee. The conclusion of our own Clerk was that there was

> "no conclusive evidence of a causal relationship between the status of the central bank and inflation performance."

That is what the evidence says, as opposed to what fashionable commentators and the chattering classes now try to nudge the House towards.

[Ms Diane Abbott]

The truth is that the bandwagon of independence as the answer to the long-term economic decline in Britain is centrally based on the West German experience. Until recently, Japan had one of the most successful economies in the world. It does not have an independent bank. The argument that I put to my colleagues and that I put to the House is that one cannot extrapolate from the West German experience to make a watertight model that proves that purely from the creation of an independent central bank will flow the benefits of low inflation and growth that we saw in West Germany.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: I am sorry, but I should like to make some progress.

The point is important because the balance of argument rests on a single pinpoint, the West German experience. I believe that one cannot, academically or intellectually, extrapolate from the West German experience and argue, as my colleagues seem to think one can, that there is a direct causal relationship between having an independent central bank and having West German standards of economic growth, and thus a West German-type strong economy.

Mr. Livingstone: The most recent example of a country moving towards having an independent central bank is, of course, Russia. Does my hon. Friend agree that that has not been a particularly good indicator of an independent central bank helping to reduce inflation?

Ms Abbott: I should think that the Russian experience is that not only is an independent central bank not the ideal weapon for fighting inflation, but it is not necessarily something that brings about great social cohesion and stability.

If there is no academic basis for believing that an independent central bank automatically brings low inflation and a strong economuy, what is the overwhelming attraction of it to hon. Members on both sides of the House? I believe that it would allow politicians to shuffle off the responsibility for interest rate levels that might well be democratically unacceptable to the population as a whole.

During our inquiries leading to the production of the report, the Treasury Select Committee was fortunate enough to meet Mr. Camdessus, the current president of the International Monetary Fund and an ex-governor of the Bank of France. In that knowing French manner, Mr. Camdessus put it to us that we as politicians should see the attraction of an independent central bank, because it would allow politicians to avoid the unpleasant political and democratic consequences of interest rates that are too high.

Although I understand the cynical argument for not allowing people to express their anger at high interest rates by directing it at politicians, who then say "Well, it is not us; it is the Governor of the Bank of England", I cannot see how anybody could argue that that would lead to an increase in democracy and accountability. Politicians and commentators who argue for an independent central bank are arguing for a monetary policy that is characterised by the slogan, "Not me, guv. Go and see Eddie George".

Another argument for the Bill, apart from what I believe to be the totally false argument about a causal relationship between an independent central bank and low inflation, and apart from the rather cynical argument that politicians do not like to bring forward, and that is behind much of the debate on the subject, is the notion of accountability. As someone who sat thorugh almost all the evidence-taking sessions, has read the Bill and is familiar with the report, let me say that the notion that, either in the recommendations of the Treasury Select Committee or in the Bill, there is any real advance towards accountability is wholly fraudulent.

What in the Bill and the report does that increased accountability boil down to? There is the much-vaunted override, which is referred to in clause 5 of the Bill. Many hon. Members have far longer experience of politics than I have and have been in and out of government, but I put it to the House that the override in clause 5 and in the Treasury Select Committee report is, in practice, wholly unusable; it could not be used in that form. It would become a weapon that was too dangerous to detonate. There is an element of fraud in hon. Members talking blithely about democratic override, which could not, as they know perfectly well—we discussed it among ourselves in Committee—in practice, be used.

In terms of accountability, another great gain that we are told that the Bill and the Treasury Select Committee recommendations encompass is the notion of greater openness. We saw the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West standing before us, in his unaccustomed meek and mild guise, fluting sweetly about greater openness, as though greater openness in Government has ever been any particular concern of his.

Let us look at the greater openness that the Select Committee's recommendations and the Bill are supposed to amount to. It amounts to debating parliamentary orders. How many hon. Members here have stayed up recently to debate them? Such orders are notorious, because they are debated in the middle of the night by a handful of hon. Members. That is a wholly ineffective method of rendering any institution or policy accountable. Little time is given to debate those orders and few hon. Members take part in the debates.

We have heard a lot about how the Governor will come before the Treasury Select Committee to give evidence and account for himself. I would welcome yet another opportunity to hear Mr. Eddie George rumble on in his amiable and affable fashion. But where does the accountability lie in the Governor appearing before the Select Committee when it does not have the right to hire or fire or even to approve the appointment of the Governor? It has no direct control over policy. It would be charming to hear Eddie George rumble on in his inimitable, affable fashion, and his comments might be interesting to read, but that would not add one jot or tittle to effective, practical political control over monetary policy.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Surely the argument about parliamentary orders is not whether they are debated late in the evening by a certain number of hon. Members, because the blame for that lies with politicians. The opportunity to debate exists, and if we do not make use of it, it is our fault. Surely the argument should be that not enough time is allocated for the debates and that more is required.

Ms. Abbott: I accept that point, but I repeat that the proposals in the Bill and the Select Committee recommendations, which their supporters tout in evidence of the hugely enhanced means of accountability that will result, are token gestures. They will not give politicians, and, more importantly, the people any further direct control over monetary policy, which is so important to their lives, their jobs and their ability to pay their mortgages.

There is no academic or economic argument to suggest that there is a direct relationship between an independent central bank and inflation. The Bill will not result in any huge improvement in the methods of accountability, so why are so many hon. Members scrambling on to the independent bandwagon, as the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West has suggested? In part, they are victims of fashion. I can do no better than quote from "General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money" by Keynes, who said:

> "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual infuences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist".

If there was ever an example of that Keynesian theory, it is the current fashion in the press and in the House to talk about independence as some solution to what I suspect is the long-term economic decline of the British economy.

The problem with the Select Committee recommendations and the Bill, and the reason why I believe that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West and some of his colleagues have latched on to the proposals with such alacrity, is that they would institutionalise monetarist policies and the monetarist emphasis on low inflation above every other consideration.

Mr. Duncan Smith: There we have it.

Ms Abbott: Yes. It would institutionalise monetarism in our political processes. That is why enthusiasm has been displayed by such xenophobes as the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West for what is, essentially, a foreign notion. That is why I am still amazed that my colleagues could find it in themselves to sign the Select Committee report.

One of the problems that politicians often encounter is that it is sometimes difficult to interest the wider public and the popular press in issues which, although they are vital, seem very boring. Monetary policy is a case in point. I can only repeat what has been said throughout today's debate: the issue is too imporant to be left to bankers.

Let me quote again from a Treasury knight, Sir Douglas Wass. According to him,

> "It is not the job of central bankers to judge how far it is right to go on damaging the standard of living of some members of the community or destroying the jobs of others, in order to bring inflation on to some particular path".

That, essentially, is the reason for my opposition to the Bill, and that is why I would not sign the Select Committee report.

All hon. Members should take the trouble to read not just the report but the evidence presented to the Committee, which will reveal that some of the fashionable theories about independence that are being touted by politicians of all parties have no basis in fact. The notion of independence will join five-year-plans, little Neddy, monetary targets and the ERM: it will be seen as one of the series of failed nostrums for the underlying cause of the economy's failures.

I believe that any move towards greater independence and autonomy for the Bank of England in regard to monetary policy would be anti-democratic. It would not be defensible in any economic or academic terms. No doubt both the Select Committee report and the Bill have brought a smile to the faces of Mr. Eddie George and his colleagues in Threadneedle street; but it is not too late for hon. Members to consider the fundamental issues of democracy that underlie this debate on democracy.

12.41 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) on winning the ballot, and on choosing to frame his Bill around such an important issue. I thank him for doing me the honour of asking me to sponsor the Bill; I do so with great pleasure.

I agreed strongly with at least one thing said by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). This is not merely a technical issue; it is a matter of major national importance. The future of the pound, and the monetary framework in which we are to lead our national lives, are issues essential to the achievement of our economic ambitions—and, indeed, to the maintaining of national self-confidence.

It would be a great shame—and, to some extent, a dereliction of parliamentary responsibility—for us not to take the opportunity presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West to debate this Bill, not only at this stage but in Committee. That will encourage the public who sent us here to consider the matter, absorb the arguments, send us representations and continue to discuss an issue which—whatever happens this afternoon—will not go away.

For two reasons, the Bill is especially pertinent now. First, we have brought recorded inflation down to the lowest level for 30 years—the lowest level achieved in the adult lifetime of many hon. Members who are present today. That is thanks to decisions made by Ministers and, in large measure, to the decision to join the ERM. The great question is whether we can sustain that achievement. Can we prevent inflation from roaring ahead again? Have we cured definitively, or merely suppressed temporarily, the besetting British disease of inflation? Inflation was at the heart of our relative post-war economic decline; it was also one of the major sources of the lack of national self-confidence from which the country has suffered for too long.

What can we do to lock in that achievement of low inflation—to prevent inflation, and inflationary expectations, from emerging again? If there is an institutional measure to be conceived that is likely to produce that result, it is the one proposed in the Bill.

The second reason why it is pertinent for us to discuss the subject now is the international context. Only a few years ago it was exceptional for any country to have granted a central bank independence in the conduct of monetary policy. Until recently, the only examples were Switzerland, Germany and, to a slightly qualified degree, the United States. But it has now become the norm in the western world.

I am not suggesting for a moment that we in the House should be influenced by fashion. We should not consider making institutional changes, let alone any as important as the one that we are discussing today, merely because that appears to be the fashionable thing to do in the world. If we

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

believe that the fashion is misconceived, we should not follow it. But it would be thoroughly irresponsible not to take account of what is going on in the world.

There is competition among the different currencies in the world. International investors have a wide choice of convertible currencies in which to hold their assets. We want them to be keener to hold their assets in sterling than in other currencies, as that will mean, over time, that there are lower real interest rates in sterling than in other currencies. We must ensure that investors believe that the chance of the devaluation of sterling against other currencies, over time, is small, and the chance of revaluation is correspondingly high. We must improve our monetary credibility.

Many other countries have acted in a way that they consider will increase their monetary credibility. Some of them are neighbouring countries in the European Union such as Holland and France, as well as those hoping to join the European Union such as Sweden. Other countries on the other side of the world that have nothing to do with the European Union, such as New Zealand, have also taken interesting steps in the same direction. We must be concerned that we may not only not enjoy a competitive advantage, but actually have a competitive disadvantage if it appears to potential holders of sterling that the parity of sterling and the extent of growth of the monetary supply in this country are still at the behest of political pressures to a greater degree than in other countries. Those are two reasons for considering the subject today and for being grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West for giving us the opportunity to do so.

Something remarkable has happened in the House. In the Treasury Select Committee, on which I have the honour to serve, we achieved a remarkable consensus between the three parties represented, with the sole exception of the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington, as she conceded.

There are differences of emphasis between us, and differences in some of our recommendations on the future shape of the Bank of England. But we were agreed on four essential points. The first subject of agreement was the importance of price stability and the need to prevent inflation from re-emerging in this country. It is clearly set out in paragraph 73 in the Select Committee's report. It states:

> "the maintenance of price stability should be the primary objective of monetary policy."

There are many other such statements. We would not have obtained the consensus of the three parties on that subject, certainly not in that sense, a few short years ago.

Secondly, there was general consensus that there are strong theoretical grounds for believing that the greater the degree of independence of the institution responsible for the conduct of monetary policy from party political and electoral pressures, the greater the integrity with which that monetary policy will be pursued, and the greater will be its constancy and credibility and therefore its effectiveness in achieving and maintaining price stability.

Thirdly, there was general acceptance of the great weight of empirical evidence that in practice there is a strong and postive correlation between the degree of independence of monetary institutions and inflation. That is so clear that the country that has given the greatest independence to its central bank, Switzerland, is top of the league for monetary performance measured by price stability since the second world war. Second in that league is the Federal Republic of Germany. The United States is somewhat lower, but we know that the federal reserve system is slightly more at risk of being influenced by political pressures.

Only one country stands out from the general trend on the graph: that is Japan, but it is a special case because for 40 years until last year the Government of Japan was in the hands of a single political party, the Liberal Democrats. That party was committed to sound monetary principles, but it was never at serious risk of losing power, and for that reason monetary policy was not subject to the short-term electoral pressures that prevail in other democracies. Until the past few months the key power plays in Japanese politics were within and between factions in the ruling party rather than between parties. That goes a long way to explain that sole exception. It is unusual in economic affairs to have such a clear empirical relationship between an institutional framework and measurable economic outcome. That was the third important matter on which the Committee agreed.

Fourthly, the Committee agreed that the Bank of England is more than capable, by virtue of its world reputation and the proven confidence of the people who run it, from the Governor and the court to the various departments, of playing just as effective a role as an independent central bank as the role currently played by the Bundesbank and the Swiss national bank. There is therefore little reason not to capitalise on those talents and on the Bank's reputation and allow it to do for us what those other institutions have successfully done in their respective countries. There was considerable consensus on this important issue.

There was agreement in the Committee between all three parties, with only one person dissenting on these points which perhaps amount to 85 per cent. of the argument. But, of course, beyond that there are divergencies. I diverge on one or two matters in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West has generously said that if the Bill goes to Committee he will be prepared to look at those matters. Perhaps I may anticipate some of the arguments which I hope will be heard at greater length in that Committee. For reasons that I fully understand, my hon. Friend sets out the possibility of a parliamentary override of the monetary policy being pursued by an independent Bank of England. I understand the strong reasons for democratic accountability and the sovereignty of Parliament that will cause many hon. Members to agree with my hon. Friend.

I think that that is misconceived, and the reason goes to the heart of the argument about democratic accountability, which my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey, (Sir P. Tapsell) developed this morning at some length. The reason is this. I believe that it is inappropriate for a non-elected agency to determine the complex moral and political trade-offs between different policy objectives, which can only, in a democracy, be debated openly and be determined by a representative body such as the House of Commons.

But that is not to say that it is not thoroughly reasonable for us to decide democratically that we wish to endow ourselves with a better chance and better mechanisms of achieving price stability and therefore that we shall give to an institution, the Bank of England, a specific and single technical task—to achieve price stability. That is a democratic decision. We are saying to the Bank, "We would like you to produce a monetary framework in which businesses, Government, employers, employed, savers and consumers can plan their affairs and operate—a framework of stability."

That is a framework which would replicate the objectivity of the monetary system that we enjoyed for three generations before 1914, in the heyday of the gold standard. At that time, the supply of money in the world was not determined by politicians' choices. It was determined by an entirely objective fact—an exogenous fact, as economists would like to call it, no doubt—which was the supply of gold in the world. That was a fairly arbitrary factor, and there was always a danger that, as did occur, if someone found more gold in the Yukon or elsewhere prices throughout the world would increase as a result.

I am not for a moment suggesting that we should return to the gold standard, but the degree of objectivity that the gold standard provided before 1914, which assured a stable monetary environment, was a framework in which the human race enjoyed a level of growth rates, of output, of employment, of prosperity and of international trade, which was unprecedented.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey dwelt a lot on the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, but if he had looked a little further back he might have found himself inspired, rather than put off, by examples of greater monetary stability.

Another aspect of my hon. Friend's Bill may be misconceived. That is the suggestion that Parliament should quantify price stability and should state that a specific price index has to be targeted. That is a dangerous principle because there never has been agreement between experts or even non-experts as to what index is the best reflection of inflation, and the Bank of England continually produces a series of new indices which, it believes, better reflect inflationary conditions.

No one believes very much these days in the retail prices index—RPI. We have been focused for some time now on RPI X, which excludes mortgage interest. The Bank of England has now suggested that we should watch a third index, RPI Y, which excludes mortgage interest and indirect taxes. No doubt, as the months and years go by, a plethora of alternative indices will be proposed. Therefore, any monetary policy that is expressed in terms of hitting a particular target in a particular index will always be open to question. People will ask whether the appropriate index is being used, because they will say that inflation is much greater than that index would indicate because other indices show a very different result. If Parliament continually changes the indices that it is targeting, that in itself will undermine the policy's stability and credibility.

It is far better that Parliament establishes that an independent Bank of England has a responsibility to maintain price stability. It is then up to the Bank to defend its achievement of that objective—to defend it in the markets, to public opinion, to the House, to the Treasury and to the Treasury Select Committee or to any other Select Committee to which the Bank will, from time to time, have to give an account of itself under the Bill.

Mr. Legg: My hon. Friend is saying that Parliament should be involved in setting the targets and indices, but that does not accord with the Bill. Under clause 3, it is the Treasury which, after consultation with the Governor of the Bank of England, will set policy targets for the Bank's carrying out of its primary objective.

Mr. Davies: I take my hon. Friend's point, but, of course, I am not assuming that we make the Treasury independent of Parliament. The assumption behind my remarks was that Treasury Ministers would still be subject to the House and that whoever happened to be Chancellor of the Exchequer would have to have the House's support and confidence. I am personally very attached to that principle as, I am sure, is my hon. Friend. I do not think that any conflict will arise.

If the targets were defined by the Treasury or by Parliament, there would be a problem deciding how frequently they were to be restated. The Bill is rather coy in this respect and simply states:

> "Policy targets may be set for the term of office of the Governor, or for specified periods during the term of office of the Governor, or for both".

So the targets can be set for any length of time. As we know, there are long time lags between adjustments of monetary policy and the outcome in terms of retail, consumer or even producer prices indices. There can be time lags of one, two, three or even more years in certain circumstances, so it would be absurd if the targets were reset at too short intervals. For example, if a target were reset annually it would be reset long before anyone could know how effective the one set the previous year had been because it would be too early to judge the outcome. If a target were set for a much longer period, there would be a greater chance of spanning a general election and Parliament would then be fully entitled to reconsider it.

That leads me directly to the issue of the parliamentary overrides. There would be a great deal of speculation in the markets about whether Parliament would override or perhaps change the target. I think that both options would be regarded as equivalent dangers. Many people will believe—cynically but perhaps correctly—that if given the chance to fiddle the targets or to introduce an override, politicians would not be able to resist the temptation so the credibility of policy would be undermined and one of the purposes of giving the Bank greater independence would be negated.

If we want to give the Bank greater independence, we must resist the temptation to reduce that independence subsequently in practice, or we shall undoubtedly negate a large part of the purpose in which we are engaged.

The only way to ensure that monetary policy is seen as being thoroughly and definitively emancipated from short-term political pressures is to give the Bank of England an entirely independent status. Of course, nobody can overturn the sovereignty of Parliament and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West is proposing to alter the Bank of England Act 1946, so future Parliaments will be able to alter the Act that may emerge from his Bill. No one would wish to deny future Parliaments that possibility, but that would be an explicit strategic decision, which would be difficult for a political party to take, unless it had promised to do so in its manifesto and it would require a Bill to go through all its stages. It could not be a mere order, which, as the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington said, could be easily slipped through the House without a full appreciation of its risks, dangers and costs.

There are two points that need to be dealt with in that context. One issue was raised by my hon. Friend the

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Member for East Lindsey while talking about the need to co-ordinate fiscal and monetary policy. I am sorry that he is not in the Chamber now, but I enjoyed his speech and his anecdotes about conversations with some of the great figures of the past were fascinating. However, his economic theory had a nostalgic flavour. He was honest enough to say that he considered that the distillation of economic wisdom was the 1944 White Paper on unemployment. He was clearly attached to the formalisation of much of that thinking, which was achieved by Phillips in the 1950s with the famous Phillips curve. My hon. Friend clearly believed that there was a long-term trade-off between monetary rigour and price stability on one side, and employment on the other.

That view is not generally shared today either in financial markets or in academic circles. If one takes the view that my hon. Friend does, that Government should be pursuing different objectives, low inflation, employment, balance of payments and so forth, one is pursuing potentially contradictory policies. Perhaps it is not an accident that Governments who have tried to target different variables believing them to be contradictory have ended up by achieving none of them. That has been the sad story of British Governments since the 1940s——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I am having difficulty in relating the hon. Gentleman's speech to the specifics of the Bill. Will the hon. Gentleman analyse the Bill and not analyse somebody else's speech on a policy which is outside the Bill?

Mr. Davies: I clearly fell into the trap of supposing that because another hon. Member had raised an issue, that issue was considered relevant to the debate.

The separation of fiscal and monetary policy is clearly an issue raised by the Bill and the kind of objection that my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey made was easy to anticipate in the debate. I shall pursue another issue raised by my hon. Friend. If the Bank of England is given the monetary independence sought by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, should it lose any of its existing responsibilities?

The Bank's two main responsibilities are its supervisory responsibility and its responsibility for the management of the public debt. I do not believe—and the Select Committee made it clear in its report that it did not believe—that the Bank should lose its supervisory responsibility. There is a theoretical conflict between the Bank's supervisory responsibility—the responsibility to maintain the integrity of the banking system—and its responsibility for monetary policy. If there were a systemic crisis and a threat to the liquidity of banks, the Bank might be forced to increase the money supply and relax monetary policy which, on general economic grounds, it might not wish to do. I do not think that that conflict can be avoided. It seems to me that one and the same institution should know where the danger signals lie—and be able to pick them up as quickly as possible if the banks are running into trouble—and should be responsible for taking the monetary measures required to deal with that problem if the need arises.

The same does not apply to the Bank's role of handling the Government's debt—or their cash, if they ever have any. There is a much more fundamental contradiction in respect of that role. I cannot conceive of such a case arising in the foreseeable future, but a Government who were heavily overborrowed and had some difficulty in funding their debt might put considerable pressure on the institution acting as its agent in the financial markets—which would have a fiduciary responsibility to get the Government debt away on the best possible terms—to reduce interest rates. The Bank might feel pressurised to do that to help its particular, rather important client, the Government. In those circumstances, there would be a fundamental conflict of interest, which would be extremely disturbing. If the Bank were given independent responsibility for monetary policy, the Treasury should therefore have to make its own arrangements—internal or by sub-contracting or otherwise—for the management of the public debt in future.

1.12 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I will not follow the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). He made his case at some length and it is not necessary for me to dwell on it, except to say that I do not share his view that the Bill is purely a technical measure. We are addressing complex issues and it is not simply a matter of making a technical decision that one aspect of what is currently the responsibility of the Government should be given over to a reformed Bank of England.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: With respect, no. The hon. Gentleman spoke for quite long enough.

Reform of the Bank of England is necessary whether or not we proceed to the third stage of monetary union. The Opposition have a number of proposals to make, and some criticisms of the Bill. In my view, the Bill does not address five crucial points. The first concerns the governance of the Bank of England itself. We believe that the existing court needs to be replaced by a new monetary policy board that would both reflect the interests of the financial world and manufacturing industry and ensure that there was proper representation from the different nations and regions of the United Kingdom. If—and it is a big "if"—we grant greater autonomy to the Bank of England, its decision-making process must adequately reflect the competing and different pressures in the economy and a wider range of interests must be represented on the governing body than at present. That change is necessary now, whether or not the Bill makes any further progress. The Bill has nothing to say about that and, for that reason alone, it ought to fail.

Secondly, there is the important question of what is meant by independence. An examination of central banks throughout the world reveals that there is no clear pattern—indeed, the word "independence" is overused. Some banks that are considered to be independent are more so in practice than in law, and much depends on their reputation and track record. The German Bundesbank is independent by statute, but has shown itself to be open to persuasion by politicians; yet its reputation remains largely intact. As the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), the promoter of the Bill, said, the 1:1 conversion rate on the unification of Germany was determined by political factors and opposed by the Bundesbank in principle, although the bank acquiesced in the event. In that case, it could be argued that, because the question was essentially to do with exchange rates—for which Ministers are responsible in Germany—rather than with monetary policy—for which the Bundesbank is responsible—that is not a criticism which can be levelled against the fact that the Bundesbank is an independent central bank.

However, that episode illustrates the inherent tension between exchange rate policy and a policy on inflation. On the other hand, the United States Fed is less independent in legal terms, but it has a high degree of credibility—at least at the moment. Its governing body is appointed by the President, who is a political creature.

Many central banks are said to be independent, but have Ministers sitting on their boards. Canada and Spain are examples of that. They cannot really be said to be independent if the people who can ultimately take away their power are on the board providing the appropriate nod or wink. There is provision in many cases for the Government to override a central bank. New Zealand is a prime example of that and that is the model which the Bill largely seeks to follow.

It is arguable that if there is an override, there cannot be independence. However, I accept that it is the perception of what is likely to happen that is important, rather than what could happen in theory. Put simply, the argument for an independent central bank is that the public trust bankers more than they trust politicians. It is a question of credibility.

It is said that politicians tend to manipulate interest rates to win elections. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), who was in the Chamber for a short while this morning, was good enough to admit in his resignation speech that this Government did manipulate interest rates for political purposes. Despite the protestations of the present Chancellor, I do not believe that the Government will be able to resist the temptation to use whatever mechanisms they can to try to manipulate victory at the next general election, given the linkage between our interest rates, short-term rates and mortgage rates.

It is argued that bankers, who, it is said, take a long-term view, would be more likely to conduct their interest rate policies to secure price stability. Proponents of that style of independence argue that bankers do not have political views. That seems to be a matter of academic theory rather than practical experience. However, it illustrates the point that if the Bank is to have greater autonomy—and in any event—the membership of the court or monetary policy board must have a far wider membership base than at present. It is not so much the constituencies from which the members come that matters, but their calibre. It is important to have a far greater range of experience than is presently the case.

Independence is an inappropriate term. We should be talking about the appropriate mechanism employed by the Government to operate their monetary policies. Changing institutions does not change the economic culture of a country. The fear of high inflation in Germany, born of the German experience of the 1920s, is the reason why the Bundesbank is probably still trusted more than German politicians. There is no guarantee that an independent central bank in Britain would remove an inflationary tendency. The performance of Mr. Viktor Gerashchenko is a startling example of that.

Reference has been made to the Bank's quarterly report which is a very welcome institution. We will watch with interest to see what it says in future. In an intervention on the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, I said that it would be interesting to see what happens if the Government do not reach their inflation target of 2·5 per cent. by the end of this Parliament. Some have unkindly said that the inflation rate will be closer to 3 per cent. and perhaps higher.

Will the Bank fire a warning shot? We and others will watch with interest to see whether it does. The test of credibility will be whether the Governor is prepared to say bluntly that he thinks there is a problem and does not resort to the form of words so familiar in this country in order to avoid a conflict, or apparent conflict, between the Governor and the Chancellor at what might be a sensitive time.

Interest rates are not the only thing that influence inflationary pressure. The Bill, with its notion of a contract —at least that is what I assume clause 3 means— recognises that other factors apply. Nearly every central bank in the world can be influenced by its Government, either through the appropriate representation on the board or through specific overriding provisions.

I assume that article 107 of the Maastricht treaty was drawn up with that point in mind. It is explicit and states that banks cannot "seek or take instructions" from the Community or national Governments. There are many ways around "seek or take instructions" which would achieve the purpose that many Governments now wish to achieve. They can influence their banks indirectly rather than directly.

Section 4 of the Bank of England Act 1946 is overt. It is quite clear. If we remove it, that would not exclude the appropriate nod or wink in the right club or golf course. The Bill proposes the substitution of a contract, which is another way round the problem.

The Centre for Economic Policy Research report, which has been referred to, chaired by Lord Roll, recognised the problem, which is why it proposed a limited power of override and a very narrow remit. The New Zealand model, in the terms of the Bill, envisages a contract which can be varied. Over the next few years, it will be interesting to see the experience of the New Zealand Government.

I am not concluding that solution out of hand. I am simply saying that the Bank cannot be independent and not independent at the same time. As I have said, independence is the wrong concept. Putting the Bank on a proper footing might be a more appropriate manner of dealing with the problem.

There is another important point, and that is the override. The override provisions are rather like having a nuclear bomb—one can use it in theory, but in practice one knows that one never can. Once it became known, and it would become known very quickly, that the Governor proposed to override the Bank, the consequences on the currency would be catastrophic, which might be helpful in negotiations between the Governor and the principal Finance Minister, but only as long as the Governor thought that the ultimate deterrent would be used.

In theory, we have that situation now. If it were thought that the Governor would resign, the Government would be in substantial difficulties, as would our currency. There is no accountability in that way unless we can use it and we are prepared to use the mechanisms provided for.

There is no doubt that there is a stateable case for a reformed central bank in the United Kingdom. There is something in the credibility argument, whether we like it or not. It is a counter-inflationary force locked into the

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system, although it has to be said that there is no evidence that a central bank's independence is a necessary condition for achieving low inflation rates. However, from examination, it is clear that there appears to be a premium, although we do not know exactly how much it is. Of course, there is the argument about causation, having regard to the political and economic culture that prevails in countries with independent central banks.

The third criticism of the Bill arises from accountability, which is crucial. The hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) mentioned the growth of quangos in the United Kingdom. Perhaps today, only 24 hours after publication of the report of the Public Accounts Committee, which provided such a resounding condemnation of what is happening in quangos that the Government have set up, we should not skip over that matter.

Indeed, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Financial Secretary, who appear to have given up their economic policy and are now given to discussing matters of moral philosophy, might reflect on the fact that quangos, which are now responsible for much Government administration, are not accountable to the House. If one cannot sack someone, he or she is not accountable, to put it crudely. We cannot be satisfied with handing power to the Bank of England in any form unless we address accountability. I do not think that accountability would be met by the sight of the Governor of the Bank of England being doorstepped by the tabloid press every time he put up interest rates. He might be accountable to the press, but he certainly would not be accountable to the House.

Let us acknowledge that the Bank of England is not accountable to Parliament now in practice, although it clearly is in law, at least in constitutional theory. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, many successful independent central banks throughout the world are part of a general constitutional settlement which we do not have. The United States Fed is part of the United States constitutional structure, and the Bundesbank in Germany is in a similar position. Both countries have written constitutions which we do not have. Nomination to the central bank council for the Bundesbank rests ultimately with the Bundesrat, which represents the German Lander, which is part of the in-built checks and balances on the federal Government. We have nothing like that in this country.

In theory, the Chancellor answers to this House, usually after the event. In practice, Ministers will do everything that they can not to answer a question. It was interesting to hear the Chief Secretary this morning trying to sidle out of the commitment that he and his party gave on tax cuts. He is now almost suggesting that they said nothing of the sort. There is a tendency for Ministers to say that, no matter what the policy is, it was nothing to do with them and they knew nothing about it—it is somebody else. The Bill would provide a convenient scapegoat if the need arose.

Of course, the Treasury Select Committee can embark on some cross-examination, but it has a roving role—it is not just to supervise the Bank of England. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). How many times have Select Committee reports been debated in the House? If any autonomy is to be given to the Bank in this matter, it is absolutely essential to have greater accountability. The Bill has nothing to say about that matter, as far as I can see.

Fourthly, what about the Bank's terms of reference, which are absolutely crucial? Again, there appear to be two models. The Bill proposes a narrow objective of maintaining stability in the general level of prices, although there is clause 5 to which I shall return.

Other central banks are also instructed with regard to the aims and objectives of the general economic policy of their country. The Bundesbank is charged with supporting the general economic policy of the federal Government. The terms of reference of the United States Federal bank contain an injunction to promote effectively the goal of maximum employment. The New Zealand model—that is a solution designed for New Zealand and, as hon. Members have said, we should be wary of importing other countries' models and hoping that they will work here—has the concept of a contract. That is an odd concept, although I would not dismiss it out of hand.

The terms of reference are crucial because they raise the question of economic philosophy. That was touched on by Sir Brian Hopkin and Sir Douglas Wass, who pointed out that monetary policy was only one of many instruments that have a bearing on inflation. Government borrowing, taxation, competition policy and pay all have their part, as they said in an article in the *Financial Times* on 22 January. I think that the hon. Member for Lindsey, East (Sir P. Tapsell) might have been quoting from that article in his speech. The article continued:

> "if meeting inflation is so important and the politicians cannot be trusted to give it the priority it deserves, logically we should take out of their hands not only monetary policy but a range of other policies as well."

Clause 5 seems to hint that a broader consideration would be possible. It is not clear exactly what is in mind, but, in any event, as has been conceded, it is an exceptional step. Indeed, it is doubtful whether it could ever be used because its consequences could intervene before it could be used. If politicians, as it is said, are tempted to manipulate interest rates to win elections, why should not the same politicians manipulate fiscal policy? That could be done at the same time as they are telling downright untruths about what they intend to do. We have some recent experience of that in this country.

It is difficult to see how the Government and the Bank could pursue objectives which could be quite different from time to time, such as the competing demands of the price of money and perhaps the need to keep the exchange rate down. There is an inherent conflict there which needs to be addressed.

Finally, there is the question of regulation, which cannot be ignored. The Bill does not deal with that, and it should do. We believe that the time has come to give responsibility for the supervision and regulation of the banking system to a separate body.

I do not accept the conclusions reached by the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding or by the Select Committee. While the steps taken by the Bank of England which are contained in the memorandum submitted in the appendix to the Treasury reports are welcome, I do not believe that they go far enough. I also do not believe that a review of the Bank of England's functions and constitutions can be conducted in isolation from its regulatory functions. The collapse of confidence in the regulatory system in the financial services industry means that a review is long overdue, although the Government have not got around to accepting that yet.

The increasingly blurred distinction between banks and building societies which want to become banks; insurance companies and banks that want to become insurance companies; and other people operating in the field mean that the time has come to embark on a thorough review of the whole regulatory system.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): The hon. Gentleman will know that the Treasury Select Committee is about to embark on a wide-ranging inquiry into financial services regulation. That will encompass all the matters to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, and, once again, will address the question whether the supervision of the banking system should remain a Bank of England function. In the report that is before the House today, the Committee made it clear that it would be reverting to that question in the context of wider financial services regulation.

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee for his brief commercial. I am well aware of the review on which his Committee is about to embark and, as the hon. Gentleman will know as he attends most of these debates, that is a theme that we have been pressing for the past 18 months.

It is most unfortunate that, while the Opposition would like an examination conducted and while the Committee has agreed to do that, so far the Government have not shown much interest in the matter. Perhaps the Chancellor has not got round to reading some of the difficulties which are now arising. There are concerns that are shared by hon. Members of all parties, as a recent debate on insider dealing showed. It is a matter, not just for the Select Committee, but for the Government. There are undoubtedly substantial problems in the regulatory system which the Government need to address.

We are continuing our examination of the constitution of the Bank. For that reason and in the light of the criticisms that I have made, we shall not support the Bill. Hon. Members who have spoken in the debate so far have referred to the cause of an independent central bank as fashionable. I do not know whether it is fashionable or not, but I am certain that we should not rush into something until we have considered all the consequences and taken the opportunity to examine the problems that exist with the Bank of England now, let alone any that may arise in the future.

1.29 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I begin by welcoming the statement that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) put in clause 2 of his Bill of the primary objective of monetary policy as he would see it in the context of the reformed Bank of England that he wishes to create. That is a fundamental about which there is much greater agreement in the House than previously and certainly fundamental agreement between my hon. Friend and the Government.

It must surely be the lesson of our history as well as the lesson that should be drawn from the experience of other countries, that there is no trade-off between growth and price stability. Price stability is what creates the circumstances for maximising economic growth. It is the most benign environment that one can create in terms of monetary policy for the creation of wealth. So I whole-heartedly welcome the commitment in my hon. Friend's Bill to that primary objective.

The primary objectives of monetary policy are much less a matter of argument now within the House and outside than previously. It would be surprising if they were still the subject of argument in the way that they were. We must surely be assumed to have a responsibility to learn the lessons of our experience.

In the past 20 years, three times we have seen inflation rise to levels at which the Government had to take action to bring it down. We have seen three times in that 20-year period the damage that is done to the wealth-creation process and the social fabric by the process of bringing inflation under control. So to those people who say that the Government should pay more attention to social and economic damage caused by recession, I say amen, but please understand why recessions happen and the most important proximate cause of our most recent experience of recession—the failure of Governments to deliver price stability and good monetary discipline.

Ms Abbott: On that point, I draw the attention of the Minister to a recent academic study in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* by Stanners which ended with the conclusion:

> "No evidence has been found to support the notion that a low rate of inflation has in the past and in various countries been associated with improved growth rate".

Mr. Dorrell: I cite two bits of evidence to the hon. Lady. The first is the evidence of experience. The experience of low-inflation countries has been better growth than that of their low-inflation comparators. The second is the evidence of analysis. It is not difficult to understand why it is easier to run a business wealth creation process against a background of monetary certainty that allows long-term planning and allows time for investments to repay the investors. It is easier to do that against a background of price stability than against a background of the short-term planning horizons that are imposed by the stop-go economic cycle.

I simply do not accept the hon. Lady's proposition. The evidence of both experience and analysis supports the assertion that price stability is the best circumstance that monetary policy can create for the generation of wealth. Of course it is true, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) said, that price stability is necessary but not sufficient. Other aspects of economic policy are important to the process of wealth creation. They are not immediately relevant to my hon. Friend's Bill. As I do not intend to speak for very long, I do not propose to talk about them.

For the purposes of the debate, it is common ground at least among everyone other than the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), that price stability is a shared objective. The question is how best to deliver the objective of price stability in our society.

In introducing the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West was at pains to argue that it represented a modest incremental development of existing institutions. He stressed that it was not an attempt to introduce a new and foreign idea—a fancy foreign scheme for managing monetary policy—but an inch-by-inch development of an existing institution. I want to come back to that point, because I do not believe that the Bill is

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accurately characterised in those terms. Before I do, let us be clear that, however modest or immodest the development envisaged in the Bill, it is clearly in an identifiable direction: of something called independence. It has been qualified that it is towards a more independent monetary policy institution and a more independent central bank.

As many hon. Members have said, these are familiar and perhaps even fashionable arguments. They have been deployed and, indeed, accepted by Governments in New Zealand relatively recently, and the new Government of France. They have been advanced in the House, most notably in recent years by former Chancellors of the Exchequer, who have sought to learn from their experience about how monetary policy could be better managed. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling)—I think that I quote him correctly—said that he thought that there was something in the direction of institutional development on monetary policy towards greater independence. The arguments can broadly be summarised: it frees the conduct of monetary policy from day-to-day political interference. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central put it, price stability is better delivered by bankers than by politicians. The depoliticisation of monetary policy is one of the strands of the argument that is put in favour of a more independent central bank; the other is the argument of experience—that if one looks at the experience of other countries, one concludes that a more independent institution tends to be more successful at delivering the objective of price stability.

As I have said, those are familiar arguments. I think, however, that even if the Bill is only a modest development in that direction, it is important for us to consider briefly the strength of the argument in favour of going down that road. It is, of course, as one or two of my hon. friends have pointed out, not open to Government to argue that it is inconceivable for us to proceed down the road towards greater independence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West said, the Maastricht treaty allowed the possibility that we might see more independent conduct of monetary policy.

I do not propose to get involved in arguments about the Maastricht treaty, but when I arrived in the House this morning and saw my hon. Friends taking their places, I did have a great sense of déjà vu. There is no hour of the day in which I have not been in the company of my hon. Friends, who sat in similar places in the Chamber, engaged in the debate about the treaty. I do not propose to go back over that ground this afternoon. I simply want to observe that it is clearly not open to the Government to say that it is inconceivable that we should have a more independent institution conducting monetary policy. Furthermore, that is true, in the context not only of the Maastricht debate, but of the changes that the Government have made in the conduct of monetary policy since 16 September 1992.

The publication of a report on inflation prospects by the Bank of England—it is entirely the responsibility of the Bank of England, and is not something agreed with the Treasury—is a small step in the direction of greater independence for the Bank of England on monetary policy. The decision announced in the autumn of last year by my right hon. and learned Friend the current Chancellor of the Exchequer—that, henceforth, the Bank of England would be responsible for the timing of interest rate changes—is a further step in the direction of greater independence for the Bank of England. The position currently is clear. I think that that answers the point made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), that one must be clear about who is responsible if the accountability mechanism is to work. Where that responsibility currently lies is clear, because the Chancellor is responsible for fixing the level of interest rates and the Bank of England is responsible for managing the announcement of any change in those rates.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman's explanation might be misunderstood, because one might assume that the Bank acts as a press officer for the Chancellor. Surely the hon. Gentleman would like to add that the Bank is expected to give advice to the Chancellor about whether interest rates should go up or down and by how much.

Mr. Dorrell: I accept that the Bank gives advice to my right hon. and learned Friend on that subject, but it is not the only source of advice on monetary policy.

When the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed reads his speech in *Hansard*, he might pause for a second, because I do not believe that the doctrine that he included in it lies at the root of parliamentary democracy. He suggested that responsibility should lie with the party that gives advice. That is a very strange constitutional doctrine and it is not one which I would espouse. According to his argument, responsibility should always lie with civil servants, because we receive advice on monetary policy from those working at the Treasury, as well as advice from the Bank. I stand firmly by the description of responsibility which I gave—the Chancellor fixes the level of the interest rates and the Bank is responsible for the management of the changes to them.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Bank of England gave primacy to domestic monetary targets in its policy-setting agenda and the Government chose to give primacy to other targets, such as the exchange rate, that would lead to real conflict between the Treasury and the Bank of England?

Mr. Dorrell: It is undeniably true that if one institution looks at one set of indicators to govern monetary policy and another institution looks at another set, it is possible that they will come to different conclusions. The important point is that monetary policy in Britain today is conducted on the basis that the Government are responsible for setting out clearly the parameters of monetary policy. That is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, because he is responsible for fixing the rate of interest and the Bank is responsible for managing changes in that rate.

It is not part of my argument that it is inconceivable to move in the direction of greater independence, but, since we are considering a Bill which pushes us a long way down that path, we should also remember that arguments exist that should apply pressure to the brake on that process as well as to the accelerator.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey and others who have emphasised that it would be dangerous for us to allow ourselves to believe that any institution responsible for managing monetary policy, or any set of institutional arrangements, are panaceas, which by themselves guarantee the delivery of price stability.

Few difficult political problems lend themselves to an institutional solution alone. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) pointed out, the Japanese experience of price stability has been extremely good, despite the fact that its central bank is clearly subservient to the Ministry of Finance. I seldom agree with the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) about anything to do with economic policy, but he was right to say that one of the problems for Russia is the independence of its central bank. It is clear that institutional change is seldom a panacea.

When my hon. Friend considers his Bill, which would create new institutions to manage the day-to-day aspects of Government business, he must accept that it is important to ensure that those institutions are accepted not just in different parts of the House, but by the country, as legitimate in terms of the exercise of the power that they would be given. Institutional legitimacy, surely, is an important criterion in the testing of any such changes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Before my hon. Friends become too excited, let me draw an important distinction between the doctrine that institutions must earn legitimacy—which I whole-heartedly espouse—and the doctrine advanced in similar circumstances roughly 12 months ago, which states that independent central banks are in a sense inconsistent with democracy. I do not accept that argument.

It would be absurd to argue that Switzerland, Germany and the United States are not democracies; clearly they are. The difference between our arrangements and theirs is this: they have a separate set of arrangements for the conduct of monetary policy that have become legitimate—to which their populations have become accustomed, and which are accepted in their societies. It is not a question of which set of arrangements is more democratic; it is a question of which set of arrangements is accepted, having earned legitimacy following a period of experience.

Mr. Darling: The Financial Secretary appears to be doing the relatively easy job that I did earlier—that is, criticising the Bill. What is his feeling on the principle? Do the Government support moves towards an independent central bank? I detect a distinct lack of enthusiasm on the Financial Secretary's part, and I assume that he is speaking for the Government rather than for himself.

Mr. Dorrell: I certainly seek to speak for the Government. The Government's view on the principle was set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor when he described himself as an agnostic on the subject; but neither of us is an agnostic when it comes to the proposition that any change must be justified. It must be shown that the change that is recommended would lead to an improvement in the performance of the institution, and to acceptance of that institution in the House and outside.

Mr. Forman: May I clarify that important point of policy? The implication is that the Government could be persuaded of the wisdom of establishing a more autonomous central bank on a new statutory basis.

Mr. Dorrell: I do not think that we envisage that happening in the foreseeable future. When I was asked about the principle, I said that I thought we were agnostic. Surely, rather than becoming involved in a long argument about what new arrangements may be established, we should ask ourselves what, if anything, is wrong with the existing institutions, and how they can be improved. That strikes me as a more informative and interesting way of dealing with institutional change. It is better than starting with a blank sheet of paper, and asking how we would manage monetary policy if we were setting up a new polity.

Mr. Budgen: May I remind my hon. Friend that the Chancellor did not talk about democracy when he last spoke about the matter, on 16 December? He said then:

> "I have an open mind on the subject, although people try to guess my opinion. I have a feeling that the Select Committee's proposal is becoming rather a fashionable cause. We should consider it with care, also taking into account such matters as parliamentary accountability for an increasingly more autonomous Bank of England."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1993; Vol. 234, c. 1257.]

There was no talk of democracy, whatever that may mean in a constitution with a sovereign Parliament; the Chancellor is worried about accountability. How could a central bank in Europe be accountable to this place?

Mr. Dorrell: As my hon. Friend well knows, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was referring to possible developments in response to the Select Committee report in a domestic monetary context. He was not talking about any move in the European context. As I have said, we have debated that subject many times, and I do not wish to return to it today; it is not germane to my hon. Friend's Bill.

Before we proceed to change arrangements on the conduct of monetary policy, we have to ask the difficult question: would the institution be accepted as legitimate in the House and outside when it made unpopular decisions, which those responsible for monetary policy occasionally have to make? Monetary policy, as we have all agreed, is a vital part of economic policy. I said that I accepted the importance of price stability as a vital precondition to economic success. If we are to deliver price stability, the institution in charge of monetary policy has to be able to take unpopular decisions and to have them accepted in the House and outside.

To put it in plain English, how would people outside the House regard what they perceived to be as an independent central bank putting up interest rates? In particular, how would they regard it if, when the issue was challenged in this place, the answer given was, "That's not a matter for me, but for Eddie"? That would not be accepted as a legitimate answer to that question, either in the House or outside. On that basis, it is important to remember the restriction on the pace at which we should allow ourselves to proceed in developing independent monetary policy institutions. It should remind us of the importance of going slowly—it is on that subject that I want to return to the Bill.

The question that the House should ask itself is whether my hon. Friend is right to characterise his Bill as a modest move in the direction of central bank independence. I think that he is understating the substantial change that would be introduced by his Bill. His argument that the Bill involves only a modest change is based on the argument, set out in his article in *The Times* yesterday that under his proposal

> "the Chancellor remains the minister responsible for monetary policy."

That would be true only if the House were to accept a regime where the Chancellor sets objectives under the

[Mr. Dorrell]

terms of clause 3, which involves policy targets. A regime that requires the Chancellor to set those policy targets allows him to answer the full range of monetary policy questions that might be posed either here or outside. It implies that the only political interest in monetary policy is in the objectives of monetary policy, rather than in the day-to-day judgments that are inherent in converting those objectives into actual interest rates and monetary policy decisions. My hon. Friend's argument is that the Government define inflation targets and the Bank interprets those monetary policy targets into a given level of interest rates.

According to the doctrine of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, the Government are responsible for those targets. The Bank, in my hon. Friend's model, is responsible for the judgments in interpreting those targets into interest rates and is an independent entity which is not responsible to the House for those judgments. I do not accept the assumption that underlies the Bill, which is that there is no political interest or, indeed, scope for political argument about the judgments necessary to interpret an inflation target into interest rates. That is not the correct interpretation. There is plenty of scope for different people, believing that they share the same commitment to the same inflation objective, to come to different judgments about how that inflation objective should be converted into, primarily, interest rates and other monetary policy instruments given a particular set of circumstances. The importance of that question was underestimated by my hon. Friend when he presented his Bill.

My hon. Friend says, "Oh well, do not worry about it because clause 5 allows the Government, if they do not like what the bank is doing, to move the goalposts." With respect to my hon. Friend, it is not as simple as that. Even if the Government move the goalposts under the terms of clause 5, the Bill still fixes them in terms of inflation objectives rather than specific interest rates. Even after the Government had secured the consent of the House, clause 5 would allow the goalposts to be moved. Clause 5 allows scope for different judgments about how the inflation objective is converted into interest rates.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey is right to stress that a statutory instrument calling for monetary policy to be changed contrary to the public advice of the Governor of the Bank of England, would lead to all kinds of financial stresses in the market. As more than one hon. Member has said, it would be a nuclear deterrent.

The Government do not support the Bill in its present form, because its key provisions would not solve the problems that are inherent in trying to answer the questions that my hon. Friend has set himself. The Bill is a bigger step towards an independent central bank than he has suggested, but it is not part of our case that we have clearly decided that greater independence for the Bank is either impossible or undesirable.

I have agreed with several of the views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey, but I do not agree with his view that it is necessary for fiscal and monetary policy to be the responsibility of the same institution. It is technically possible to resolve the problems, but whether we want to do so is a different question; and if we do, how fast do we want to make the necessary changes?

Mr. Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend says that the Government do not necessarily rule out greater independence, but have not the Government ruled it in? Their recent changes mean that they have already started on the route towards greater autonomy. Surely the question is how far the Government are prepared to go.

Mr. Dorrell: I said that this is a process on which the Government have already gently embarked, but that the way in which we intend to proceed is by starting with what we have and asking how it can be improved, not by starting with a clean sheet of paper and asking how it might be done in a perfect world. We always bear in mind the important constraint that whatever emerges from the process must be accepted as legitimate here and outside. In plain English, when interest rates go up, the arrangements must be such that people do not say that the Government are trying to get out from under or that the institutions are in some sense illegitimate.

My hon. Friend is to be congratulated on what he has described as a probing Bill. It deals with an interesting subject and has presented the House with a valuable opportunity to debate the issues. However, I cannot commend the Bill in its present form.

1.57 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): If the Bill were to become law it would be one of the most pernicious attacks on the people of this country in many decades. That is because the Bill recommits the Tory party, which clearly sees the next election hoving into view, to fundamentalist Thatcherism and monetarism. The legislation would inevitably mean permanent, institutionalised higher unemployment throughout the length and breadth of this country. That is because it would reassert the primacy of price stability over every other social and economic objective.

The disaster of the past 15 years of politicians assuming that a couple of lines of economic theory could be turned into a religious creed to which everthing else was subordinated, shows that some Conservative Members have learnt nothing from the lost opportunity of the past decade and a half. Therefore, I am surprised that the Government Whips have instructed their Back Benchers to ensure that the Bill is talked out.

The reality is clearly spelt out in the Bill's introduction, which in a sense tries to capture the flavour of what is behind the measure and its attempt to win support in the city. The Bill's objectives are,

> "to remove the general power of the Treasury to give directions to the Governor of the Bank; to establish price stability as the primary objective of the Bank and to provide for policy targets for the carrying out of this objective;".

All the City interests, whose interests have dominated the past 15 years of Conservative Government, would be delighted for that to be enshrined in law, but what would it mean in practice?

We are asked to trust the bankers. I have nothing against bankers as a group. I am certain that they would make good neighbours if they lived next door. They probably would not play their reggae music in the middle of the night or kick one's cat, but what is distinguishing about bankers that makes their judgment any better than that of any other group in society? Is it simply the failure of successive Governments to regenerate the British economy and move us into the realms of the average modern European economy, with the levels of social and economic provision that others are able to afford, and the failure of British Governments to achieve that during the past 40 years, that leads some people to cast about desperately for some new institution or group—in this case bankers—who can be given power so that they will be able to create what successive British Governments have failed to create?

It would be much better to analyse why British economic policy has failed during the past 40 years—of course, I do not include the post-war Attlee Government in that record of failure—rather than to thrash around, not considering policy but seeking some new institution that can do it all for us.

I do not think that bankers are impartial. All the history, in this country and other countries, suggests that bankers, as a group, are characterised overwhelmingly by a cautious and narrow approach to their sector of responsibility. Occasionally, there is a slightly more radical or progressive banker, but overwhelmingly it is a cautious little group and, frankly, they do not balance the competing interests of society, and that is not their job.

The job of bankers is primarily to try to maximise the return on the money that has been entrusted to them. Increasingly in Britain that has been perceived as a short-term role. They have not taken on board any national responsibility and our law enshrines that they cannot do that. They simply have to think in terms of the quickest possible return for the investors to whom they are responsible and accountable.

Let us consider the idea that is creeping forward of the independent central bank. I was amazed to hear the Financial Secretary speak about the Government's open mind. A treaty has just passed through the House which commits us to making the Bank independent. They have signed the thing. Now I am not surprised that people are backing off, in the tatters of the Maastricht treaty, but night after night we witnessed the Government Whips dragooning Conservative Members through the Lobbies to win support for a treaty which, by law, forced the British Government to denationalise the Bank of England. It is rubbish for the Government to say, "We are giving the matter some thought" or, "We are open-minded" or, "a bit agnostic" when they have spent virtually the whole of this Parliament so far trying to carry into law a treaty that forced them to create an independent central bank.

No doubt the prime force is that Members of the House consider other nations that have had more successful economic policies and say, "There is an independent central bank element to their success. If we could have an independent central bank we could be the same."

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) pointed out the success of Japan. Japan consistently ran very high inflation until it established the basis of its growth. The Japanese central bank is independent. There is a much more collective form of policy-making and task-setting in terms of Japanese political leadership.

Increasingly, though, people have tended to point to the Bundesbank or the Federal Reserve bank in the United States. The example of the Federal Reserve in the United States should be a warning to Opposition Members. If one considers recent history, the Federal bank in the United States became truly independent during the Truman presidency. Before that, right up to Roosevelt's time, the bank did pretty much as it was told by the President. It was only when the cost of funding the Korean war became so inordinate that the American Government could no longer obtain funding from the markets for the cost of the deficit that was built up by the Korean war, that suddenly the balance of power shifted and the Federal Reserve bank started to assert some independence on which it has built since.

People on the left of the political spectrum should consider recent history. When President Carter was faced with a severe and persistent recession and wished to relax the Federal Reserve's policy and reduce interest rates, the bank's board of governors refused to co-operate. Jimmy Carter went into an election that he was doomed to lose because of the economic constraints. A decade later, George Bush was equally stuck with a long and persistent recession but the Federal Reserve was happy to cut interest rates in the most manic way. It clearly did everything possible to ensure the re-election of a Republican President. I am not surprised that a group of bankers in any society is going to be broadly sympathetic to parties of the right, and the case I have just cited is the clearest demonstration of that in recent times.

The Bill is the first step towards the creation of an independent central bank. If we were to create such a bank, how would it be governed? The Opposition parties would demand to be able to nominate a proportion of the members of the bank's governing body. That would be very different from the current situation. We read in the newspapers that Lady Thatcher had appointed Robin Leigh-Pemberton as Governor of the Bank of England and no one else had a say.

The reality of Lady Thatcher's premiership was good, clear accountability: Robin Leigh-Pemberton was appointed because he would do what he was told. He was completely and utterly a creature of the Government or, to be precise, of the Tory party. In the run-up to the 1992 general election, he virtually gave a free party political election broadcast for the Tories, telling the people that the recession was over. I did not object when Mrs. Thatcher appointed Robin Leigh-Pemberton. She wished to appoint as Governor someone who was clearly her creature and it was her right to do so because, at the end of the day, if the Bank got the policy wrong she would lose her job. That is what political accountability is all about.

I believe that Governments try to do far too much. Many of the things for which Governments have responsibility should be devolved to regional parliaments and local authorities. We all agree that Parliament and the Government should be responsible for foreign policy and for defence, but how can anyone deny that macro-economic policy should be the preserve of the Government and Parliament of the day? I am all in favour of more transparency in how such decisions are taken, but, rather than have the Bank present a banal report every few months on what it is doing, it would aid accountability and transparency on questions of how interest rate policy was evolving if the Chancellor came to the House when the Bank wished to change the interest rates. Why should not the proposed new rates be announced to the House? We could then debate the issue and all hon. Members could have some influence.

I do not know why I have driven from the Chamber the Front-Bench spokesmen of both parties. I wonder whether a coalition Government is even now being formed because of the horrifyng prospect of what I am saying. This is one of those rare times when I am in complete agreement with my party's Front-Bench spokesman, and such occasions

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

give me great pleasure. Like many of the best pleasures in life, it is becoming increasingly infrequent as the years roll by.

We should be aware of what the Bill would mean for the people whom we represent. There is not the slightest doubt that it would be bad news. I was delighted to find that my reminding the House of what happened in Russia pleased the Financial Secretary. The truth is—*[Interruption.]* I do not know what is going on, but I am beginning to wonder whether I might be in a state of dishevelment.

We have only to consider what is happening in Russia today to realise the problems arising from split accountability for the management of the economy. The governor of the central bank there is pursuing a policy that is completely at variance with the elected President's economic policy, and it has been disastrous.

It is all very well for the Bill to say that the Government of the day could, in effect, issue an edict that will run for six months, but what would be the impact on the money market while that was being debated in Parliament? What would it cost the British Government in a possible drain on the pound if it were known that, while the independent Bank of England was favouring one policy, the Government of the day were having a public debate and a vote in the Chamber one or two or three days hence to impose a policy to which the Bank was opposed? It would mean a collapse in confidence.

That is the pernicious sting in the tail of the Bill. While it gives the illusion of accountability, it transfers power. How many Governments would have the nerve to run the risk of one, two or three days of a haemorrhaging of resources from Britain, as the international money markets panicked at seeing the central bank and the Government locked into disagreement and conflict? That would be a disaster. I want to see greater accountability on the Floor of the House—that means clarifying how political accountability works.

I had a vivid example of such accountability when I was leader of the Greater London council. As elected council members, we inherited a transport arrangement with an appointed London Transport Executive, which had responsibility for the day-to-day running of the transport system. Often we were in agreement and often we were not. When the first Labour administration after the new arrangements took office in 1973, there were horrendous rows, conflicts and sackings. It always seemed as if there was no reason for an elected council and a full-time executive of London Transport to run London transport. There was a tremendous overlap in that capacity and there was confusion and dissent. Londoners were the losers in the end because of that blurred accountability.

I was impressed by a book that I read about 30 years ago —an autobiography by senator William Norris, who was the senator for Nebraska in the first half of the century. His theory was that it was in the interests of voters to have the clearest lines of political accountability. He campaigned and eventually won a change in the Nebraska state constitution to abolish its system of a Nebraska house of representatives and a Nebraska senate and introduced a unicameral legislature. That meant that if something was not going right, everyone could see where the political responsibility lay.

I have not the slightest interest in taking even one step towards an independent central bank, which will lead to a blurring of accountability and a blurring of where blame lies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) has said—it may have been said by a Government Member; the parties are rather close on that issue—it would be no valid excuse to say to people "Go and see Eddie". Imagine a difficult financial position, with mounting unemployment and 100,000 or more workers marching up to Trafalgar square demanding action, and someone from the Government of the day says "Don't blame me you have to go and see the Bank of England". It is an absolute travesty.

The House is filled with 651 people who, in the main, have drooled over the idea of becoming a Member of Parliament. In some cases, they have lusted for political power since they were little boys and girls and were photographed outside No. 10 Downing street. They devoted their lives to getting here because they wanted political power. They arrive in the House and decide to give the key decision to the bankers. Why not go off and become a banker in that case? I did not come here to say, "That is a difficult decision. Let some other poor sod take it". I am happy to take those difficult decisions. Part of the problem is that there are too many bankers on the Conservative Benches.

I shall wind up so that another hon. Member may make a brief speech before the Division. I want to outline why the British economy has failed and why the aims of the Bill will not work. The British economy has not failed because it has suffered too much inflation. Inflation has not helped and the economy would have been a lot better if the British rate of inflation had been closer to that of Germany. The economy has not failed because British workers have earned too much money, as they have been almost the poorest paid workers in northern Europe. It has certainly not failed because successive Governments have almost got things right but lost their nerve.

The underlying cause of our economic problems is lack of investment. When the Government came to power, they made a great song and dance about the state of the motor industry, comparing the productivity of Japanese workers in the motor industry with those of their British counterparts. But, for every £1,000-worth of equipment with which British workers in the motor industry were working, Japanese workers had £11,000-worth of equipment at their disposal—a ratio of more than 10:1.

The reason why British Governments have failed to turn round the British economy and replicate the success of Japan or Germany is that we have under-invested in Britain. Through the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, British investment limped along at about 14 or 15 per cent., whereas German investment often stood at 25 per cent. and Japanese investment at 33 per cent. Nothing in the Bill will lead to an extra pound of investment in the British economy.

Mr. Forman: Does not the hon. Gentleman realise that the climate for investment over that long period would have been much better had we had lower inflation and less volatile interest rates, and that both would have been helped by the existence of a more autonomous central bank on a new statutory basis?

Mr. Livingstone: I ask the hon. Gentleman to examine the success stories. Japan has not had low inflation until recently. It established its economic predominance, often with massive deficits and high inflation, by creating the right climate of opinion. It made itself into a nation that was going somewhere—which was growing and investing. It is largely a matter of psychology. We have created a different climate of opinion: we are a nation obsessed by what is happening in the City of London which sits and watches bankers clawing their 0·5 per cent. off the value of someone else's productive labour. The best and brightest minds come out of our universities and go into the City —into stockbroking and accountancy—rather than into industry, engineering and scientific research. We must change that climate of opinion, and no independent central bank will do it.

If the Bill became law, the message would go out that Britain's financial interests had reinforced their predominance over industry in the British economy. That is why this is a pernicious Bill. I find it amazing that an hon. Member who has earned a lot of respect and who, with good humour, has spent much of the past 18 months trying to prevent the British people from being enslaved by a European cartel of bankers is now happy to truss up his constituents and deliver them bound hand and foot into the power of British bankers. I do not like bankers, whether they are British bankers or foreign bankers, because bankers are not interested in the sort of people I was sent here to represent.

2.13 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I never imagined that I would admit to the House that I agreed with the spirit—if not with the content—of a speech made by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). Clearly, pigs sometimes fly.

I welcome this important debate and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen). It is appropriate that he should have introduced the Bill to give us the chance to discuss a very important issue which has been rattling around for years. The opportunity that my hon. Friend has given us to debate the issues is both timely and welcome.

My hon. Friend described his Bill as a tiny step. I would put it in a different way. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) described the Bill as a lever. Could it not also be regarded as a big step for mankind, but not always to everyone's advantage?

I note that the Treasury Committee, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West is a member, admitted that it had no intention of seeking an independent Bank of England, and my hon. Friend emphasised that in his speech. I think that we would all agree that the issue goes wider than the Bill. Should we set the Old Lady free? Perhaps, but perhaps not just yet. I agree with my hon. Friend the Minister that we should examine the existing institution and consider how it could be improved.

It is not unreasonable to liberalise the ties between the Treasury and the Bank. I believe that accountability is important and that transparency is vital. However, it is a matter of degree. We all agree that it must be a priority to keep inflation down, and for good. Perhaps the best way to look at the effect is to consider how the lives of our constituents would be affected.

My constituents in Sutton are very concerned about the cost of living. Their lives could be shattered if things go wrong. They do not want shocks or sudden price rises which can throw a family budget, particularly if mortgage payments are tight. Pensioners do not want to see their hard-earned savings swallowed up by a rampant rise in the cost of living. Small business men do not want to see resources gobbled up. They all want steady, sustainable growth.

For all that, I do not believe that we should be fearful of examining new ideas which ultimately make for better and perhaps more accountable systems and which need not cause a revolution. That did not happen in 1946 when the Bank of England was nationalised. According to the Bank's official history, that aroused little interest among historians and caused precious little public debate or controversy.

The Bank's history may already have been evolving into the brave new post-war world. Nationalisation may have occurred as a legacy of wartime controls and was given a push by the radical socialist Government, free of any parliamentary constraints. The argument then was that nationalisation was simply a move to regulate existing procedures and that, despite the change in ownership, the Bank would maintain independence in day-to-day management of banking operations.

Even when the Bank was in private hands, the practical relationship between the Bank and the Treasury was complex, with the Treasury generally having the last word. The Bank's directors would consult the Chancellor before deciding on changes in bank rates, even though such changes were formally not undertaken until the directors held their Thursday meeting.

The relationship between the Bank and the Treasury today is, of necessity, something of a delicate quadrille. In the 1960s, the earlier consensus was replaced by a suspicion of the Bank by a Labour Government who disliked criticism of their tax policies and spending plans.

The balance tilted the other way in the 1980s and reached its high-water point of Treasury domination of the Bank. The former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, was quoted in *The Economist* in 1990 as saying in 1987

> "I make the decisions and the Bank carries them out."

A turnabout in mood, which surprised commentators, came when Lord Lawson, when giving evidence to the Treasury Select Committee in an investigation into the independent role of the Bank of England, said:

> "I became convinced in my own mind that it would be a better institutional arrangement for the battle against inflation . . . It was not because I was suddenly struck with the feeling that central bankers were supermen . . . it was simply that I felt as an institutional arrangement it would work better."

Those who work in the Bank may be flattered to be called supermen. However, I do not sense any arrogance judging from the evidence given by the Governor, Eddie George, to the Treasury Select Committee. He did not give the impression of empire building. If that was in his heart, he did not let it be known. He was quite clear when he said that there has to be

> "an accountability mechanism. And it has to be effective."

He added that the Bank's euphemism for independence is

> "statutory accountability, precisely to try to remind ourselves all the time of the point and to try to get rid of this idea that independence, which is the popular name for the debate, is about a lot of appointed bureaucrats exercising . . . powers."

He favoured a mandate from Parliament, giving price stability as the objective.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

On accountability, it is interesting that the Select Committee report noted that the Prime Minister, commenting on the then Chancellor's support for an independent central bank, said:

> "The very real concern that I have always faced is one that I believe is spread widely across the House: the need for accountability to Parliament for decisions on monetary policy matters. Were a way to be found to get the benefits of an independent central bank without the loss of parliamentary accountability, my views would be very close to those of my right hon. Friend."

Are we ready for the Old Lady to cut the apron strings? Is that necessary? Evolution means that it is common sense to operate on a more open basis. Why not allow the public, the press and Parliament to know what the Government's monetary policy is and the extent to which the Bank is given freedom to achieve the Government's stated objectives? It is welcome news that Mr. Pennant-Rea, the deputy Governor, a former journalist and editor of *The Economist*, will take personal control of the Bank's relationship with the public, Parliament and the press.

Would a lurch to total independence turn into a perfect world? Some say that we should look overseas to Germany and Switzerland—America even—which have good or excellent inflation records. Are we so certain that autonomy means low inflation, or are there other factors? Could it be the management style? After all, the independent Bank of New Zealand brought inflation down, but, at the same time, that country went into recession. Is independence such a conclusive indicator of low inflation? Analysis of the world's leading economies shows that there is hardly any evidence that real growth rates or unemployment performance were superior in countries with more independently constituted banks. The flip side, as pointed out by Edward Balls in the *Financial Times* in 1991 is that

> "Countries where the fear of inflation is greatest may be those that give the most independence to a central bank thus denying governments the ability to use monetary policy to stabilise the economic cycle which may actually lead to more variable output and higher unemployment."

Surely what count are the decision makers. Clearly, it is more desirable that the Government should take responsibility, if not the rap, if things go wrong. At least we should know how and why they have gone wrong. By the same token, we could give them a good cheer for getting things right. Ultimately, the buck stops with the Government. They decide and co-ordinate tax and monetary policies and report to Parliament. An independent bank would make things very tough, because politicians would be held responsible for an organisation—the bank—over which they had no control in certain respects.

I am not always in total agreement with Lord Healey, but, on this occasion, I have to support him. He gave evidence to the Treasury Select Committee. The report states:

> "the transfer of responsibility for monetary policy to the Bank is essentially a 'gimmick', supported by previous Chancellors of the Exchequer as a way of putting 'major responsibility onto somebody else'. In this view, the successful conduct of monetary policy 'depends on individuals'".

I must support him on that matter.

That is not to say that times have not moved on sufficiently for greater openess. It is already happening and it will develop even more. We can see that the relationship between my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England is running along very nicely. There is almost the mutual patting of heads—so much so that my right hon. and learned Friend announced that, in future, when decisions on interest rates had been taken, he would leave it to the Governor to decide when to move.

But a word of warning. On 7 January last year, Anatole Kaletsky warned that we cannot always rely on independence as an aspirin for future ills. He told us to beware

> "of the search for a single 'silver bullet' to deal with all of our economic problems; the eagerness to replicate off-the-peg foreign models; the disregard of practical experience in examining the claims made for theoretical miracle cures."

He is not alone in his remarks. Indeed, analysts in the City are not overwhelmed by the notion, and many see no merit in change.

Mr. Neil MacKinnon, chief economist at Citibank, said in the 10 June edition of the *Financial Times:*

> "In the late 1980s everyone thought that ERM entry would be the answer to inflation. I think it is rather depressing that we are again looking for a holy grail. In the end it boils down to whether we have the right policies or not, and an independent central bank isn't going to change that."

That view was echoed in the same article by Mr. Kevin Gardiner, the United Kingdom economist at S. G. Warburgs who said: "I am not sure that an institutional change——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

MERCHANT SHIPPING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION (PUBLIC EXPENDITURE) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Speaker shall—

(1) at the sitting on Wednesday 2nd February

(a) not later than Seven o'clock put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. William Waldegrave relating to Scientific Research; and

(b) put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Lilley relating to Child Support not later than three hours after their commencement; and the said Motion may be proceeded with after the expiry of the time for opposed business; and

(2) at the sitting on Thursday 3rd February, not later than Ten o'clock put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Gummer relating to Local Government Finance; and those Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Health Care (Greenwich)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I am pleased to have this opportunity to raise a matter of the utmost concern to my constituents—the present state of the NHS in Greenwich. I am also pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) is present this afternoon, as he has a long-standing interest in the subject. He will, if he is successful in catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have a valuable contribution to make to the debate.

There is widespread concern in Greenwich about the NHS. In particular, there is concern about the impact of the Government's so-called reforms and the performance of the Greenwich healthcare NHS trust since it was set up fewer than 10 months ago. Over the past three to four months, a substantial number of cases have been brought to my attention by individuals who tell me that the standard of health care that they or their relatives have received has been far below the standards that they have a right to expect.

The most highly publicised case involved 83-year-old Elsie Westron, who was lost for four hours after being admitted to Greenwich district hospital on 1 September. When she was eventually located, she was found to have died. The circumstances leading up to her death were described by the coroner as

> "an appalling catalogue of disasters".

Elsie Westron's case shocked not just Greenwich, but the whole nation. Responding to the concerns that had been voiced, the junior Minister for health, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), expressed regrets, but claimed that it was a single, isolated incident. I am afraid that he was wrong. A month later, a 93-year-old woman named Mrs Edmonds was left waiting for 10 hours in the accident and emergency department of the same hospital for an X-ray after being admitted following her involvement in a vehicle accident. The chairman of the healthcare trust, in responding to my letters about the incident, referred to it as "a totally unacceptable delay'. I agree.

Long waits and delays are not just a problem in the accident and emergency department. At the same time, I was having to take up with the chairman of the healthcare trust cases involving patients who had been admitted to the Brook hospital for elective cardiac and neurosurgery. The patients found that their operations were cancelled not just on one occasion, but on several because of the lack of qualified staff.

Responding to a complaint lodged in one of those cases, the chief executive of the trust wrote

> "to apologise for the distress the cancellations must have caused . . . regrettably, in the case of your wife's surgery, we have not achieved the level of quality we would wish."

Many other similar disturbing cases have been brought to my attention, but it is not only patients and their relatives who have been voicing their concern. I have received a steady stream of complaints from nursing staff, GPs and hospital consultants about the increasingly severe pressures under which they work. Nurses complain of chronic staff shortages and the replacement of qualified

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

nurses by auxiliaries. GPs complain about the hours they spend trying to get patients admitted to the two local hospitals, where beds are in increasingly scarce supply.

One GP wrote to me:

"it has been absolutely clear to every doctor working in London that any reduction in the number of hospital beds would cause great problems. It seems that that situation is now upon us."

Consultants complain about long-established and effective working procedures being undermined by the closure of hospital wards and the cancellation of operating theatre sessions prompted solely by financial constraints. One wrote not only to me but to the Secretary of State to complain that for the first time in 14 years working as a consultant gynaecologist in Greenwich he had had to establish a waiting list.

No impartial observer of the health service in Greenwich could conclude other than that health care in Greenwich faces a crisis. That crisis is not of the making of the medical, nursing or auxiliary staff. In my experience, the overwhelming majority are exceptionally hard-working, highly motivated, dedicated people desperately trying to do their best in increasingly difficult circumstances. Not surprisingly, they feel a growing anxiety at the poor public image that Greenwich health care is attracting. They long to be able to provide the high-quality service that they came into the profession to deliver. That they are unable to do so to the extent that they would wish is a tragedy not just for them but for the people of Greenwich who depend on them. The blame for that lies squarely with the Government, who are savagely cutting the funds available for health care in Greenwich, and with the healthcare trust, which has spectacularly failed to live up to the promises that it made when trust status was sought.

Those promises are not dim and distant pledges made many years ago. The trust has been in existence for only 10 months. The prospectus that it issued is only 18 months old. In that document, the trust promised

"to treat each user of the service with respect and dignity at all times".

That pledge must have a hollow ring to the relatives of Elsie Westron.

The trust pledged:

"to deliver services of excellence to users whose needs will always come first."

That is now revealed to be far from the reality to all those whose operations have been cancelled or delayed as a result of staff shortages, ward closures and the creation of waiting lists.

The trust pledged:

"to develop on the Brook hospital site an elective resource centre, an integral part of which will be the regional specialty cardio-thoracic services."

That pledge contrasts sadly with the current position. The Brook hospital is to be closed and the regional specialty cardio-thoracic and neuroscience units are to be lost altogether from the district.

The trust pledged:

"Greenwich District Hospital would be upgraded to become the main Acute General Hospital for the district, with a major accident and emergency department, supported by the full range of the necessary specialities and modern high technology support services."

Now the trust proposes to close Greenwich district hospital.

The trust pledged that its first objective was

"to secure by contract the current service activity".

Its second objective was to

"identify opportunities to improve the quality of service to our local population".

The third was

"to seek to identify those areas where we can build on and expand our service to patients from outside the district."

Instead, we are now told that ward closures, staff cuts, operating list cancellations and hospital closures are inevitable because the trust is failing to attract sufficient contract activity to sustain its existing resources. Neighbouring areas are increasingly withdrawing their residents from the Greenwich hospitals. In other words, the service is being killed by the market.

I could, but will not, go on at great length cataloguing the broken promises and failures. The picture is already, sadly, too clear. However, I shall quote one last passage from the trust's prospectus. It said:

"An essential objective of the Trust is to ensure that it is very closely associated with its community . . . The Trust will encourage and respond to users' views".

That was always a somewhat questionable claim, because the overwhelming majority of local people opposed the setting up of the trust in the first place. Sadly, the experience of the past nine months has confirmed that the trust neither encourages, nor responds to, the views and aspirations of the local community. On the contrary, it is seen as remote and unresponsive. It has forfeited the confidence of the local people.

The point was well put by one local resident writing about the experience that he had when trying to obtain a response from the trust on the delays experienced by a relative awaiting treatment. He wrote:

"I have been trying to reach an administrator at your hospital so that I can be furnished with an explanation. However, no-one seems willing to speak to me . . . I have discovered that the NHS Trust is packed with tiers of bureaucrats all of whom are said to be at meetings and none of whom appear to want to be accountable."

The consultant wrote:

"My observations on the organisation would be that there is panic, ignorance of the clinicians' own management expertise within their departments, and extravagance in virtually every aspect except where direct patient care is concerned."

That is sadly an all-too-familiar story, echoing the comments in the report of the Public Accounts Committee published yesterday, which catalogue the baleful influence of unelected, unaccountable quangos, whose cry is now heard throughout the land. The Government cannot pretend that they are unaware of this sad state of affairs; nor can they simply pass the buck. Most of the evidence that I have outlined has already been submitted to Ministers as well as to the healthcare trust. Instead of acting on it, the Government offer only feeble excuses.

We are told not to worry about the threatened closure of the Brook and the Greenwich district hospital, because the trust proposes to acquire the Queen Elizabeth military hospital. I believe that it is right for the NHS to acquire the QEMH, but not as a substitute for two existing hospitals, whose combined capacity is more than twice that currently available at the QEMH. On present plans, the move to the QEMH means yet further reductions in the number of beds available, at a time when it is patently clear that the existing capacity is seriously overstretched.

We are told by Ministers—I refer to a letter dated 8 December 1993 from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—that

"there is clearly overprovision of acute services at this time."

That is an astonishing statement. I remain fascinated to know where the Minister gets his information from, not least because, in answer to a parliamentary question from me about the availability of acute beds in Greater London, he replied just a week later to say that that information was not available centrally. Had the Minister taken the trouble to ask about the local situation, he would not have made his rash and wholly spurious claim about a surplus of capacity. The reality is exactly the opposite, as hospitals, beds and staff are all severely overstretched by a demand that is clearly causing the system to burst at the seams.

The other excuse that we get from Ministers is that resources have been transferred into primary care. I, for one, welcome the long-overdue recognition of the need to improve primary care provision in London. The extra funds coming in consequence of Tomlinson are welcome, but, as yet, they have not created any new capacity. It will be some years before the network of primary health care centres will have been developed to a point at which it might be possible to reduce some of the demands on local hospitals.

As I outlined, however, the cuts are already biting deeply into our hospital services, and it will simply not do for Ministers to plead future improvements in primary care as a justification for cuts being made today which seriously damage the quality of patient care in Greenwich. The Government cannot justify washing their hands of the disastrous consequences of their actions. They are responsible for the financial cuts and ward closures. They are responsible for the damage caused by the workings of the internal market. They are responsible for the actions of the health care trust which they brought into existence and whose members they appointed.

Nothing less than a full public inquiry into the state of the NHS in Greenwich will suffice if public confidence is to be restored. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will belatedly recognise that the Government have a responsibility, that they cannot continue to pass the buck and that they must act now to set up an inquiry and ensure that adequate funds are made available locally if we are to avoid a further tragic decline in the standards of health care in Greenwich.

2.43 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) and to the Minister for allowing me to intervene briefly in the debate. The problem in Greenwich, as my hon. Friend pointed out, is not only the incompetence of those who are responsible for managing the health care trust but the total unaccountability of the structure. I think that the rot began to set in with the management changes that the Government introduced in 1990, which removed from the local health authority any semblance of local accountability. Local authority nominees were removed from the health authority, but those members had not only an interest in and lived in the area, but had a deep knowledge of local health authorities.

In the health debate last week, the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) said that the new arrangements were locally accountable. I do not know to whom they are accountable locally, because I was replaced on the health authority by a company director from his constituency. That man is a computer company specialist. On his appointment, he said that he knew nothing about the NHS, that he was a friend of the director of finance and the chair of the health authority and that he assumed that was why he had been appointed. He also pointed out that all his staff were members of BUPA and that he would be too, if only he had remembered to fill in the form.

The other person who replaced the local authority representative on the health authority was Mr. Hewitson, who runs a double glazing company in Bromley—a far cry from Greenwich and Woolwich. We have not seen much improvement in patient care in the Greenwich health district, but no doubt the windows have improved.

We have recorded a catalogue of disasters, including £8 million invested in the hospital information services system, HISS, which was supposed to deliver an internal management system. The health authority still appears to be totally unable to send out invoices for bills that are due.

My hon. Friend and I have repeatedly called for the dismissal of the chief executive of the trust. If the Government were looking for a job for him, perhaps MI6 might be appropriate, or perhaps he could become an adviser on secrecy to the Cabinet, because the trust, like the health authority before it, is run in complete secrecy.

Is that trust accountable to local people? We asked the chief executive about the trust's proposals to sell off part of the Brook hospital site to Sainsbury. We were told that no such negotiations had taken place. A week later, the truth was revealed and we learnt that an agreement had been reached with Sainsbury.

I asked the chief executive about discussions between the health authority, the trust and the Ministry of Defence concerning the Queen Elizabeth military hospital. I was told that no such discussions had been held, but the MOD confirmed that they were taking place.

The trust is dictating terms to a weak health authority which even occupies premises owned by the trust. My hon. Friend referred to the pledges made in the hurried attempt to draw up the trust. There was no public health input into those discussions. The Greenwich health authority drew up a commissioning strategy without any independent public health advice. It was done in such a hurry that no agreement was reached on a strategy for acute services: in fact, that strategy has not yet been published.

I wrote to the Secretary of State to ask her to defer the decision on the creation of the trust until an acute service strategy was agreed. No delay occurred and we found that the chair and chief executive of the health authority took up those posts in the new trust.

Whenever my hon. Friend and I describe the mishaps that have occurred and describe the frustration felt by the medical, nursing and ancillary staff, we are accused of undermining the morale of staff at the local hospitals. We are merely reflecting the views of the medical staff and nurses who tell us that morale is at rock bottom and express their frustration at the fact that they are unable to provide the standard of care that they believe that the people of Greenwich and Woolwich deserve.

I am still waiting for an answer about the purchase of the multi-resonance image scanner, at a cost of £500,000. The Minister has passed the buck back to the district health authority and it has passed it to the trust, which, in turn has passed it to the regional health authority. In the end, I have received letters from the company that supplied the equipment to say that there is nothing wrong with it. Why did the trust and the regional health authority spend £500,000 on an MRI scanner in May of last year, which has

[Mr. John Austin-Walker]

not yet scanned a single patient? Each year, £116,000 is being paid to the private sector to provide that scanning service.

No doubt, the Minister will say that the scanner is an isolated example, just like the catalogue of isolated examples that my hon. Friend cited. An inquiry is needed and the buck stops with the Government.

2.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I am delighted to respond to the hon. Members for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) and for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) and to have the opportunity to discuss health care in Greenwich. The debate enables us to look at some of the problems raised by the hon. Members, and also to consider the real progress that has been made in the provision of health care in the health authority and local authority area of Greenwich. It also gives me the opportunity to acknowledge the plans that have been agreed or are being considered for the future delivery of health care.

Important developments in primary and secondary care have been envisaged for the health service in south-east London, including, as has been mentioned, the possible transfer of the Queen Elizabeth military hospital at Woolwich into NHS ownership. Family health services in Greenwich have benefited from extra funding as a result of the Government's London initiative zone.

Having visited Greenwich recently at the invitation of its local council, and having met the leaders and senior officers of that council, I am impressed by the fact that they generally see Tomlinson and "Making London Better" as a real opportunity for Greenwich and the development of its health care, particularly at primary-care level. They are working on some innovative projects; I was particularly pleased to see their "family and carers" support work and centres. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was recently able to see something of the imaginative work that is being done in regard to mental health. What impressed me above all was the way in which the various agencies are working together—social services, health authority and trusts, police and probation services, the voluntary and private sectors and, of course, the users and carers themselves. I should have thought that that in itself would cause both hon. Members to salute a great deal of the work on health care in their respective constituencies, and to praise the dedication of health and care workers in primary and hospital and community care.

The hon. Member for Greenwich mentioned staff morale. This week, people working in those hospitals have telephoned me, questioning whether some of his outspoken comments are doing anything for staff morale and telling me that staff at all levels are anxious to get on with the job. They are not being helped by some of the hon. Gentleman's comments.

I am pleased to say that Greenwich district health authority has been working closely with the Greenwich and Bexley family health services authority. That work has been helped by the setting up two years ago of the Bexley and Greenwich commissioning agency, which has brought the two authorities together with Bexley district health authority. As was recently announced, the two DHAs will merge in April. I am sure that the new authority will remain sensitive to the needs of Greenwich residents.

Both the commissioning agency and the Greenwich healthcare NHS trust support a proposal to transfer hospital services to the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich, which is, of course, just across the road from the Brook. That proposal would involve bringing accident services and acute in-patient services together at the Queen Elizabeth hospital. Under that proposal, the Memorial hospital at Shooters hill would provide out-patient and residential care, and Greenwich district hospital would continue to provide out-patient clinics.

Negotiations are continuing with the Ministry of Defence, which has announced that it will leave the hospital in 1998, and I am pleased to say that good progress has already been made. The commissioning agency consulted on its acute strategy, and the trust has announced its proposals; however, any change of use at the Brook or Greenwich district hospitals would require public consultation.

I know that there has been concern about some of the services provided at the Brook hospital. The neurosciences and cardiac speciality reviews recommended that those regional specialties be transferred to larger teaching units in south-east London. My right hon. Friend is still considering the advice that she has received, and hopes to be able to make an announcement soon.

It is entirely appropriate that the trust is planning hospital services to meet the requirements of those who are purchasing services on behalf of patients, and the recommendations of the specialty reviews. For their part, the Government are committed to ensuring that Londoners have access to appropriate, high-quality and cost-effective patient care.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to individual cases —one in particular—in which something has allegedly gone wrong, or services have fallen below the standards that we, health authorities, trusts, GPs and patients expect. Those are rightly subject to inquiry when appropriate, and the trust has committed itself to put right any failings identified by such inquiries.

Equally important is the development of primary care in Greenwich and Bexley. Greenwich, Woolwich and Thamesmead are within the London initiative zone set up as part of the Government's response to the Tomlinson report. The Government believe that family health services in Greenwich should achieve the standards of excellence that are common elsewhere in the country. To that end, the funding of projects totalling £22 million spread over six years is planned, with £3·1 million this year for Greenwich and Thamesmead and £4·2 million for 1994-95.

That funding will enable primary care centres to be established in each designated locality. The services planned for those centres include consultants out-patient clinics, pathology and investigative services, physiotherapy, chiropody, counselling and psychiatric services, and minor injury facilities. Work on the acquisition of the first centre will begin next month.

The family health services authority is contributing funding for practice managers to ensure that each practice has sufficient management skills available. A GP forum has been set up in each locality to determine priorities, identify and assess needs and discuss the commissioning agency's agenda. The FHSA is providing locum cover for

GPs in each forum to enable them to attend meetings with local providers and commissioners. Similar arrangements have been established for community pharmacists.

A series of locality-based seminars on community care are under way, designed to facilitate joint working between GPs, community health services and social services. The FHSA is seeking to improve the quality of prescribing through postgraduate education and the development of disease management guidelines. A health promotion programme based on pharmacies is being established. Pharmacists will soon be able to use referral forms to pass information to GPs.

From the beginning of this year, physiotherapists have been attached in five locations for approximately four sessions a week to assess the effectiveness of general practice-based physiotherapy. Evaluation will focus on the impact that service has on secondary referrals and the benefits that it achieves in terms of outcome. Similarly, counsellors have been funded sessionally in west Greenwich and Plumstead common to establish the effectiveness of attaching such services to general practice. The scheme started in June 1993; it will be extended to Plumstead High street soon.

An equal opportunities post is planned. The post holder will work with commissioners, providers and others to develop an advocacy role for local ethnic minority populations. While new contracts for sessional interpreting services are being finalised, the Greenwich interpreting service is providing services for GPs in London initiative zone localities.

The existing scheme whereby social workers are attached to GP practices is being extended to five more practices. In the longer term, the intention is to provide one-stop health and social care based in primary care centres to include all levels of community care assessment and care management. Since September last year, a primary care charter development officer has been working with local practitioners to facilitate the development of local charters relevant to the needs of service users and providers.

Developments in primary care services will see local residents provided with health care delivered in the most appropriate setting. That recognises that referral to hospital-based services should occur only when necessary.

Greenwich healthcare NHS trust incorporates both acute and community services, and I acknowledge the significant achievements of the trust's integrated child health service—the ICHS. Since that leading service was inaugurated in 1992 it has encompassed a wide range of services, including neonatal, special care baby unit, acute paediatrics, school health, family planning, immunisation and vaccination services and the establishment of a home care team and community paediatric nursing. The specialist clinical and nursing teams are supported by speech and language therapy and child dental professionals.

For children with severe learning disabilities, the ICHS has opened a sensory room at the Wensley close facility which provides stimulation for the children using state-of-the-art high technology equipment, and a child development centre is planned. Concurrent child mental health and paediatric out-patient clinics allow the joint investigation of psychosomatic disorders. Furthermore, the ICHS is a pilot site for the Audit Commission's well child project "Promoting the well being of children and young people".

Already the subject of widespread national and international interest and a recent feature in the *Health Service Journal*; the ICHS will host a national conference at the Queen Elizabeth conference centre later this year to discuss the issues of integration of acute and community child health services.

Greenwich residents come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. The total integration of child health services facilities dialogue and close working with social and educational services, demonstrates a clear commitment to the devlopment of healthy alliances.

On the management of the Greenwich healthcare NHS trust, the appointment of senior nursing professionals as service managers for medical, surgical, trauma and orthopaedics, anaesthetics, obstetrics and gynaecology, radiology, pathology, neurosciences and cardiothoracic services allied to the development of clinical directorates means that those closest to patient care and service delivery are fully involved in the management of the trust. Those service managers lead multi-disciplined, patient-focused teams, which through individual and team-performance objectives, ensure that the planning for, and delivery of, patient care is the priority. In addition, rehabilitation and therapy services across the trust are managed by the senior occupational therapist, ensuring a fully integrated and seamless service for acute and community patients.

Retention and staff turnover difficulties have been brought about by some of the uncertainties surrounding the future of cardiothoracic and neurosciences. The trust has run a successful campaign to recruit intensive therapy unit nurses, with the result that 15 appointments have already been made at the Brook hospital to staff fully six ITU beds.

The trust also provides a comprehensive staff and management development programme, and encourages the pursuit of professional and health care management qualifications. Furthermore, the recent removal of the operations director post and the subsequent reporting of the clinical directors to the chief executive will further integrate clinicians into the management process.

Those steps demonstrate the trust's commitment to the development of an organisation able to respond to the changing pattern of health care within Greenwich. The trust is working hard to achieve greater internal efficiency, meet its statutory financial responsibilities and present a case for further transitional funding. I share the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Woolwich about the commissioning of the MRI scanner, but, following the trust's inquiries into the matter, we will ensure that any procedural shortfalls are addressed. I understand that a meeting is to be held shortly.

The trust had a complex agenda in which progress on long-term issues and short-term pressures has had to be balanced. Nevertheless, I believe that the trust has been approaching those issues in a determined manner——

The motion having been mdde at half-past Two o'clock and having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 31 January 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit System

1. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to improve the operation of the benefit system.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): We are continually improving the operation of the benefit system. Over the past two years, the time taken to process claims for most key benefits has been reduced by an average of 30 per cent. and output per member of staff has been increased by more than 20 per cent. For the future, I announced last September the one-stop programme to improve customer service and value for money even further.

Mr. Flynn: Has the Secretary of State noticed that the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill is only the latest in a long series of salami cuts in the income of people on invalidity benefit? If the benefit were still being paid under the same conditions that operated in 1979, each single person on invalidity benefit would receive an extra £35 a week and each couple would receive an extra £47 a week. Are not a Government who scapegoat the sick in that way nauseating, weak and hopeless?

Mr. Lilley: If long-term sickness benefit were available only to the number of people receiving it under the last Labour Government, expenditure would be halved. We have allowed it to double in 10 years and to treble in 15 years. We want to ensure that, in future, money is focused on those who are genuinely unable to work because of sickness or disability and that it does not go to those who are able to work and who should be helped back into work on the back-to-work benefits. If the Opposition wish to revert to the old system, from where will they get the money?

Mr. Sims: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is very strong feeling about the extent to which some people are receiving benefits to which they are not legally entitled? The extent of that was demonstrated by my right hon. Friend's announcement last year that he intended an initiative to save as much as £500 million worth of benefits that were being drawn wrongly. What success has my right hon. Friend had in reaching that target and what steps is he taking to prevent fraudulent claims so that money can go to those who are genuinely entitled to it?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There is widespread resentment among people of all parties and none, and particularly among those on modest incomes who are striving to support themselves and to pay their taxes. They feel that some of their taxes are being misused and abused by those who are defrauding the system. I set a target last year for the Benefits Agency of identifying and stopping £500 million worth of abuse. I am happy to say that it exceeded that target and it is well on the way to matching a higher target this year. That will be welcomed by everyone who has at heart the best interests of those who genuinely need help from the benefits system, as well as the best interests of the taxpayer.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Does the Secretary of State intend to review payments to the 1·5 million families who are dependent on income support, in the light of the report published today by NCH Action for Children? According to that report, the £4·15 a week that is deemed sufficient to feed a child is 30 per cent. less than what was spent by Victorian workhouses in 1869, when it was £5·46. Is that not a disgraceful decline in our standards with regard to feeding our children?

Mr. Lilley: For several reasons, that does not ring true to anyone, not least because there is no sum designated specifically for food within the income support system. The sum given is available for parents to decide how they should spend it in the best interests of their families. I believe that the hon. Lady is referring to a figure that might have been implicit in the supplementary benefits system. However, she is somewhat out of date with regard to the reasoning behind the press release. Her allegation that people would be better off if we returned to the Victorian workhouse system discredits the hon. Lady.

Occupational Pensions

2. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average value of an occupational pension in 1979, and in the latest year for which figures are available.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. William Hague): It is estimated that, at 1991 prices, the average value of occupational pensions was £41.90 per week in 1979 and £63.30 per week in 1991, an increase of 51 per cent.

Mr. Greenway: Are not those figures a matter for congratulation? Will my hon. Friend confirm that more than 70 per cent. of all recently retired pensioners now have an occupational pension, compared with 50 per cent. of all pensioners in 1979? Will he confirm also that the Government will continue their caring Conservatism and look after pensioners on the basic pension, as they always have done?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Not only did the average income from an occupational pension grow throughout the 1980s but, as he says, the percentage of pensioners who have an occupational pension has also grown to about 70 per cent. of recently retired pensioners. My hon. Friend is right also to draw attention to the importance of state provision of the basic pension. Our policy remains to maintain the value of the basic state pension and to encourage additional provision on top of it.

Mr. Frank Field: The whole House notes with pleasure the figures that have just been given, but do the Government share the Opposition's concern over the fact that it appears that millions of former pensioners in occupational schemes and in the state earnings-related pension scheme have been badly advised to opt out of those pension schemes? Do the Government regard that as a serious development? If so, what do they intend to do?

Mr. Hague: The extent to which that might have happened has not yet been determined. As the hon. Gentleman will know, my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury have asked the Securities and Investments Board to undertake a review. If such bad advice has been given, the Government will take it extremely seriously and will look to the Securities and Investments Board to come up with proposals to remedy what has happened.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will my hon. Friend confirm the amounts over and above inflation to be paid to pensioners to protect them from the imposition of VAT on fuel?

Mr. Hague: Yes. My hon. Friend draws attention to an important point. In the forthcoming uprating of the state pension, 50p per week will be given to single pensioners and 70p per week will be given to couples over and above the normal uprating in order to give extra help with VAT on fuel.

Child Support Agency

3. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will now abolish the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Lilley: No.

Mr. Hain: Will the Secretary of State respond to the detailed and devastating indictment of the operation of the Child Support Agency by a victim, one of my constituents, Mrs. Carol Jenkins? She showed that the pre-Christmas changes that were announced by the Government were mere window-dressing. Many families are still suffering chaos and heartache. The operation of the CSA is contrary to natural justice in that it is retrospective and overturns court orders, some of which were implemented seven or eight years ago. Has the time not come to wipe the slate clean and abolish the Child Support Agency, which is turning thousands of ordinary, decent men and women into a new oppressed class?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman seems unaware—I hope that he is becoming aware and will pass on my answer to his constituent—that the changes that were announced before Christmas, in rapid response to the investigations that were carried out by the Social Security Select Committee and that, in some respects, went rather further than it recommended, are to be introduced into the House shortly. I hope that they will come into force on 7 February. Obviously, when they do so, those who are affected by them will appreciate the benefit.

As for scrapping the agency, that would deprive hundreds of thousands of women of the prospect of reliable, regular and substantial maintenance. It would mean that men would no longer be expected to fulfil their obligations to their children and that taxpayers would have to pay sizeable sums, which the Opposition are not yet prepared to promise to meet. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was a supporter of the feminist tendency within the Labour party. He seems to be backing the male chauvinist wing now.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend accept that I and many others welcome the changes to the Child Support Agency which he announced before Christmas? Is he aware that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has proposed a disregard of £10 a week, which would cost £340 million on his figures? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that disregarding maintenance paid through the Child Support Agency for income support purposes would give many married women an incentive to separate?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We look forward to seeing whether the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman is prepared to utter that pledge in the House, in which case we can take it seriously, or whether it is in the category of pledges made outside the House which we should disregard entirely. The extra taxpayer expenditure of £340 million proposed by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) would not alleviate one penny of the burden on the absent parent, but it would create an incentive to separate in exactly the way that my hon. Friend suggests. I do not think that that is necessarily the best use of taxpayers' money. We await the opportunity for a supplementary question to provide some clarification from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that in the negotiation, usually at arm's length, of most clean-break settlements, extra allowance of capital is made to the wife to reflect the cost of supporting children? Does he agree that, while there have been useful changes to the CSA regime, they have failed to give full account to the real intention and effect of clean-break settlements land have undermined the good advice frequently given to spouses at the break-up of marriage?

Mr. Lilley: I would recommend that the hon. and learned Gentleman read the letter from Nicholas Mostyn of the Family Law Association in *The Spectator*, which considers the issue in detail. He should also consider the ruling in the Crozier case——

Mr. Carlile: The Minister is obviously missing the point.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. and learned Gentleman may disagree with the judge in the Crozier case, who said that the courts always have the opportunity to take into account the fact that either parent could come back and seek a change, as could the Department of Social Security, if the parent is left on benefit. The courts have always looked to clean-break settlements between husband and wife, but there has never been the possibility of a clean break between parents and childen. Parents cannot divorce their children; nor should they seek, by an asset transfer, to transfer the cost of maintenance to the taxpayer if they have the necessary resources themselves.

Sir David Madel: When the Child Support Agency draws up an assessment, why does it ask for income details of the second wife when she has no children of her own? Could my right hon. Friend look again sympathetically at the point made by the hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) in the last Social Security questions, which is that travel-to-work costs should be considered because it costs a small fortune to commute from Essex or Befordshire to London?

Mr. Lilley: The second wife's income is taken into account only in the context of setting the protected income. As hon. Members will know, under the proposed changes, the protected income is being raised by £22 per week above the previous level. On reviewing that, I have decided that the information need no longer be given to the first parent when the protected income does not come into play. That will reduce the transfer of information, which caused some stress when it was unnecessary.

We considered, as did the Select Committee on Social Security, the possibility of taking into account specific costs, but we thought that it was better to leave people with an appropriate share of their income after meeting their burden, and to meet the other costs from that income, rather than specifying each and every cost that they should meet.

Mr. Ingram: Has the Secretary of State had an opportunity to read the recent analysis of the Child Support Act 1992 produced by the citizens advice bureaux in Scotland? While recognising that certain benefits can accrue from the Act, the CABs call for

> "some serious amendments in order to produce a workable scheme that will benefit the family and not merely the State".

Will the Secretary of State accept that observation and undertake a thorough and urgent review of the Act, and introduce amendments that will take account of the many criticisms that have been raised by the CABs and other groups about the workings of the Act?

Mr. Lilley: I have not personally seen the CAB Scottish review, although I dare say that my hon. Friend in the Scottish Office has done so. I will look at the review afterwards.

The Government have carried out our review and we have responded to a review carried out by the all-party Select Committee, and we have gone somewhat further in some respects. We are introducing it before the House and, I hope, implementing it rapidly in February so that the pressure points that we have identified will be alleviated. We want to know from the Opposition—the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) failed to respond to this—whether they are sticking by their £340 million pledge, which would not help absent parents at all. Why did not the hon. Gentleman respond? Will the Opposition's other Front-Bench spokesmen clarify the situation? Are they reneging on the recommendations of the all-party Select Committee?

Mr. Cormack: I welcome the changes that my right hon. Friend will introduce on Wednesday, but I urge him to continue to monitor the working of the agency carefully to ensure that responsible fathers are not unduly penalised and that vast numbers of second marriages are not thereby put at risk.

Mr. Lilley: As my hon. Friend knows, we keep all our policies under continuous review. We shall try to ensure that the detailed operation of the policy is as sensitive and as efficient as possible, and that as few mistakes as possible —ideally, no mistakes—are made. We hope that the changes that we have announced will meet the pressure points that have been identified and brought to our attention, both by the Select Committee and by individual hon. Members such as my hon. Friend. We have done what is right to make the policy acceptable while preserving the basic principle that both parents are responsible for supporting their children, and that the taxpayer should be involved only if the parents do not have the means to do so.

Child Support

4. **Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much child support is estimated to be collected in 1993-94; and what proportion of this will represent a net increase in incomes for one-parent families.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): The amount of child support maintenance originally estimated to be collected is £530 million. The actual amount will be lower, but it is not possible to provide an accurate revised figure, since the full impact of the proposed policy changes is not yet known. Similarly, it is not, therefore, possible to estimate the proportion of this amount which will represent a net increase to lone parents.

It is important to remember, however, that all maintenance paid is of benefit to lone parents as it forms an income that can be used as a stepping stone back to work.

Mr. Wicks: Is not it the case that only £1 or so out of every £10 goes to improve the living standards of mothers with children? Therefore, is not it the case that the vast bulk of the money goes to the Treasury, and that in reality we have not a Child Support Act, but an Exchequer Support Act? Does the Minister accept that those of us who support the decent principle of parental responsibility will now need to defend the measure against the bad practice that is undermining that principle? Will he reform the measure to ensure that the vast proportion of money goes through to mothers with children, and that we have in reality a Child Support Act?

Mr. Burt: There are two points to be made. First, if the hon. Gentleman had read the Select Committee report, he would have seen that it found it a perfectly worthwhile objective of the agency from the start to seek to recover payments to support the taxpayer. The report states:

> "The Committee believes that taxpayers have for too long been asked, in effect, to pick up maintenances bills that should have been met by absent parents."

That is the intention behind the legislation.

The second, and equally important, point to make is that establishing a maintenance payment early, even if there is not an immediate pound-for-pound benefit, is important. Most lone parents want to go back to work, and they find that what stops them from doing so is not having an income such as maintenance being available from an early date. There was no advantage in their getting that before, but now they can establish that early link of maintenance. When they go back into work as their children get older, maintenance will have been established and that will be an important factor.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that many taxpayers will be pleased to see that the responsibilities are being passed on to absent fathers under this welcome legislation? Does he also agree that it would be more helpful if sections of the media spent less time concentrating on the problems of absent fathers, and more time exposing the benefits to the mothers who are left bringing up the children on their own?

Mr. Burt: One or two cases are now coming through in the media—there have been a couple today—showing how the CSA can work to the advantage of mothers. There has been an over-concentration on the other side. The media also tend to fail to bring out the fact that in 96 per cent. of all cases in which the CSA is involved, benefit is being paid to the parent with care of the child. That means that, whatever the income or circumstances of the absent parent, the parent with care has been left dependent on everyone else and on the taxpayer. The agency was set up so that it could seek to relieve that burden on taxpayers. We are all happy to pay for children when no one else can, but we all want to ensure that parents live up to their responsibilities.

5. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what responses he has received to the proposed changes to the child support regulations announced on 22 December.

Mr. Burt: I have continued to receive correspondence from hon. Members and from the public since the proposed changes were announced. The responses cover a wide range of views.

Mr. Hughes: In considering the correspondence that he has received, has the Minister been made aware of the breaches in confidentiality that the CSA has recently made? Is he worried, as I am, about confidential information being given to ex-partners about income and whereabouts? I have one constituent who is now being pestered by an ex-partner because information was leaked to him by the CSA. I fear, and I hope that the Minister shares my fear, that violence could be introduced into a situation following such leaks of information. Will he put an immediate stop to those breaches of personal liberties?

Mr. Burt: Like everyone else, the agency operates under the Data Protection Act 1988. Making available information about income is a vital part of what is done. It was done in the courts previously, when the only way to ascertain how much the other party had so as to determine the amount of maintenance was affidavit. There was free transfer of that information. That goes on now and is covered by the Data Protection Act. Whereabouts should not be released. Where that happens, it is wrong. I will take steps to ensure that it does not happen.

Mr. Burns: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is premature to prejudge the effects of the changes that he announced just before Christmas in a swift response to the anxieties expressed in the Select Committee report? Can he give an assurance that once the regulations are in operation, if it is seen that there are still problems—for example, commuter fares within the home counties are a significant monthly expenditure—his Department will be prepared, as part of on-going monitoring, to look again at such problems?

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that the policy remained under review. That was always our purpose from the outset. However, I suggest to my hon. Friend that he looks carefully at what the Select Committee said in response to my evidence to it on specific expenses. The desire was to ensure that a certain proportion of income remained with the absent parent. What was an important expense to one was not necessarily an important expense to another. Simply to list a series of expenses that might be appropriate to absent parents would run the risk of driving the priority of maintenance to the child back down to where it was under the previous system. That is why we preferred to go for the system that we have now. That explanation was accepted by the Select Committee.

Mr. Rooney: In drafting the proposed changes, which will be debated soon, and recognising that the assessment of absent parents' income is based on net income, are we to assume that every case will be reassessed following the massive tax increases on 1 April, when all absent parents' income will fall?

Mr. Burt: It remains open to any party to seek review of the assessment if there has been a change of circumstances. It should be made clear that that form of assistance was not available under the previous system, under which it was much more difficult to obtain a review. The continual raising of the position of the absent parent ignores the importance of the whole system to parents with care of children. It is important that the Government make sure that there is a balance. That is what the Child Support Act 1991 set out to do. Far too many complaints and concerns are raised by people who do not understand the importance of ensuring that parents with care of children receive adequate, regular and reliable maintenance. That did not happen before.

Mr. Sykes: Will my hon. Friend ignore the carping from Opposition Members and instead congratulate the Child Support Agency on pursuing errant fathers who have no intention of facing up to their responsibilities and prefer the rest of us to pick up the tab?

Mr. Burt: A less well-known fact about the Child Support Agency is that, unlike the previous system, it has a tracing function. In the past, when full information about an absent parent could not be given, that parent used to go completely to ground, leaving the burden on all the other taxpayers and leaving a parent to care for the child without any support. We now have a system whereby he or she can be traced and about 15,000 have been found, which represents a 90 per cent. success rate. I should have thought that that would merit some support from Opposition Members.

Mr. Dewar: Do Ministers really argue that the possibility of a disregard should not even be on the agenda for discussion or be examined in the context of present discontents? I have argued precisely that on a number of occasions and that argument was also put forcefully by the Social Security Advisory Committee in its latest report. Has the Minister considered the Australian precedent of introducing a review officer who, in certain defined circumstances, can order a departure from the normal financial formula if that is justified by exceptional circumstances? Will he take it from me that a large number of hon. Members feel that if the present package—due to come before us on Wednesday—is seen as the final word, the system will forfeit public confidence in the most damaging way and also that every system needs a safety net, which has not yet been provided?

Mr. Burt: The point about the review that the hon. Gentleman recommends is that the Australian system is completely different from ours; it is much more incomplete and far more rough and ready and the right of appeal is not available to everyone. He is asking us to substitute a much more imperfect system merely to give a relatively small number of people the opportunity to appeal.

On the second point, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the disregard that the hon. Gentleman suggests does not relieve the absent parent from any burden, but it increases the burden on the taxpayer by however much he wants to include in the disregard. The hon. Gentleman is reputed to have suggested about £340 million for that sort of payment. I notice that he has not responded to the challenge offered to my right hon. Friend.

Can the House take it that the hon. Gentleman is giving a pledge in the House?

Mr. Dewar *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Burt: I find myself in some confusion if the hon. Gentleman is prepared to say something inside the House but not to stand by the pledge. The House and the whole country will have noticed his shifty nature.

Mr. Bates: Does my hon. Friend agree that the greatest scandal to be brought to light by the work of the Child Support Agency is that 660,000 of the first 1 million cases involved an absent parent who was not paying one penny in contributions towards their children? Will he ensure that, whatever the changes proposed, they will not affect his and the Child Support Agency's ability to tackle the greatest of all injustices?

Mr. Burt: It has been a concern to those who have been paying and asked to pay more that the agency is seen to be going after only that group of people. In referring to the expected number of cases taken on by the end of the first year, of which about two thirds of a million will be people who have not paid any maintenance, my hon. Friend seeks to redress that argument. It is clear that we are determined to ensure that those people who have not been paying towards the care of their children do so and that is a good reason why the agency should continue with its work.

VAT (Fuel)

7. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements have been made to compensate people who rely on wheelchairs and other electrical devices for their well-being, following the introduction of value added tax on fuel.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): The cost of electricity for equipment used in the treatment of illness at home, such as dialysis, is met by the local health authority or NHS trust. That does not apply to electrically powered wheelchairs, but around 80 per cent. of disabled people will receive extra help for VAT on fuel through social security benefits.

Mr. Dowd: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does not he realise that, while compensation for those hardest hit by the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel is inadequate in any case, it strikes those with disabilities especially hard? Is he aware that the department of applied economics at Cambridge university has shown that the average spent on domestic fuel by households that include members with a disability is up to one quarter higher than that spent in a traditional household? Is not it characteristic of the Government that their taxation policies rely on soaking those in the community who are least able to bear it and taxing people for the privilege of being able to move around in their own homes?

Mr. Scott: Help with VAT, including direct help through special payments, exceptional cold weather payments and energy efficiency, will cost about £2·5 billion over the next three years. That, if I may say so, is vastly in excess of anything offered by the Opposition, who were talking of some 50[illegible] a week being adequate for those purposes. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned powered wheelchairs, I might add that the average extra cost as a result of VAT for the average user will amount to about 76p a year.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend confirm that planned funding on sick and disabled people for this year will be £16·5 billion? Will he confirm that that is an increase of some 300 per cent. in real terms and is three times higher than the amount that was spent on sick and disabled people in 1978-79? Does not that show the Government's commitment to helping sick and disabled people?

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend puts his finger exactly on the point. While I well understand the pressures on both sides of the House for us to do better in meeting the needs of disabled people and enabling them to have a higher quality of life, it comes a bit thick from the Opposition when they failed disabled people in many ways when in office. As my hon. Friend reminded us, we are now providing three times as much help for disabled people as was ever provided by a Labour Government.

Child Care Allowance

8. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many additional people he expects to return to work as a result of the recent introduction of a child care allowance in family credit.

Mr. Lilley: We expect 50,000 families to take up work and be better off as a direct result of the change.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the child care allowance is not only available to those on family credit but to others such as those on disability working allowance? Does he agree that it is a tremendous leap forward in helping working families to get back to work—both partners?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is correct. As well as a disregard of child care costs in family credit, it is also available in disability working allowance and to some people on housing benefit, as well as council tax benefit. We believe that it will not only draw back into work some 50,000 people—perhaps more if more people than our cautious assessments respond to it—but it will also help some 100,000 families where one parent is already at work and on family credit, perhaps to increase their hours and the standard of living of that family. We think that it is a positive change which has been widely welcomed.

Mr. Bradley: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, as the child care allowance is a disregard against family credit, the lowest income families, who already receive their full entitlement to family credit, will receive no help whatever with their child care costs under the scheme?

Mr. Lilley: In general, those who earn least and therefore receive most family credit are those who work the shortest hours. They, of course, will be helped to work longer hours by being able to meet some of the costs of child support. That is precisely one of the reasons for introducing the changes.

Mr. Willetts: Does my right hon. Friend accept that nearly half of all recipients of family credit are single parents? Does not that show how effective the benefit is in ensuring that they get into work?

Mr. Lilley: Absolutely. Although family credit is not exclusively geared to help lone parents, it helps them disproportionately. It will help also married couples where one partner is disabled and unable to look after the children. It is a much more significant change than the rather grudging comments from the Opposition Front Bench. Indeed, it exceeds the request of the Daycare Trust for a £35 disregard by offering a £40 disregard.

VAT (Fuel)

10. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the amount in cash per week of the compensation for value added tax on fuel, over and above the general income support increase, for a pensioner on income support.

Mr. Hague: In April, income support will increase by an extra 50p per week for single pensioners and 70p for couples. By April 1996, the extra for VAT will be worth some £1.40p and £2.00 per week respectively.

Mr. Pickthall: Does the Minister agree that although most means-tested benefits will be upgraded in April by 3·9 per cent., which includes the 4 per cent. VAT compensation, retired pensioners on income support or those in receipt of invalidity pensions will receive an increase of 3·5 per cent. on their pensions, plus 50p if they are single or 70p if they are a couple? Does he agree that that amounts to 26p extra per week? Can he estimate, for the benefit of the House, how much gas, electricity or solid fuel could be bought by that most needy and fuel-dependent group in our society for 26p, the price of a packet of crisps?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman has got his arithmetic a little mixed up. When considering the 50p or 70p per week extra that will be given to pensioners to help with VAT on fuel, it would be illogical to deduct the extra amount that is also given in income support. All pensioners, whether in receipt of income support or the full basic pension, will receive 50p per week if they are single or 70p if they are a couple.

The total income support rate for pensioner couples will rise by £4 per week from £95·25 to £99·25, which is an increase of 3·9 per cent. That is a lot more than that received by many people in work. All that adds up to a package which is a good deal more generous than that famously suggested by the Opposition, who said that they could give that help through an extra 50p on pensions.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Investment Priorities

29. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what are the investment priorities for the Church Commissioners for 1994.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Church Commissioners have accepted the Lambeth report's recommendations that they should seek to maintain a portfolio that is not markedly different from that of other major bodies with comparable responsibilities. That is their long-term priority. The immediate priority is to let newly completed developments and to reduce unsecured borrowing. The commissioners also propose to take steps to adjust the imbalance between prospective sustainable income and likely expenditure.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful for that full and helpful reply. If the right hon. Gentleman accepts that the twin planks of an acceptable investment policy should be to maximise returns to pay stipends and pensions and to behave in an ethical Christian manner, will he reflect on the fact that, last year, hundreds of millions of pounds were lost as a result of the Church Commissioners' investment policy and that it has now been decided to increase the rents of the tenants of the Paddington Churches housing association by 20 fold? Those two facts represent a failing in good investment terms and in terms of Christian ethics. If the sums involved had been public money, the Church Commissioners would have been brought before the Public Accounts Committee and would have probably been given a rough time. Would the commissioners agree to let an independent organisation look at their investments, possibly the Ecclesiastical Committee of this House and the House down the road?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman will know, going back to the capital losses, that between 1986 and 1989 the value of the assets held by the Church Commissioners increased from £2·2 billion to £3 billion, an increase of £800 million, but that between 1989 and 1992 the value of those assets declined by £800 million from £3 billion to £2·2 billion. They are now in the process of increasing again and the value of the stock exchange portfolio has already gone up this year by nearly £200 million.

The real difficulty about the change in the underlying value of those assets is cash flow. Everyone is worried that the clergy will be unable to receive their stipends. That is one reason that the yield from the assets must obviously be increased, even through rent increases.

Pensions

30. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners what actions are being taken to safeguard the pensions of Church employees.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners' assets are considerably in excess of pension liabilities relating to service to date of active and retired clergy. Clergy pensions are, of course, non contributory. The Lambeth report made certain recommendations to safeguard, in particular, the provision for liabilities in respect of the future service of existing and future clergy. Those recommendations are being actively pursued.

Mr. Corbyn: Can the right hon. Gentleman give us a guarantee about what the Church Commissioners will do to protect the pensions of those who are employed by the Church at present, because his answer did not do that? Does he accept that the Church Commissioners have gambled away £800 million of their money on inappropriate and daft property speculation, including the Ashford shopping development, which does not even have planning permission, and the Lutterworth development, which is the subject of separate concern? Does not he think that it is time to set up a pension fund so that the pensions of employees and clergy of the Church Commissioners can be guaranteed for the future? Should not the funds be invested ethically, sensibly and suitably, rather than being threatened by property speculation?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman has used a pejorative term in talking of gambling away the Church Commissioners' assets. I heard no complaints about the gambling away of assets when they increased by £800 million between 1986 and 1989. I have already explained to the hon. Gentleman that the underlying assets are more than sufficient to meet the existing and prospective pension liabilities of clergy who are in post, still active or who have retired. The Lambeth group report, which we are actively pursuing, simply asked us to set up a segregated fund into which contributions could be safely segregated. But there is no underlying threat to prospective or existing pensioners.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

35. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received concerning the eligibility for legal aid in the past three months; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): I have had 47 letters from Members of Parliament concerning various aspects of financial eligibility for legal aid, some of them relating to individual cases.

Mr. Barnes: Last year, about 14 million people became no longer eligible for legal aid. In his autumn statement, the Chancellor announced the largest cuts in legal aid in more than 40 years. Is not it a charter for the wealthy, the powerful, the bully boys, the unscrupulous and the exploiters, not to mention the drug industry? Could not at least the £58 million underspend last year, because of those problems, be used to move in a different direction?

Mr. Taylor: Far from being confined to a small group of participants, civil legal aid is available to 48 per cent. of households. Criminal legal aid has no upper limit if the court thinks that the interests of justice are served by grant of legal aid. There must be some disciplines in legal aid, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that ours is probably the most generous legal aid system in the world. He has the word of the Labour spokesman in the House of Lords, as well as mine, on that.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that legal aid has risen tenfold since 1979? Does he accept, however, that many of us are concerned at the ease with which some defendants in City fraud trials secure legal aid? Those individuals, such as Mr. Roger Levitt, seem to live in substantial homes yet qualify for legal aid. Are they not salting away their assets and then being defended at vast expense to the tax payer?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend returns to that point with his usual cogency. Although I have some sympathy with the general principle that he presents, he will understand that I cannot comment on individual cases. There is no upper financial limit on criminaal legal aid. Legal aid will be granted for criminal proceedings if the court thinks that it is in the interests of justice to do so.

Police and Magistrates Courts Bills

36. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement concerning the consultations he has been engaged in relating to the Police and Magistrates Courts Bill *[Lords]*.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Since the publication of the White Paper two years ago, 11 consultative documents have followed. The reforms have also regularly been discussed by the Magistrates Courts Consultative Council. The Lord Chancellor has taken careful note of respondents' comments.

Mr. Jones: The consultations were cosmetic; the papers stand virtually unaltered. Does the Minister agree that the proposed reforms give the Lord Chancellor swingeing new powers over the justices' clerks, and ultimately, therefore, over the courts themselves? Does he accept that the proposals in the Bill turn back the practice and tradition of many years, and that there are no friends for this Bill? The hon. Gentleman should think again.

Mr. Taylor: I must make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that these proposals leave the accountability of justices' clerks where it has always been: to the local magistrates courts committees, which comprise local magistrates and will be locally administered.

In some senses, the White Paper is not a very original document—almost all these proposals are already in operation somewhere in England or Wales, with no signs of adverse effects: rather the reverse. They are in place because local people have chosen to put them in place.

Mr. Boateng: The Minister refers to the local magistrates courts committees. He is well aware that the measure before the other place proposes that the chairmen of those committees should in turn be appointed by the Lord Chancellor. He also knows very well that all parties in the other place, and every Bench up and down the country, have expressed widespread opposition to the proposal, and that the Lord Chief Justice has described it as "chilling".

Will the Minister undertake to ensure that the Lord Chancellor thinks again about this measure, just as his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has had to think again about his?

Mr. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's mind is open, as was said by the noble Earl Ferrers in the debate in another place. The Lord Chief Justice participated in that debate and did indeed use the word "chilling"; but he made it clear that he supports a great deal of the Bill. The proposal that he called chilling is the one for a legal forum—a proposal that came originally from the justices' clerks themselves.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Minister recognise that the decline in standards of public conduct referred to by the Public Accounts Committee appears to be afflicting his Department, which is introducing proposals that are universally regarded by our senior judiciary as resulting in the independence of the judiciary being tampered with by politicians? I refer most particularly to the proposals for justices' clerks. Will the Minister ensure that they are not brought before this House?

Mr. Taylor: I am sorry to have to say this twice, but the proposals render justices' clerks answerable to magistrates courts committees—that is where responsibility lies. If the hon. Gentleman claims that the White Paper and the Bill are so friendless, I can only repeat that all these proposals are, as far as I am aware, already in operation somewhere in England or Wales, because local people have chosen to put them there.

Judiciary (Election)

37. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what further plans he has for the election of magistrates and judges.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government have no plans for the election of magistrates or judges, and do not consider that elections would provide a suitable basis for appointment or be compatible with the principle of judicial independence.

Mr. Skinner: Can there be another country in the world like our aristocratic society, with all the incestuousness of freemason-type judges looking after number one? It is like a family circle; they put their friends in as the next in line. Surely, if the Government want to deal with the Roger Levitts and the Ernest Saunders of this world, and with all those other City crooks who are part of the Tory fraternity, the best thing to do is to ensure that the judges are elected. If the Government believe in a classless society, let them put it into practice.

Mr. Taylor: It is not the purpose of judges to be representative of the community. They are selected for their ability, legal expertise and personal qualities, including the quality of having the ability to relate to people from all walks of life.

Sir Anthony Grant: While wholly rejecting all the tomfoolery about electing magistrates, may I ask my hon. Friend whether he is aware that not everybody is wholly happy with the method of appointing magistrates? Is he aware that a large and increasing number of people are anxious and have the time, the ability and the experience to serve on the bench but are rejected on the ground of age? Many people do not want to be tried by young oiks of some sort but by people with experience. Can my hon. Friend assure the House that there is no question of the disease of ageism spreading to the appointment of magistrates?

Mr. Taylor: I am not in favour of ageism or oikism or any other ism in this context. As my hon. Friend knows, magistrates are appointed from among those who offer themselves for service and the age limit was not set by the Lord Chancellor but by the House.

Chief Justices' Clerks

38. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has made of the value of the appointment of chief justices'clerks.

Mr. John M. Taylor: An increasing number of magistrates courts committees have already appointed a single head of service, in some cases called a chief justices' clerk. I am aware of no such committee returning to its previous management structure.

Mrs. Campbell: Does the Minister agree with the chairman of the Cambridgeshire magistrates courts committee, Mr. Alex Cook, who has said that the appointment of chief justices' clerks will be an expensive addition to the management tier and that existing justices' clerks will lose status, authority and independence?

Mr. Taylor: I do not think that I should answer for people's dignities from the Dispatch Box, if that be the line of the inquiry. However, I wish to ensure from the Dispatch Box that the Lord Chancellor and I can be properly accountable to Parliament for the expenditure of £350 million per annum. The appointment or emergence of a chief justices' clerk is not to create a new tier of management but is, rather, the emergence of the head of an existing tier of management who is accountable to the local magistrates court committee. That is the way it should be.

Mr. Sims: I understand why my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor may wish to alter the structure and administration of magistrates courts, but does he not appreciate that if he puts in charge of local administration people whom he calls chief justices' clerks, the individual justices' clerks in the local courts will feel that they are losing their authority and, in particular, their independence to give legal advice to magistrates? If the task of a chief justices' clerk is simply to be, as it were, a chief executive, why not call him that?

Mr. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has never regarded the actuality of the name as crucial, although it has clearly emerged as the preferred name. The chief justices' clerk will not have any say in the advice given in court by an individual justices' clerk. That advice will remain trenchantly independent, and the legislation will say so.

Children (Court Evidence)

39. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of whether courts are taking sufficient steps to shield children while they are giving evidence in court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The use of live television links for witnesses up to the age of 17 in criminal cases involving violent or sexual offences received overwhelming support. A further research project is evaluating the use of pre-recorded interviews with child witnesses. In family proceedings, screens can be used at the court's discretion. In conjunction with the Children Act 1989 Advisory Committee, I shall be keeping the position under review.

Mrs. Golding: May I bring to the Minister's attention the recent case of a 12-year-old girl who described her experience in court as the worst day of her life? She was promised screens to protect her, but discovered when she got to court that she had one small screen by the witness box. The judge called her to the centre of the court so that the accused could see her and shout at her, and her home address was given to the court so that the man accused of abducting her could visit her when he was released from the mental hospital. Does the Minister describe that as protecting children in our courts? What does he propose to do about it?

Mr. Taylor: I have not yet responded to the hon. Lady's remarks about an individual case, but I am certainly prepared to look sympathetically at that case. I know that, as the vice-chairman of the all-party group on children, the hon. Lady will make sure that these things are watched very closely. I expect that she approves of the fact that a child liaison officer has been appointed in each of the 47 courts that have television link equipment. It is planned to make similar appointments in all Crown court centres, and, as I am sure the hon. Lady agrees, the sooner the better.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that the continued extension of child video link equipment in courts ought to be welcomed by all hon. Members. Is he aware of the fact that this matter continues to cause great concern to everyone involved in the legal profession, including the members of the Bar Council committees, on some of which I sit?

Mr. Taylor: I welcome my hon. Friend's remarks. I should like to draw the attention of the House to the second annual report of the Children Act Advisory Committee, which was published in December 1993 and raises a number of issues concerning the safeguarding of the welfare of child witnesses—issues which will have the support of all of us.

Rover Group

3.30 pm

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about BMW's acquisition of Rover.

This morning, British Aerospace announced its decision to accept an offer from BMW to acquire its wholly-owned subsidiary, Rover Group Holdings Ltd.

BAe bought the Government's shareholding in Rover Group in July 1988. In accordance with assurances given at the time of the sale, BAe has helped to transform Rover into one of Europe's most efficient vehicle manufacturers. Many factors have contributed to this—notably the management of Sir Graham Day, Mr. George Simpson and Mr. John Towers; the receptiveness of the Rover work force and of Rover's suppliers to changing demands; and the close involvement and valued support of Honda. BAe has played a major part, and has put in very substantial capital investment, averaging £200 million a year.

BAe wants to concentrate on its role as a world player in the defence and aerospace sector, and has been giving consideration to the future of its shareholding in Rover. Late on 26 January, BAe received a formal bid from BMW to acquire Rover Group Holdings Ltd. It was for BAe to take the commercial decision about how to respond to that bid. In particular, it had to have regard to the interests of its shareholders, whose approval at an extraordinary general meeting is still a condition of the deal. But BAe immediately informed us of the bid and, in the absence of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on an overseas visit, I met the chief executives of both BAe and BMW to discuss their plans.

The reality is that BAe owns two cash-hungry businesses—Rover, and its defence and aerospace activities. BAe could not invest as much as it wanted in both businesses. The sale to BMW will therefore allow BAe to pursue plans for the turbo-prop and regional jet businesses in Prestwick and Manchester. This is good news for the United Kingdom's aerospace industry.

For Rover, the new relationship with BMW offers some significant opportunities. BMW has stated that it will: maintain Rover as a separate enterprise, with its own manufacturing plants and its own design and development capabilities; be able to offer better access to the very substantial funds needed for investment in new models; encourage Rover to build on the progress it has made in developing long-term relationships with its suppliers; and be able to offer Rover additional export opportunities, which should increase volumes. BMW has also stated that it hopes that Rover will be able to maintain and to build on the existing links with Honda.

Those intentions are set out in more detail in a letter that BMW sent to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. Today, I am sending a copy of that letter, together with a letter from BAe confirming its strategy, to all right hon. and hon. Members, and I am placing copies in the Library.

BMW is one of the most highly regarded car and engine manufacturers in the world. The fact that BMW is making this very substantial investment in Britain is evidence of the dramatic improvements in competitiveness that have been achieved by the British vehicle industry. BAe and BMW believe that the deal can significantly strengthen Rover and consequently the whole United Kingdom vehicle industry. That should be welcomed by our vehicle industry and by all those who work in the industry.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): The Minister would agree that he has just made a statement of major significance to British manufacturing industry. He has confirmed the takeover of the last British volume car producer into foreign ownership. Was the Minister present last year when the President of the Board of Trade assured Britain:

> "Our motor industry is now in better shape than our European competitors"?

If that were true only a few months ago, can the Minister explain why the last big British car company has today been taken over by one of those European competitors?

The Minister did not talk figures but will he confirm that the purchase price agreed was £800 million? Does he recall that his Government sold Rover for £150 million gross, or £106 million after the deduction of the hidden sweeteners? Does he recall that at that time the National Audit Office, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry and the Opposition all said that Rover had been sold too cheap? Now that the company has been bought at five times the price for which the Government sold it, why does not the Minister admit that they were all right? Is not today's deal proof that Rover was sold at a knockdown price to British Aerospace and at a rip-off to the taxpayer? *[Interruption.]* Does not the Minister and those Conservative Members baying from the Back Benches understand the apprehension felt by Rover's work force today now that they have seen their company sold to BMW, with which they are in direct competition across Europe?

Does the Minister recall that, when the President was on the Back Benches, he backed a management buy-out of Land Rover and justified British ownership on the ground that promises made when ownership moved from British to multinational control had not materalised?

The Minister chose to repeat in the House the promises made to him by BMW. What collateral does he hold to ensure that BMW delivers on those promises? What remedy does he have if it does not deliver on those promises? Will he fill in a gap from that list of promises, which contained no commitment on jobs? What assurance can the Minister offer those currently employed at Rover that their employment is as secure today as it was yesterday?

The Minister acknowledged the valuable contribution made by Honda. The new Rover 600 was overwhelmingly engineered by Honda. Last year, Honda warned that it would be difficult to continue sharing technology and designs if Rover were sold to another manufacturer. Has the Minister noticed the concern expressed by Honda that today's sale negates its attempts to provide a firm future for Rover? Has he held any discussions with Honda, as he has with BMW? Can he give the House any assurance that the sale will not place at risk the valuable partnership with Honda that is integral to the range of Rover models?

The Minister conceded that British Aerospace's decision to sell the whole Rover company and not just the part that Honda wanted to buy had nothing to do with whether BMW is a better partner for Rover and everything to do with BAe's desperate need for cash. Is he aware that, since the start of this year, BAe has already announced five separate redundancy packages totalling more than 1,900 jobs among a most skilled work force?

Will the Minister now accept the invitation of BAe's chief executive to sit down to talk with him about a strategy for that industry? Will he accept the Select Committee's advice on the urgency of providing a national strategy for an industry in crisis? Will he do so before he has to come to the House to announce the passage of the British aerospace industry into foreign ownership, as he has today accepted Britain's last volume car manufacturer losing its British independence?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman's remarks about the price paid display his total lack of understanding of what is involved in the ownership of a manufacturing industry. British Aerospace has invested more than £200 million a year since it bought the company. It has transformed its performance and the quality of its product. The fact that BMW is prepared to bid £800 million, put in the extra investment and take over the financing costs is a tribute to what BAe has achieved and, more importantly perhaps, to the British vehicle industry and its work force. If Rover had remained in public ownership, I suppose the hon. Gentleman would have expected the taxpayer to go on pouring in money to meet the losses that it would have sustained. In 14 years of public ownership, nearly £3 billion of taxpayers' money was wasted in paying for such losses.

I am happy to pay tribute to Honda's substantial contribution to Rover's achievements. BMW did so in its letter to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, adding that it hoped that

> "Rover will be able to maintain and to build on the existing links, both in terms of current and planned joint projects and in terms of the wider synergies between the two businesses."

We share that hope with BMW.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) did not say whether, in his view, the deal was good or bad for Rover and its work force. Is he not aware of the opportunities for increased exports? Is he not aware of the opportunities that will be available to Rover through the extra investment that it will receive from BMW? Is he not aware of the benefit that that will bring not only to the work force of Rover, but to its suppliers, its distributors and its dealers?

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many people in the midlands and in the Oxford region will be anxious to seek reassurances on the deal. Having heard what he said on jobs, let me press him on the subject of product development and design. For strategic reasons, no hon. Member would wish Rover to lose control of design and future development of products. Has he had any communication from BMW on future purchasing policy and the health of on-going component supply from the United Kingdom into the Rover Group and subsequently, hopefully, into the BMW group?

Mr. Sainsbury: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concerns. I assure him that those were some of the points raised in my discussions with the chairman and chief executive of BMW. The letter from BMW to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade states:

> "We want to protect that asset"—

referring to the distinctiveness of products and brands—

> "and therefore intend to maintain BMW and Rover as separate enterprises each with their own manufacturing plants and their own design and development capabilities."

BMW has also made it clear that it will maintain the purchasing departments. Indeed, it sees opportunities for British component suppliers to gain increased volume, not only through increased sales by Rover, but through increased access to BMW because it recognises that British component manufacturers are very competitive.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Minister accept that there is some regret that a company that has achieved the success of Rover is unable to find a British buyer that is capable of taking on that success and continuing the investment? Does he accept that members of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry who have visited Rover and BMW in the past few months have seen the enormous turnaround that has been achieved in Rover? Does he also accept that tribute should be paid to its management and work force for ending their confrontational approach and introducing industrial partnership, new innovation and working practices which have achieved flexibility and success?

What assurances can the right hon. Gentleman give that consumer interests will be protected and that, as a result of the merger, we will be able to ensure the manufacture of quality cars at a lower price? Will BMW honour its commitments and recognise that, as we produce cars of greater quality and more competitively than Germany, it should not just maintain employment and investment in Britain but increase it?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the achievements of Rover's management and work force, and to the extent to which the business has been transformed since leaving public ownership—and since the Government changed the framework of industrial relations law.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the value of Rover's products. BMW clearly recognises the quality that the company is achieving, and considers the Rover range—both four-wheel drive and conventional vehicles—entirely compatible with its own. It will seek every opportunity to increase sales, not only in the United Kingdom but in important export markets in some of which Rover has so far enjoyed limited distribution.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. The House will recognise that an enormous number of hon. Members wish to question the Minister. Questions cannot continue unless hon. Members put them briskly and briefly and the Minister responds in kind; if questions become long statements, I shall have to intervene. We are not in the middle of a debate.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): The Minister has rightly paid tribute to the huge role played by Honda in transforming a loss-making white elephant into a profitable company. Would it not be regrettable if the negotiations for sale were initiated, and the sale completed, without the consent—or, initially, the knowledge—of Honda? Given that some consider that Rover would have a better future linked to Honda than linked to an ailing German giant, will the Minister take steps to ensure that the link between Rover and Honda is maintained?

Mr. Sainsbury: I do not accept my hon. Friend's description of BMW. It is an extremely successful company, which has maintained its profitability when other car manufacturers have been losing theirs. I assure my hon. Friend that my Department will do what it can to ensure that BMW's wish to maintain the valued links

[Mr. Sainsbury]

between Rover and Honda is honoured, and that the benefits of that co-operation are maintained for both companies.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): What is the difference between those assurances and what we were told when the Sherpa van factory was sold to DAF? When DAF got into trouble, the Dutch owners wanted to close the factory in Birmingham, sack all the workers and transfer production to Holland.

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman may recall that the whole of that enterprise went bankrupt. Factories on both sides of the Channel were in a similar position. Having sought a market-led solution, the British side is now flourishing, without a great investment of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): Does my right hon. Friend agree that both the fact of the takeover and the price that is to be paid constitute a tribute to the excellent achievements of the work force in many parts of the country, including my constituency? Should not tribute be paid to that work force, and to management, for the complete turnaround that has been achieved in a few short years?

Will my right hon. Friend also learn a lesson from the fact that there is no potential British purchaser of this excellent company? Will he now direct his Department's attention to the need to work out why that is so? Will he also ensure that Honda—another company in Swindon—will have a major part to play in Rover's future?

Mr. Sainsbury: Again, I am happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to Rover's work force, including the work force in his constituency. As I have said, my Department will do all that it can to help the relationship between Honda and Rover to continue to work to the benefit of both companies, as it has in the past.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): The Minister referred to the excellent work force. What guarantees have been given to the work force that their jobs will exist in future? Thousands of highly skilled engineers are in jeopardy because of the deal. There is no guarantee that they will be employed in future. Quite frankly, the Minister's statement is a disaster for British industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: Quite to the contrary; the right hon. Gentleman should realise that any job is best secured by a company having good products and the money to invest in continuing innovation and product development. That is what the deal gives to Rover, and that is why Rover jobs are probably more secure today than they have been for 20 years.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): May I declare an interest on the basis that I have had the privilege of selling Rover cars through my company to hon. Members on both sides of the House? Indeed, I have frequently taken inquiries for BMWs from Opposition Members.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I would not trust the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Carlisle: Many hon. Members have trusted me.

Will BMW preserve the current dealer network and ensure that the excellent deals which Rover has offered, to Members of this place and to people outside, are still available?

Mr. Sainsbury: I can assure my hon. Friend that it is BMW's intention that Rover will continue to offer excellent deals to all its customers, whether inside or outside the House.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): The Minister has told us about BMW's intentions in respect of Rover. What role will the Minister's Department play in trying to obtain commitments which will make the letter from BMW mean anything at all? Has BMW said anything about the continuation of Rover in the part of the market which is in direct competition with BMW—for example, in respect of Rover's 600 and 800 series?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that the hon. Gentleman and the House will recognise that no company would invest £800 million to bring a business to an end. BMW has made it quite clear that it intends to take advantage of the investment to expand Rover sales and to expand the opportunities for Rover's work force and suppliers. I have every confidence that that is what BMW intends to do, and the £800 million is evidence to prove that.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Is not the difference between what we have heard from the Government Front Bench and from the Opposition Front Bench that the Government Front Bench understands the value of pan-European, multinational investment while the Opposition Front Bench incredibly still yearns for nationalisation and subsidy? Will not the deal mean better investment and more opportunity for Rover and for British Aerospace? Is it not a tragedy that, to coin a phrase, "that lot over there" cannot understand that?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend has made his point very effectively. What we have heard from the Opposition is another demonstration of their failure to understand the nature of modern manufacturing industry.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): The Minister referred to meeting the chief executives of BMW and British Aerospace. Did he consider the fact that my constituency and the work force at Longbridge first found out about the deal from reports on the radio this morning? Is that an acceptable way of going about things? How would the Minister react if the company for which he worked, which he had turned round and made a success, was sold off over his head and without any consultation?

Does not the Minister accept that the time has now come for workers in Britain to be given proper consultation rights and proper information rights? May I ask the Minister one more time: will he please answer the question and tell us what guarantees he will give and put in place to ensure that the jobs of Rover's work force will remain secure, not next week or next month, but next year and the year after that?

Mr. Sainsbury: I find it strange that the hon. Gentleman, who has substantial manufacturing, including car manufacturing, in his constituency, still seems to think that it is for the Government to offer job security to anyone in industry or in any other form of employment. The job guarantee comes from the effective and competitive operation of a company. The deal will contribute very substantially towards that. It is time that the hon. Gentleman recognised that his work force at Longbridge will have been relieved to know that the ownership of the company is now in the hands of a group which can invest the substantial sums needed for the new model development that is required at Longbridge.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): As it costs hundreds of millions of pounds, if not billions of pounds, to produce a new model today, and as vehicles have to be sold on an international basis, not merely a European basis, in order to survive, manufacturers will have to come together. Is not that even more true for aircraft manufacturers? Do they not need even more resources to produce new models? If they do not have resources, they will go down.

Today's news is good news for Rover and for British Aerospace because it will ensure their ability to survive. Together they would have had a doubtful future, but separate they will stand a chance. Is it not sad to reflect that, if Rover had had today's industrial relationships in the 1970s, it might be doing the buying rather than the selling?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for emphasising the international nature of the motor and aircraft industries. He is quite correct to say that the deal offers excellent opportunities for both industries, because it will enable BAe, as it stressed in its letter, to devote resources to its operations in Manchester and Prestwick on regional jets and Jetstream which might otherwise not have been available.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Is the Minister concerned that this is the second company in the British aerospace industry that has had to go to BMW to be rescued financially? I refer to Rolls-Royce in respect of the 700 series, the 49·51 deal, and the present deal to liberate cash for British Aerospace and it aerospace sector. Is the Minister concerned that the lack of finance going into British manufacturing is forcing our best companies to sell off sectors or go into partnership, selling certain technology when somebody else brings a cheque? Is that a satisfactory industrial policy?

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Gentleman to what my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) said about the international nature of the car industry and the aerospace industry and the fact that both industries are now characterised not only by manufacture in many different countries or by drawing their supplies from many different countries but by many partnerships and international consortia. I expect that trend to continue. The arrangement to which the hon. Gentleman refers between Rolls-Royce and BMW as a manufacturer of lower thrust aero engines is proving to be extremely successful.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is quite erroneous to seek to draw a comparison between the joint venture which was freely entered into between BMW aero engines and Rolls-Royce aero engines to produce the 700 series of turbo fans and the proposed acquisition of Rover by BMW? That arrangement will keep Rover not only a going concern but, we hope, a successful and profitable company, and will free the funds necessary for the restructuring of the commercial aircraft divisions of BAe. In other words, there is much in it for British engineering and the future of British industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is correct to say that the deal releases opportunities for the aerospace and car industries. BAe, in the letter which it sent to my right hon. Friend, referred to it as an excellent opportunity for the future development of Rover, and it also referred to the deal enabling it to progress plans for the turbo-prop and regional jet businesses. Both elements of the deal should be welcomed by those who work in those businesses.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): In view of the enormous achievements of the Rover work force, including my constituents at Cowley, in securing the transformation to which the Minister referred, do not the workers deserve the firmest guarantees on the future of jobs and investment in the model range?

Although I welcome what BMW has said so far on the matter, will the Minister tell us more about the guarantees that he was given? How long will they hold? Will they hold indefinitely? Will he say more about the link with Honda, which has been crucial to Rover's success? What guarantees has he sought? What was he told about the future of the Rover pension fund? That matter is also of enormous concern to everybody.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman recognises and welcomes what BMW said to the work force about accepting the new Rover deal and the assurances that it has given about jobs, as well as the general assurances about its intentions for the business. The business of Rover will continue; the company goes on. The ownership of the company is now in the hands of BMW, which believes—and I agree—that it can contribute substantially to the benefit of the company both in the form of cash for investment and in the form of access to markets. As the hon. Gentleman knows, investment is much needed.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while under this Government the import content of new registrations has reduced, under the last Labour Government it doubled from 28 per cent. to 56 per cent.? Does not that prove that this Government is a true friend of the British motor industry?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend draws attention to an important point. What we want to see for jobs in this country, not only directly in the industry but in its suppliers, is more cars being produced. Indeed, that is what we have seen in the past year: when the rest of Europe's car industry was in deep recession, output in the United Kingdom car industry increased. I believe that this deal will provide an opportunity for further increases.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Does the Minister accept that today's statement is a symbol of the collapse of British capital in funding British industry? That said, the company purchased today is not the company that was sold five years ago. If the alternative must be that it is sold to the far east or within Europe, the creeping "Japanisation" of British manufacturing industry must be halted. If we do not succeed in building a European-based mass-market manufacturing industry in terms of vehicles, frankly, there is no future because the United Kingdom and other countries in the European Community will never be able to compete with the far east. Will the employees of

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Rover now benefit from the social chapter? Will they benefit from the supervisory board style of management in Germany, which is so detested by the British Government?

Mr. Sainsbury: With productivity in manufacturing industry rising sharply and at record levels, with exports at record levels, and with Britain having been more successful in attracting inward investment than any other country in Europe, I think that outlook is very positive. If we had had the social chapter, I suspect that investment in Britain would not have looked so attractive to BMW.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there has been considerable investment by British Aerospace in Jetstream aircraft in Prestwick? Given the current difficulties in the marketplace, does he acknowledge that that investment needs to continue? Will he join me in welcoming today's statement whereby the deal suggests that investment will be forthcoming?

Mr. Sainsbury: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that there has been substantial investment and, as he rightly points out, there needs to be continuing substantial investment in that important business. That is why I have emphasised, as has BAe in its letter to my right hon. Friend, that the deal is good for aerospace, and particularly Jetstream at Prestwick, as it will provide excellent opportunities for Rover cars.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Will the Minister take the opportunity of dissociating himself from the sneering, jeering and frivolous attitude of many Tory Back Benchers, especially the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), on what is, frankly, a sad day for British industry?

What assurances has the right hon. Gentleman received that Longbridge and Cowley will not become dispensable satellites of Bavaria in any future downturn in the motor industry? Can he tell us what firm assurances he has secured for the motor components industry which employs many more people than actually work in assembly, especially in the black country? Equally importantly, what assurances has he received about the future of engine manufacture, which is the core of vehicle assembly?

Mr. Sainsbury: What I am happy to dissociate myself from is the attitude of Labour Members who seem to be unable to appreciate the opportunities that the deal will bring to the car industry, suppliers, the component supplies industry and the aerospace industry in this country. They seem to be extraordinarily reluctant to recognise the international nature of those industries. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that if the car industry in this country is strong, the component suppliers and the engine suppliers have increased opportunities.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): In rejecting the Opposition's knee-jerk xenophobia, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether he agrees that one of the things which must have attracted the German company was the fact that it would not have German work practices such as the social chapter inflicted upon it? Could there be any better vindication of the stance adopted by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister during negotiations on the Maastricht treaty than the fact that that German company is now choosing to invest in this country?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend has made a good point. I notice that the letter from BMW to which I have referred states that, like other German manufacturers, BMW is aware of the major improvements in competitiveness which have been made by the United Kingdom supply base. Factors such as those to which my hon. Friend referred may have contributed substantially to this major improvement in competitiveness.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Is not the heart of the matter that all future decisions affecting jobs, investment, exports and other major policies of this great British company will in future be decided, not in Britain, but in Germany according to the interests of that great German company? Does not the Minister consider that that is a shameful sell-out of major long-term British interests for short-term financial gain?

Mr. Sainsbury: It is the marketplace which will make effective decisions on the future of the Rover company and other companies. Rover will be in the same position as businesses all over the world which have British ownership, such as Burger King, Jacuzzi and Hilton, where those who use those companies are not aware of British ownership.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Given that the Labour party is now the party of the European Union, was not my right hon. Friend amazed—if it is possible to be amazed by what the Labour party does—that the spokesperson for the Labour party complained about the sale of Rover to a foreign company? Given also that all Jacques Delors has to do is twinkle his eye for the Labour party collectively to open its manifesto commitments, is not its response to the statement the most dishonest and disingenuous——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not asking questions on subjects for which the Minister has any responsibility. He is abusing the time of the House. I will give the Minister a minute to answer.

Mr. Sainsbury: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can scarcely add to what my hon. Friend has said. I am glad that I do not have responsibility for the matters to which he referred.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Is not one of the alarming things about today's statement the fact that we are assured that the deal has the blessing of Downing street —the same Downing street from which the present Prime Minister and the previous one have overseen the inexorable decline in investment and jobs in our manufacturing industry? Is it too much to hope that there will be just one word of regret from the Government Front Bench at the decline of the British motor industry? The whole of our industry now is owned by American, German and Japanese companies. Is the message from the Government that, as long as they remain in office, there is nothing—not the railways, not water, not the broadcasting industry or the motor industry—that is not for sale?

Mr. Sainsbury: I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that, before he makes another absurd intervention, he might like to study the sales for the United Kingdom car manufacturing industry. He would then recognise how wrong he is to refer to a decline.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in 1977, Rover—previously trading as British Leyland—was described as the weakest motor car manufacturer in Europe? Is he also aware that today's news clearly shows that, in the private sector and subject to the Japanese style of management and production methods which the Labour party opposes so vigorously, it has now become a leading manufacturer and has attracted investment from BMW?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend makes an effective point. I suppose that if the Labour party had been in power, another £3 billion of taxpayers' money would have been wasted in losses sustained by an industry in public ownership. As it is, we have a profitable and growing industry whose quality and competitiveness have been recognised by one of the most respected companies in the entire industry.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Is not the decision a kick in the teeth for the thousands of workers who made the enterprise such a successful one? Rover can now compete on quality and performance in the markets of the world, yet this is the time that has been chosen to sell it off to a foreign competitor. Does it not mean that under the Conservative Government we have lost all pride in British enterprise?

Mr. Sainsbury: From what I have heard about the reaction of the work force, they are somewhat more realistic than the hon. Gentleman. They recognise the opportunities that the deal provides for the companies in which they work.

Sir Thomas Arnold (Hazel Grove): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the announcement that British Aerospace wishes to concentrate on its core aircraft business will be greatly welcomed in Greater Manchester, as it would appear to mean fresh investment for both Woodford and Chadderton? May I invite him to ascertain from the company whether it will now seek to reverse the recently announced programme of redundancies, due to take place between now and November?

Mr. Sainsbury: I agree with my hon. Friend that the deal provides significant increased opportunities for the regional jet business at Chadderton, which I know is important to his constituents. I cannot say anything about the job losses, which are always a matter of regret. He and I know that the market for the product has been weak of late. I hope that, as a result of the increased funds that will be available to it, British Aerospace will continue to improve its product, invest in production facilities and meet demand when that demand revives in the market.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Can the Minister explain to the House how it is that Germans think that it is worth while investing in Britain when apparently no one in Britain with money thinks that it is sensible to do the same thing? Were any other bids for Rover invited or received? Has the Minister—if he has not, will he—asked BMW to put in a formal document to Her Majesty's Government the undertakings that are now on the PA wire?

Mr. Sainsbury: As I hope that I have made clear to the House already, job security in any business does not rest in the hands of the Government. It does not even rest in the hands of a business, unless that business can succeed in the marketplace by investing, innovating and providing quality products that the customer wants. It is clear from the reaction of British Aerospace and BMW and their managements and work forces that the deal is perceived as increasing the opportunities for Rover to do just that.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Is not £800 million of foreign private sector money just about the best compliment that could have been made about the turnaround in Rover's fortunes following the past few years? Is it not a fact that 15 years ago no automotive group in the world would have touched Rover, or British Leyland as it then was, with a bargepole? Do not we all know why that was? Is not today's news a fine tribute to the turnaround of so much of British manufacturing industry in the past decade?

Mr. Sainsbury: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is not only a tribute to the achievements of the management and work force of Rover; we can also regard it as a recognition of the achievements of privatisation and the introduction of rational, sensible and fair industrial relations laws.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): As a Rover owner who will not buy any more used cars from the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), may I ask whether the Minister appreciates that it is not xenophobic of Labour Members to want to see the retention of an indigenous motor vehicle capability? Is not it bizarre that, while the Secretary of State for Defence has encouraged defence manufacturers to diversify out of the defence industry, British Aerospace is going in the opposite direction? Is it the goal of Conservative Members to see unsuccessful British companies going under and the successful ones becoming subsidiaries of foreign operations?

Mr. Sainsbury: I have to disagree with the hon. Gentleman about what constitutes an indigenous industry. For me it is one that operates in Britain, creating jobs and wealth here. The ownership of the company seems not even secondary but far down the line of importance. I wonder whether the ownership of Hilton International, Jacuzzi or even Jack Daniels—perhaps it is not well known that that is a British-owned brand name—makes a difference to the people who work for the companies that produce those commodities and the people who use them.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): My right hon. Friend's assurances that Rover will remain a separate enterprise are welcome, but does he not think that the escalating costs of German production and the fact that so many German companies are moving their production to Britain means that there is a distinct possibility that BMW will want to build BMWs at Rover plants in Britain?

Mr. Sainsbury: I cannot answer that. However, it is quite clear that BMW recognises the competitiveness of British component suppliers and thinks that there could be increased opportunities for them to supply parts for BMWs made in Germany. That is partly due to lower overheads and wage costs in the United Kingdom compared with those in Germany and is part of the benefit of our not having the social chapter.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Is it not clear that the guarantees and promises that the Minister gave in his statement have become less valuable as he has responded to questions? Will he tell us the force of the guarantees that have been given on investment in aerospace, research and development and job security? Judging from his words, is

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it not a fact that those guarantees are simply not bankable? Is it not perverse that Conservative Members should claim a success for their strategy when the nature of that success means selling Britain's last wholly owned car firm to the Germans and to our competitors?

Mr. Sainsbury: I fear that the hon. Gentleman's remarks again betray a lack of understanding about the nature of modern manufacturing industry. Even more than that, they betray his total lack of understanding about what happens in a marketplace in which consumers and customers determine a company's success. It is they—if anyone—who guarantee job opportunities for the company and its suppliers.

House Emblem

4.13 pm

Madam Speaker: I wish to make a short statement to the House about the use, and abuse, of the House's emblem, the crowned portcullis. My remarks are cast in general terms and affect all Members equally.

Every Member receives a copy of the Members' handbook, which contains the following passage under the heading "Use of the House Emblem":

> "The designs and symbols of the House should not be used for purposes to which such authentication is inappropriate, or where there is a risk that their use might wrongly be regarded, or represented, as having the authority of the House. The principal emblem of the House is the Crowned Portcullis."

On 29 April 1981 the then Speaker made a statement to the House about a case of abuse of the emblem that had been referred to him as a contempt of the House. He said:

> "I wish to make it clear to people outside the House, as well as to hon. Members, that the unauthorised use of the badge and name of the House of Commons is a serious matter."

While he did not take any further action in that case, he added:

> "Having given that public warning, I shall not be disposed to take as lenient a view of any future case brought to my notice."—[*Official Report*, 29 April 1981; Vol. 3, c. 789.]

I judge that it is now appropriate to renew that warning. While it is one of the principal duties of the Speaker to uphold the dignity of the House, this is a responsibility undertaken equally by all of us when we have the honour of being elected to this place. Any intended use of the portcullis must be submitted for approval under the rules enforced, on my behalf, by the Serjeant at Arms and the Administration Committee, and no permission will be given if the use could possibly reflect adversely on the House, or be misunderstood.

I hope that I have made abundantly clear the importance I attach to this matter.

Points of Order

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I refer to the ruling that you gave on 26 October in respect of the decision by the Home Secretary to decline to allow the president of Sinn Fein to come to Britain.

You, Madam Speaker, then properly said that it was a matter for the Government and that it was not your responsibility. However, for the president of Sinn Fein, armed with a British passport in which the Foreign Secretary asks all foreign Governments to let him go without let or hindrance and to afford all possible assistance to him, to go to an unofficial body in the United States, but not to be allowed to come here raises the question again. I ask you, Madam Speaker, to consider, not today, but at some stage, whether you could find a way of protecting Members of Parliament so that a British citizen who is not convicted or even charged with any offence can come to this country, as he can travel to America, Dublin, or to any other country in the world.

In view of the importance of the peace process that has begun being completed, I invite you, Madam Speaker, to consider carefully whether this would be the moment to indicate to the Executive that the two Secretaries of State should resolve their differences; one asks every foreign nation to assist Mr. Adams, while the other excludes him from the Palace of Westminster, where he should be allowed to answer questions put by hon. Members of the House.

Madam Speaker: I have given this matter a considerable amount of thought. I recall very well that the right hon. Gentleman raised this matter with me last October. Nothing has changed since then so far as my responsibilities are concerned. I shall simply repeat what I said on that occasion: this is a matter for the Home Secretary, who is not responsible to me for what he does in his official capacity. It is not my intention to comment on any action that he may care to take.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any request from the Secretary of State for Wales to seek an opportunity to clarify in the House contradictory statements that he made outside the House? You, Madam Speaker, will be aware that last year the Secretary of State for Wales was required to appoint a new chair to the Welsh Development Agency, the previous occupant having left in disgrace, and the WDA was enmeshed in a web of fraud, corruption and mismanagement. In the summer, Mr. David Rowe-Beddoe was appointed.

Following months of speculation concerning Mr. Rowe-Beddoe's previous political activities, the Secretary of State for Wales, in an interview broadcast by the BBC in November, said:

> "I have no idea what his political affiliations are."

I wish to put this point directly to you, Madam Speaker. It is now clear that the Secretary of State for Wales had received a copy of a curriculum vitae, which featured prominently a political position that Mr. Rowe-Beddoe was holding as chairperson of the Monte Carlo branch of Conservatives Abroad. That post was responsible for gathering—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. If I could have a little order here, I would be able to hear what is being said.

The hon. Gentleman is now getting into an argument and putting forward a point of view. Although I am always interested in points of view outside the Chamber, I can listen only to points of order that are for me. Will the hon. Gentleman come to his point of order?

Mr. Davies: Two contradictory statements have been made: first, the Secretary of State for Wales maintained that he was unware of the political affiliations and, secondly, on Friday of last week, the press department of the Welsh Office put out a notice saying that he had received a copy of the curriculum vitae and was aware of the political affiliations of Mr. Rowe-Beddoe. It is quite clear that no right hon. or hon. Member could mislead the House, but it seems to me that that is a clear case of the public in Wales having been misled. I wonder whether you, Madam Speaker, could give guidance, first, on whether you will take it on yourself to ensure that the same strict standards of honesty which you maintain in the House will be maintained outside the House——

Madam Speaker: Order. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is now reflecting on the Secretary of State. He must not do that. If he wishes to do that, there are ways and means of doing it by means of a substantive motion. He must not reflect on the Secretary of State. I am sure that he will withdraw that reflection.

Mr. Davies: I am seeking your assurance, Madam Speaker. I am sure that it is the case that——

Madam Speaker: As soon as the hon. Gentleman sits down, I will give him my assurance and let him know what I think about the case.

Mr. Davies: Of course I understand quite clearly that no right hon. or hon. Member can cast any aspersions on the integrity of any other Member of the House. I am concerned because contradictory statements have been made outside the House. I should be grateful if you could confirm, Madam Speaker, that if you receive any request from the Secretary of State for Wales to come to the Dispatch Box, you will facilitate that so that he can take the earliest opportunity to clarify those clear contradictions in his public position.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman and all hon. Members understand, Cabinet Ministers and all hon. Members from all parts of the House are responsible themselves for the comments or statements that they make. As Speaker of the House, I cannot be responsible for the comments or statements made by any right hon. or hon. Member.

In direct response to the hon. Gentleman's question, I have not been informed by the Secretary of State that he is seeking to make a statement on that matter. If he wishes to do so, he will certainly be facilitated.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Does it relate to the previous point of order?

Mr. Richards: Yes.

Madam Speaker: In that case, I have dealt with it.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Does it relate to the previous point of order?

Mr. Dalyell: No. It is a point of order arising out of Question Time, or, more candidly, a point of curiosity arising out of parliamentary language.

In answer to Question 5, the Minister referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) exceedingly inappropriately, but nevertheless he did, as being a man of "shifty nature". That was allowed. Are we to take it that we can apply any adjective, such as "lying", providing we put the noun "nature" after it and get away with it? That would be an excellent parliamentary device.

Madam Speaker: When the hon. Gentleman reflects on the matter and looks at *Hansard* tomorrow, he will probably find that that description was a reflection on the policies of the hon. Member for Garscadden and not on him personally. I am very concerned about such matters and that is how I interpreted what was said.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I revert to the matter of the portcullis? Is it not somewhat unfortunate that some years ago the relevant Committee took the decision that the shop downstairs, and I think other outlets as well, were allowed to use the portcullis in their commercial transactions for various bits and pieces of various sorts of commodities? Should that policy not be reconsidered? In view of your animadversions against the improper use of the portcullis, should not the hon. Member who has given rise to the raising of the issue——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie).

Mr. Faulds: I am so grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Should not the hon. Member who misappropriates the portcullis be subject to some sort of penalty?

Madam Speaker: I made it clear when I made my statement that I was issuing a general reminder to the House. I am not referring to individual cases, which, I will tell the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), I deal with, having received advice from the Administration Committee. I have already dealt with the case to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

As regards the kiosk and the sale of goods from it, such sales are conducted on behalf of the House, with the entire approval of the House.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Further to the earlier point of order——

Madam Speaker: No. I have dealt with that point of order; it can go no further. Once I have given a ruling, the point of order has been dealt with.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order arises out of the statement made earlier today. It affects the authority of the House and it seems to reflect a growing trend. When a major issue of national importance is before the House, such as the sell-off of the Rover Group, the House is addressed not by a member of the Cabinet, but by a Minister of State. The same thing happened last week in the debate on housing, which is another matter of major national importance. I do not intend any disrespect to the hon. Members concerned, but a debate is downgraded if the Cabinet does not send someone of Cabinet authority to address the House. When matters of national importance are raised, surely someone of Cabinet rank should address the House.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the level of the Minister who appears at the Dispatch Box is not a matter for me. I am sure, however, that his remarks will have been noted by those sitting on the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Llwyd: On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. Earlier this year, the Secretary of State for Wales made a plain statement that he was unaware of the political affiliations of Mr. David Rowe-Beddoe, the incoming chairman of the Welsh Development Agency. It is clear from the evidence available that he well knew at the time what the political affiliations were. Has——

Madam Speaker: Order. That is the same point of order. Having dealt with it, I refused a point of order from a Member on the Government side. The hon. Gentleman is taking advantage of my tolerance and generosity on this matter. I have dealt with it and it must be left there.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) made a point of order, with which you dealt, but it must be pointed out that the Minister replying today made it clear that the Secretary of State was out of the country—he is in the far east—which is why he was not making the statement today——

Madam Speaker: Order. The House is inclined to get into a bit of a tangle on such matters. The Secretary of State was on the Front Bench at the time, which was why the hon. Gentleman for The Wrekin made that point of order. He wondered why another Minister in the Department should make the statement.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Last weekend's press, particularly the Welsh press, contained a statement by the Public Accounts Committee regarding the funding of the Welsh Development Agency and all that has gone on in the investigation that has been conducted there. Can you advise me on how to ask the appropriate Ministers about the publication of the Public Accounts Committee report? What channel should I use to ask my questions?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman may be aware, I never give advice on procedure across the Floor of the House. The hon. Gentleman is a long-standing Member of the House who is rather shrewd and well aware of how to get things done. I shall, however, point his nose in the direction of business questions on Thursday as a way to begin.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

(Clauses 28, 46, 72 and 77)

Considered in Committee

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair.*]

Clause 28

AIR PASSENGER DUTY

4.31 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I beg to move amendment No. 1 in page 22, line 26, after "Chapter", insert—

"but subject to (6) below.".

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 2 in page 22, leave out lines 37 to 39.

No. 3 in page 22, line 43, after "aircraft", add—

"(6) This duty shall not be charged until the Government has presented a report to Parliament on its effects on the economies of the United Kingdom islands, on the travelling public and on the air transport industry and tourism.".

Mr. Smith: It gives me pleasure to move this amendment, which calls on the Government to submit to the House a report on the full implications of air passenger duty before the tax is introduced. It gives us an opportunity to debate the general principle of the tax in relation to our objections and those of many others outside the House.

Not only was this yet another tax which Conservative Members omitted to tell the electorate anything about in their election addresses, but it was brought forward with no prior consultation with those most affected, the travelling public, the island communities of the United Kingdom, on whom it has a particularly serious affect, the airline industry or the tourism industry.

Our call for a report to Parliament is all the more justified because the Government have no mandate whatever for this tax, any more than they have one for the other new impositions and tax increases which they are inflicting on the public. As we all now know, and as the country knows, the Conservatives fought the last election on a false prospectus, as the people are only too aware. Bitter experience has taught them that they can never trust the Conservatives on tax again.

It should worry Conservative Members that, according to a poll reported in yesterday's *The Sunday Mirror,* 69 per cent. answered with a resounding no when asked whether they would ever trust the Conservatives on tax again. Three quarters of the poll sample said that tax would be very or fairly important in determining how they voted next time.

The Opposition are most concerned about the air passenger tax because it will add to travellers' costs. It also risks destroying jobs in the airline and tourism industries, and it will add to industry's bureaucratic costs. It is discriminatory as between air and other modes of travel. It impacts unfairly on the people and economies of the smaller islands of the United Kingdom; and its imposition is the thin end of a wedge which threatens to drive the air tax sky high.

Even at the levels at which the duty is proposed now, there will be an unwelcome impact on passengers and holidaymakers and those on whose jobs depend on providing for them. As Keith Betton of the Association of British Travel Agents said, as reported in *The Times* of 1 December,

"the tax would mean higher air fares, lower passenger volumes and a reduction in air services, 'none of which will be to the consumers' advantage'".

The same article pointed out that the tax on flying will push up fares on some routes in Britain by about 15 per cent., and it is feared that it will lead to the closure of several small airlines. On top of all that, we should note the cost to the airline industry, now conscripted as a tax collector, which will face the administrative burden of collecting the duty.

Airlines such as British Airways have warned that the duty could prove costly and complicated to administer. Aircraft operators with no business or fixed establishment premises in the United Kingdom will be obliged to appoint fiscal representatives to ensure compliance with the tax regulations, and that may discourage some marginal overseas airlines from flying out of the United Kingdom.

There are a number of other problems with the administration of the tax, such as the unfair asymmetry between the respective obligations of Customs and Excise and air operators, in respect of late payments and refunds of duty. It cannot be right that Customs should have to pay interest only if delay is due to its own errors, whereas the taxpayer has to pay interest for any reason, even if an error by the Customs causes a delay.

We shall be pressing these matters further in Standing Committee, but there are a number of other points on the administration of the duty which I should raise now. As I said earlier, the industry has had an inadequate time to respond to these proposals. I have with me a copy of a letter sent to the Paymaster General, dated 27 January 1994, from Sir Colin Marshall, the chairman of British Airways. He points out that he was asked to submit comments on 30 November and to supply them by 31 January. It is clear from the tone of his letter that he was a little taken aback by the fact that the deadline for reply that he was given sees the Government debating this clause on the Floor of the House. That shows just how inadequate the time has been for the industry to respond.

I take it that the Paymaster General has the letter and the submission with him today. He should tell the House and the wider public whether the Government intend to respond sympathetically to British Airways' sensible and pertinent points. The airline points out that the duty should be accounted for by the airline that collects it. It points that, as proposed, the collection of duty from passengers will be done by the airline selling the ticket, but payment of the duty will be done by the airline carrying the passengers on the dutiable sector. There are no administrative systems for airlines to identify at uplift which passengers are eligible to pay the duty. It would clearly be very expensive for British Airways or other airlines to put such systems in place.

These are the sort of matters which could and should have been gone into thoroughly if full consultation with the airline industry and all affected had taken place.

British Airways' second point concerns the timing of the collection of the duty. It says that the duty should be

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payable after it has been received by the airline responsible for paying it. That is not an unreasonable request, because, in many cases, the Bill requires airlines to pay the duty before they have received it. That is because of the delay in collecting the tax from agents or other airlines. Such a system would give rise to onerous cash flow difficulties.

British Airways suggests that duty on domestic journeys should be charged at £2·50 per direction rather than £5 per round trip. It states:

> "if the duty is simply accounted for by the uplifting carrier, there are no systems to identify which leg of such a journey the passenger is really on".

That would involve airlines in much additional administration. They would have to check the wording on millions of tickets, and that would be costly. BA suggests a constructive way around that.

British Airways says that all passengers whose journey commences and terminates outside the United Kingdom should be exempt from the duty. That is because of the importance to British Airways and other airlines of passengers who stop over in London or in other United Kingdom cities during an international journey. BA says that one third of its passengers through Heathrow are transfer passengers and that charging duty on them would render BA uncompetitive. It says that it is competing for business with foreign countries by offering stopovers in the same way as some other airlines, such as KLM which stops at Amsterdam. Having to add the duty to the fares of passengers coming through the United Kingdom would damage BA's competitiveness.

British Airways suggests that all passengers for whom no fare has been charged should be exempt from the duty and says that a number of passengers fall into that category. The obvious ones are the members of staff travelling for duty purposes. For example, crew members have to be in position to operate a service somewhere else. But BA says that there are other free flights for charitable or compassionate reasons. It states that it would seem inappropriate to impose the duty on passengers such as the seriously sick children that the airline carries each year on its "Dreamflight" charters to Florida. Those issues will have a great resonance with the wider public.

The legislation is indicative of the Government's hurry. It has been rushed without full consultation with the industry, and the full implications of its administration and the unfair and damaging effect of many of the provisions have not been thought through.

British Airways says that the effective date of the duty should be delayed until at least 1 November 1994 and preferably until 1 January 1995. The Association of British Travel Agents says that tour operators selling short-haul holidays generally have summer brochures running to the end of the season on 31 October. It says that imposition of the duty from 1 October will leave those operators having to pay the duty for a month without having collected it from the passengers. Moving the effective date back a month would remove that problem.

As I have said, another area of widespread concern in the industry is the discriminatory impact of the tax as between air travel and other forms of transport. I hasten to emphasise that we suggest that it would be better not to impose it on air travel, and not that it should be extended to other forms of travel. Plainly, the travel industry must be worried about such an extension. In *The Independent* of 1 December, Sir Colin Marshall said:

> "The new air passenger duty proposed discriminates against this nation's most successful transport sector and penalises airlines while rail, coach and ferry companies will escape, as will the Channel tunnel. It will mean, in effect, higher fares for virtually everyone at a time when UK airlines have been working hard to keep ticket prices down."

Sir Michael Bishop, the chairman of British Midland, Britain's second biggest scheduled airline, said:

> "Air travellers in and from Britain do not deserve to be singled out in this way. Why should they be forced to pay more and why should road, rail and sea travellers be exempt? This will make air travel less competitive against other forms of transport and we greet the decision with great anger."

I await with interest the Government's response to those angry complaints by the industry's leaders about unfairness.

4.45 pm

One of the most serious aspects of the unfairness of the tax is its impact on travel to and from the smaller islands of the United Kingdom. If the Government's argument is that the duty is some sort of luxury tax, it is particularly flawed in relation to travel to and from the Scottish islands, Northern Ireland and a number of other islands around the British Isles. In such cases, both for business and family travel, there is often no realistic convenient alternative to air travel. It has been estimated that the impact on prices on those routes will be particularly serious.

The article in *The Times* from which I quoted earlier put the possible increase as high as 15 per cent. Surely the Government must see that that would be serious for the communities affected and their economies. In a letter to the Paymaster General, dated 15 December, John Parr, the director general of the Air Transport Users Coucil, said:

> "the Council would urge you most strongly to exempt passengers flying to and from Northern Ireland, the Scottish Islands, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands from liability to the tax. On none of these routes is there any acceptable alternative to air transport for business purposes, so that the local economies are heavily dependent on the provision of adequate air services. Any significant reduction in the latter as a result of the tax would inevitably put frequency—a prime requirement of business flyers—at risk and might even cause some services to be withdrawn altogether. The economic consequences would clearly be extremely serious for the areas concerned."

In a letter of response dated 13 January, the Paymaster General stated:

> "While I note your argument about exempting all passenger flights to Northern Ireland, the Scottish Islands, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man from the duty, it would be difficult to justify relieving flights in one or more particular areas but not elsewhere. The result of such concessions would undermine the principle of the duty and reduce the revenue to be raised from it which would have to be made good from elsewhere."

There is no understanding of or even reference to the important point about the economic effect on the livelihood of the islanders, their tourism, economic development and family links and visits. It is abundantly clear that, as elsewhere in the Budget, the Government's desperation to pay the bills resulting from their incompetence counts for everything and the real needs of the economy count for nothing.

To rub salt in the wounds, in his Budget speech the Chancellor tried to have us believe that the exemption for journeys undertaken on aircraft of less than 10 tonnes take-off weight or with fewer than 20 passengers was somehow intended to help the islanders. When my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) said that 90 per cent. of air journeys in his constituency would still be caught by the tax, did the Government have a rethink? Of course not; they just forged on, doubtless feeling that a Government already tainted with so many broken promises need not worry about such details. After all, the Chief Secretary has told the nation that the little promises do not matter. The Opposition believe that it is imperative that flights to the other islands of the United Kingdom be exempted from this duty. We have tabled amendments to that effect and shall return to this crucial matter during later proceedings on the Bill, when the Government will rightly be put under very strong pressure to think again about this duty's very severe impact on the communities to which I have just referred.

The Government will undoubtedly argue that, notwithstanding its probable damaging effects and its unpopularity, the air passenger duty is being introduced at a modest level. No doubt they will ask what all the fuss is about. In answer, we need only refer to the danger—indeed, on Second Reading my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) referred to it as the likelihood—that, once the tax is in place, the initial levels will be the thin end of the wedge. What the industry and the travelling public fear is that a Chancellor pressed simultaneously by the fiscal deficit and the need for pre-election bribes on marginal income tax rates will not be able to resist putting the air passenger duty up as part of the process of year-on-year tax increases to which the Conservatives, in breach of all their election pledges, are now committed.

I invite the right hon. Gentleman to give the Committee an assurance that the air passenger duty will not be raised before the next general election. As it is, this tax promises to be just a part of the Conservatives' sky-high taxation. That is why Opposition Members will vote for the amendment and against the clause.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): I should like at this stage to make some brief preliminary remarks, although I hope to be called at a later stage so that I may reply in more detail to points raised during the debate, including some of those made by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith).

The amendment draws attention to the potential effects of the new duty. These and all the other factors were considered when we were deciding to introduce the duty and were concerning ourselves with structure, rates and exemptions. As all hon. Members know, the purpose of the tax is to raise revenue—a matter that has been discussed at length in this Chamber.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I understand that when a tax is being introduced the Treasury examines its effects in particular areas. Can the Minister explain why he and his Department did not see fit to consult the airline industry? This tax came like a bolt from the blue. Why has the subsequent consultation been so quick? In fact, it is ending on the very day on which this clause is being debated. If the airline industry had been consulted, the Government could have been made aware of some of the difficulties that the details of the tax will create.

Sir John Cope: No Chancellor of the Exchequer discusses proposed taxes in advance of a Budget statement. The consultation with the airlines and others involved, to which attention has already been drawn, was launched on Budget day with the issue of a considerable paper giving further details and inviting general and very specific comments from those most immediately involved. The consultation process has by no means ended. Hon. Members know, although people outside may not be aware, that this is only the first of a series of debates that we shall no doubt have during the Committee stage—to say nothing of Report stage. Indeed, we have already heard that we shall be returning to some aspects of this duty and I can assure the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) that even now the consultation process is continuing.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): May I take it from my right hon. Friend's answer that in the coming weeks or months the airlines will have an opportunity to make representations about the way in which the tax will be collected and the date on which it should become operative?

Sir John Cope: Yes, indeed. Discussions with quite a number of parties in the industry are proceeding and we are open to more general representations from the people affected by the tax as well as from hon. Members on both sides of the Committee.

The air passenger duty fits the Government's strategy of shifting the burden, in part, from direct taxation by broadening the indirect tax base and it falls on a sector where expenditure is currently subject to very little indirect taxation because of the VAT zero rating that it enjoys as well as the use of duty-free fuel for international services and all domestic services to which the new duty will apply.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I have been listening very carefully to the Minister's comments about low taxation in this area. Can he assure the Committee that the tax will remain at the level at which it is being introduced and will not be raised before the next general election?

Sir John Cope: We believe that the tax has been set at the right rate, but obviously I cannot give an assurance about future Budgets—nobody could do that.

This tax brings us into line with many other countries, including some of our European partners. Having decided that such a tax was desirable, we looked closely at how it might best be designed. The results are before the Committee in the form of the Finance Bill.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): My right hon. Friend has indicated that by introducing this tax the United Kingdom will not be putting itself out of line with other countries. I have a great deal of sympathy with that point. Can my right hon. Friend give the Committee a few examples of other countries which have such a tax and the levels at which they levy it?

Sir John Cope: I shall be happy to do so, though in no particular order. Denmark has a tax very similar to ours; the rate for all international departures is roughly £6·50. In Belgium the amount is £9, depending on the airport of departure. Passenger tickets issued in the Republic of Ireland are subject to a rate of £5. Greece has a departure tax of £15, while in Canada Toronto has a transportation tax of approximately £10. In the United States—for instance, in Los Angeles or New York—the total figure for departure tax, federal taxes and customs fees is about £14. The situation is similar in Japan, New Zealand, Australia and Hong Kong. South Africa's figure is £6, and France

[Sir John Cope]

has an airport tax of £2. One could give all sorts of examples. Obviously, there are differences of detail, including the detail of collection.

In deciding which way to go, we considered some of those models. We had to balance conflicting pressures. We wanted as much simplification and certainty as possible, and we wanted to impose the lowest possible costs on the Customs and Excise authorities and the business undertakings collecting the tax. We tried to secure the minimum disruption of established patterns and, above all, we sought fairness between the various people and interests concerned.

Mr. Mans: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again, and I assure him that I shall not intervene a third time in his introductory speech. Can he confirm that in virtually all the countries that he has mentioned as examples of places in which taxes of this nature are imposed most of the funds raised are used for developing the infrastructure of the airline industry and do not simply go into the central treasury?

Sir John Cope: It varies. Some are straight departure taxes and others are federal taxes or customs fees. I readily acknowledge that some are closer to the example that I gave than others. As my hon. Friend knows, we have always been cautious about revenue being hypothecated to particular cases of expenditure.

I mentioned some of the factors that we took into account when designing the tax. They also applied—and this is relevant to the impact on the air transport industry —to the exemption of transfer passengers. We were concerned to maintain the international position of the British air transport industry and particularly that of Britain's hub airports, such as Heathrow, and to help the British airlines serving them by preventing the tax acting as a disincentive to passengers changing planes in Britain.

5 pm

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): As to international comparisions, do other countries make any exemption or reduction in respect of small offshore islands? If so, have the Government addressed any such examples? If people have no alternative but to leave an island by air, and exemption were given, surely that would not upset the general principle.

Sir John Cope: I cannot give my hon. Friend an off-the-cuff answer, but I will endeavour to answer his point later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) made a point that has been raised in correspondence since the Budget, concerning the date of the duty's introduction. Many of the brochures promoting holidays to the end of October 1994 were published before the Budget, and a good number of holidays were sold from them before my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget statement. Accordingly, he has agreed that the date of the tax's introduction should be deferred to 1 November 1994. It would be unreasonable to expect tour operators to take the theoretical possibility of new taxes into account when entering into the price guarantees that they give their customers. The Government agreed to that special arrangement in 1994 to accommodate tour operators. I am sure that my hon. Friend, airlines, tour companies and others welcome that. It also allows us a little more time to prepare for the tax.

As to the Scottish islands, a number of people seem to have misunderstood my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget speech. Announcing the exemption for small aircraft, he said:

> "This means, for example, that most flights between the Scottish islands will not bear tax."—[*Official Report,* 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 932.]

It was not his intention to relieve all flights to and from, as well as between the islands. He pointed out the consequences of the small aircraft exemption that he was proposing and documents published on Budget day made clear the precise details of the exemption that we had in mind.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I do not quibble about the accuracy of that quotation as the exemption delivers exactly that stated, but the impression given by the Chancellor and in informal Scottish Office briefings was that the exemption was meant to cover many more cases. What inquiries were made of airline companies before the Chancellor presented his Budget as to how many people would be affected by the exemption? What estimate did the Chancellor have on Budget day of the number of passengers who would enjoy the exemption?

Sir John Cope: We made no direct inquiries of airlines or of anyone else outside the Government before Budget day, but a lot of public information was available to us about the number of flights, number of passengers, size of aircraft and so on which enabled us to make a fair estimate of the number of passengers who would be affected.

I said that there was misunderstanding in some quarters flowing from the phrase used by my right hon. and learned Friend in his Budget statement, but the detail was clear in the papers that we published on the day.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): If the Chancellor was right to give an exemption for travel between islands such as the Orkneys and Shetlands—I do not imagine that aircraft of the size that the Chancellor had in mind are used for the Western Isles—why would it be wrong to exempt passengers who want to leave an island to get to the mainland, which is the biggest communication difficulty? I do not see the reason for the difference in philosophy, unless the Chancellor believes that people want to travel only between islands and never to the mainland.

Sir John Cope: The effect will differ according to the particular flights that people use. My right hon. and learned Friend gave an example of one effect of exempting a small aircraft from duty, but the reasons went beyond that particular example. As I said, the aircraft affected by the duty do not pay excise duty on the fuel that they use, but most small aircraft—and many below the exemption limit —do pay it. Therefore, the tax will not apply to the smallest aircraft used by airlines. Incidentally, their value added tax position is also different.

Mr. Wallace: The right hon. Gentleman made that point to me in correspondence and it seems a wonderful post facto rationalisation of the situation in which the Government find themselves. The Paymaster General must know from the information available to him that the exemption would apply to the twin-engined Otter aircraft and to the Jetstream 31—both of which use kerosene and not avgas. Therefore, the rationalisation that the right hon. Gentleman just offered admits of exceptions. It has all the hallmarks of someone trying to justify an earlier statement.

Sir John Cope: If the hon. Gentleman will study the words that I used just now and on other occasions he will find that the lines of differential in respect of air passenger duty and the use of different types of fuel are not precisely coincident. Neither is the line of differential of VAT. Nevertheless, my remarks are true for a large number of the aircraft affected, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged.

We remain of the view that it would not be appropriate to provide exemptions for certain parts of the country. It would be extremely difficult to distinguish between them and would add considerably to the complications of the tax for ourselves and for the airlines. However, there is obviously concern about the position of some services to the Scottish islands, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will continue to consider the impact of the duty on Scottish island routes. I do not want to pre-empt those discussions until the picture is clearer.

Mr. Andrew Smith: When does the right hon. Gentleman expect those consultations to be complete? It would be helpful if the Government could report the outcome of those deliberations before we vote on the matter in Committee.

Sir John Cope: I hope to report on those consultations in time for the convenience of members of the Standing Committee.

I wanted to give the reason for the special treatment of small aircraft. I have mentioned that many small aircraft, including air taxis, use dutiable avgas rather than duty-free avtur, so the argument about the low level of taxation in the air travel industry is not strong. The size criteria for exemption are based on the Civil Aviation Authority licensing requirements, which are taken from European Community agreements. They mean that under existing arrangements an airline which operates only aircraft below those sizes is subject to less rigorous requirements on its financial health than under existing arrangements. Those airlines, therefore, have a different sort of licence from airlines which operate aircraft above the size criteria. Linking those exemption criteria to the CAA licensing regime has the benefit that a large number of operators will know immediately, from the type of licence that they have, whether they will be liable to register. As well as that deregulatory benefit, levelling the exemption means that some of the flights mentioned will be exempt.

The threshold is sufficiently low to minimise the scope for distortion of competition on routes served by both exempt and taxable aircraft. If one studies the sizes of aircraft and their use on different routes, it is difficult to find any size criteria that have no effect on competition and cause no difficulty. That is not a reason to have no size exemption, but it means that it is difficult to choose one that is perfect in every respect.

Mr. Wallace: Can the Minister name one airline company in the United Kingdom which flies on scheduled routes in the United Kingdom and whose flights will all be exempt under the proposal?

Sir John Cope: I will not answer that off the cuff, but I hope to respond to the hon. Gentleman's question later. I assure him that there are quite a number of small companies that use only smaller aircraft and will be exempt.

The take-off weight and seating capacity of any aircraft will normally be determined by the aircraft's certificate of air worthiness, although there is a provision for Customs and Excise to examine such matters.

In moving the amendment, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) mentioned tourism. Most overseas tourists use aircraft only to travel to and from the United Kingdom and will be charged the £5 or £10 rate only on departure. The small number of United Kingdom and overseas tourists who take flights within the United Kingdom will be charged at the £5 rate. Even then, the duty is likely to be a very small proportion of the total cost of a holiday in Britain, so it will not be a significant influence on whether people choose Britain as a holiday destination.

The air passenger duty is, if anything, likely to have a small but positive effect on United Kingdom tourism. I understand that, among air passengers, three and a half times as many United Kingdom residents go on holiday overseas as overseas visitors come to take a holiday in the United Kingdom. Even if some overseas visitors were deterred from taking a holiday in the United Kingdom, it would be likely that more United Kingdom residents would be deterred from holidaying overseas. Many of those would choose to take a holiday in the United Kingdom, which would be of corresponding benefit to the United Kingdom tourist industry.

Ms Eagle: The right hon. Gentleman seems to want to have it both ways. A while back he said that the tax was so modest that it would not affect the number of passengers flying in. His Department has worked out the elasticity of those flights and has said that it is very small—only 2·5 per cent., as I recall. He has just argued, however, that people who may have gone abroad for their holiday will now abandon air travel and go instead to Bridlington, Bognor or Clacton. He cannot have it both ways. Does he say that the proposal will either affect or not affect the number of air passengers?

5.15 pm

Sir John Cope: I did not say that the proposal would have no effect on the number of air passengers. Nor did I say that it would have a large effect on the tourist industry. On the contrary, I said that it would have a small effect on the tourist industry and, in so far as it had an effect, it would be positive rather than negative for the reasons that I have given.

Mr. Forman: Have my right hon. Friend and his advisers considered the possibililty that the current rate of tax is so marginal that it could well be absorbed by the companies and not passed on to the traveller?

Sir John Cope: In some cases that may happen. It is difficult to be sure of the extent to which it will happen because the companies involved are competitive, need to make decisions about pricing and will no doubt make different decisions in different circumstances. The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) is right to say that we suggested that the best estimate that we could make was that air travel could be affected by about 2·5 per cent. She should consider that statistic in context: air travel would otherwise be expected to increase by 4 to 5 per cent. a year.

[Sir John Cope]

Even if we are right about the 2·5 per cent., it means that there will be a slower rate of growth in the number of air passengers rather than a decline.

I find it slightly surprising that the Labour party should be so adamant about the matter because I have had drawn to my attention a copy of the report of the London Policy Forum. I understand that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was the chairperson of the economic working party of that organisation. It suggested a few months ago, just before the Budget, that it thought that

> "a tourism tax should be considered."

It seems that it was already in the process of accepting that a tourism tax might have some validity even before the Budget. The proposal was made in September 1993 by a leading member of the Labour Front Bench finance team —or at least in a document issued by an organisation of which she was the economic chairperson.

The same document also states that

> "Labour will consider introducing an airport tax such as that levied in many other countries."

I do not say that in moving ahead and introducing such an air passenger duty we have built on suggestions made by the Labour party—that would be going too far—but we are not unique in looking in that direction.

Mr. Wallace: Clearly, the Treasury's researchers have not yet come up with an airport tax such as they have proposed in the plethora of policy documents that we Liberal Democrats seem to put out. *[Interruption.]* The Paymaster General is welcome to have a look; if he finds any such reference, I shall be unpleasantly surprised.

I am concerned about the impact of the tax on the Scottish highlands and islands. Both this proposal and the proposed tax on insurance premiums remind me of occasions when former Chancellors—certainly Lord Lawson, and, I believe, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont)—announced the number of taxes that would be abolished with great flourish in their Budget statements; now, the Government are introducing new taxes.

As the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) pointed out, there has not been much consultation, if any. Perhaps the Government thought that the fact they had not imposed VAT on passenger transport—there had been considerable speculation on that possibility before the Budget—the ground might have been softened for the introduction of some other transport-related tax.

I do not think that the general concept of an airport tax will get the adrenaline going and prompt the raising of placards outside every airport—although the islands are an important exception. It is common experience for a traveller abroad to turn up at the check-in desk and discover that he must pay airport duty before he can leave. Although this is not the most sinister of taxes, it is important to watch out when any new tax is introduced: it may start at a modest level, but once in place it can easily be increased without the debate and scrutiny that we are being allowed in this instance.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) may well share the anxieties expressed by Jetstream Aircraft Ltd., which is in his constituency. The tax is being introduced at a time when the airlines' figures could scarcely be described as buoyant. A rate of growth such as that mentioned by the Paymaster General would certainly bring a smile to the faces of airline executives, but I know that, in recent months, the traffic level has stagnated—or, at any rate, has not risen to the extent suggested by the right hon. Gentleman.

The tax also comes at an unfortunate time for the aircraft industry. If the airlines are in difficulty, and are not sure how the tax will affect passenger numbers, they may understandably defer decisions on investment in new aircraft, which would feed through into the manufacturing industry. That, in turn, would affect companies such as the one in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ayr—at a point when the aircraft manufacturing industry has not, by any stretch of the imagination, been going through good times.

The amendment has provided a useful peg on which to hang a debate about the impact of the duty on the economy of the islands, and remote parts of the mainland of Scotland. As the Paymaster General said, the Chancellor spoke in his Budget statement of air traffic between the islands, and—in the strictest sense—the proposed exemptions reflect that. However, the impression I gained at the time was that the Chancellor was conferring a much larger benefit, and similar vibes came from the Sottish Office.

The Paymaster General said that the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Scotland were continuing to consider the impact of duty on the Scottish routes. I hope that he meant that the door had not been shut on the possibility of a future extension of the exemptions: perhaps he will even announce such an extension in this debate. My arguments, added to those of the hon. Member for Oxford, East, may help to persuade him. There is a good case for such a move. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has received representations from a number of sources in the airline industry, as well as from local authorities and many others who are concerned about the economy of the highlands and islands.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I agree that the Chancellor appeared to be very bountiful to the Scottish islands when he dropped the exemption proposal into his speech. A good deal of confusion was caused: we all thought that flights from the mainland to the islands, as well as flights between the islands, would be exempted. I was concerned to find that that was not the case.

In fact, there are very few inter-island flights—at least in my constituency. The Paymaster General should appreciate that return flights from Glasgow to Islay and Tiree already cost £100 and £124 respectively. The extra tax will impose a considerable burden—not on tourism; these flights are a lifeline for the islanders.

Mr. Wallace: My hon. Friend has made a number of important points. I know that she has been at the forefront in putting her constituents' case: her constituents and mine will be particularly affected by the tax and, indirectly, by any downturn in tourism.

My hon. Friend rightly pointed out that the exemption, as it stands, will not apply to a large number of people. I suspect that the overwhelming majority will be in my constituency, and I am thankful for small mercies; but I should like more to be helped. If any airline in Scotland has an idea of the likely impact of the exemptions, it must be Loganair, which has many years' experience of serving the

Scottish islands. It estimates that about 20,000 passengers will benefit—only a small proportion of those who travel to and from the islands.

Once the tax is introduced in the autumn, it will apply to the Dash 7, which flies to the Isles of Scilly; but, in a Scottish context, it is likely to apply only to the Britten-Norman Islander, which carries eight passengers —or nine, if someone sits at the front with the pilot.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) pointed out, a return ticket from Glasgow to Islay or Tiree costs about £125. The proposed tax constitutes a significant increase. The Paymaster General may not know quite how expensive it already is to travel to the Scottish islands. When people book their tickets to Orkney and Shetland at the travel agent, they are surprised at the cost. It is very expensive compared, for instance, with the cost of crossing the Atlantic.

I have here an airline ticket from Orkney to London, and the return from London to Shetland—for which I need not pay, courtsey of the Fees Office. It cost £447. Anyone who travels regularly within Europe would think that an exceptionally high fare—and the Government now propose to add duties to fares that are already extremely high.

We are not talking about travel for pleasure or convenience; we are talking about lifeline services which are an essential part of island living. To travel across the country rapidly, it is necessary to go by plane. I well remember the first time that I submitted a car allowance claim after becoming a Member of Parliament in 1983. I had travelled from my constituency to London on the ferry. I wrote down something like "9/10 September, Orkney to London". Someone from the Fees Office telephoned me and asked, "Was this a return journey, Sir?" I said, "Has it ever occurred to you how long it takes to travel by car from the Scottish islands to London?" If I always travelled back and forth by car, I would probably spend all my time on the road; I would seldom be here.

This is a serious point, however. We cannot simply hop on to a high-speed train or other means of public transport; airlines are crucial to livelihoods and island living. If the Government had sought to impose such a duty on train travel, commuters for whom trains are essential would be jumping up and down all over the country.

It is also important to emphasise that the flights about which we are concerned are very price sensitive. Passengers who travel through highlands and islands airports are more likely to pay their own fares. They do not rely on businesses to pick up the tab. They often comprise families who are travelling to visit relatives or to conduct their own family business.

5.30 pm

There is also much price sensitivity in respect of businesses in the highlands and islands. The very nature of business in the islands involves narrow profit margins. Those businesses cannot readily stand extra impositions. In addition, flights are very expensive for people who wish to visit the islands as tourists. The duty will be an added disincentive.

With regard to the tourism argument and the general imposition of air passenger duty, the Paymaster General said that what we might lose by way of people not travelling to the United Kingdom would be made up in respect of people from the United Kingdom not travelling abroad. However, those people will certainly not travel to Orkney and Shetland, to the Western Isles, or to Tiree or Islay if they have to pay the duty. It seems that we are going to suffer the full cost of the duty with none of the benefits.

Many people travel from my constituency to Aberdeen for hospital treatment. Although routine operations can take place in the islands, many people have to go to Aberdeen to have operations or to be treated as out-patients. Obviously, the air ambulance would be used for emergencies and that service is exempt from the duty. However, I am concerned about people who have to travel to Aberdeen for medical treatment on the scheduled flights. I often travel with such people on a Monday morning and sometimes travel with patients as they return to the islands on a Friday evening.

In a written reply, the Secretary of State for Scotland said:

> "It is not expected that Orkney and Shetland health boards will require to purchase many tickets"—

although my experience does not necessarily accord with that.

> "Any additional costs would be more than offset by the 4·5 per cent. increase in funding for the NHS in Scotland which my right hon. Friend has announced for the next financial year."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1993; Vol. 234, c. *892*.]

That may be so, but that funding was meant for health care. It was not meant to go on a circular journey back to the Treasury through air passenger duty. The money that will be lost will be lost to health care in the islands.

Perhaps the Government should examine the impact of the duty on their own pocket. The responsibility for the highlands and islands airports is about to be transferred from the Civil Aviation Authority to the Scottish Office. However, those airports are recipients from the public purse. If their passenger levels show a sizeable decline as a result of the duty, that will do them no good.

I am also concerned about the fact that the duty could lead to anomalies. Loganair has announced recently that it is restructuring its operation. During the past six weeks when travelling from Glasgow to Kirkwall and from Kirkwall to Glasgow, I turned up at the airport to board a Jetstream 31 which was the scheduled plane for that service. That plane has 18 seats, so I would not have been expected to pay the duty when I booked my ticket. However, I was told at the airport that, for operational reasons, I had to fly on a Shorts-360 which has 36 seats.

If the air passenger duty had been in place, I imagine that someone would have been standing on the tarmac demanding £5 from everyone before they could board the plane. I would probably have had the £5 on me. However, someone may have been returning from holiday with only £5 for the taxi fare from the airport into Kirkwall. That person would have had to spend his taxi fare before he could board the plane.

I may be taking things to extremes, but there is a potential anomaly. That anomaly is perhaps less likely as the Jetstream 31 is being withdrawn from that service. However, there will still be an anomaly in respect of passengers travelling from Kirkwall to Wick. Some of those journeys will take place on the eight-seater Islander aircraft which will be exempt from the duty. Others will be undertaken on the Shorts-360 and people will have to pay. A tax depending on the time of day one travels and on which plane the operator provides does not fulfil the criteria for the kind of taxes that should appear on the statute book.

The Liberal Democrat amendment which was not selected extended further than the islands. It would have taken account of remoter areas from which travellers possibly could catch trains. Although one cannot take a train from Campbeltown, I suppose that one could take a train from Wick. However, the distances and travelling time would be great. We should consider mainland airports in remoter areas where, like many islands airports, air travel is essential.

I want to consider part of the Government's response. The Paymaster General referred to the criteria relating to the CAA licensing requirements. In a letter to me last week, he said:

> "all holders of this type of licence will immediately know they need not register for the duty."

I asked the Paymaster General a question and I look forward to the answer. I do not know of any operators of scheduled services in the United Kingdom who would be fully exempt from the duty. Some will be partially exempt, but will have other services that will attract the duty.

The Paymaster General said that the Government do not want to disturb the airline operators. However, Loganair has made representations to the Treasury about the duty. It is clearly not terribly upset about the possibility of having some flights which might attract the duty while a greater number will be exempt. The operators believe that the extended exemptions are far more important for the viability of their businesses than any additional administrative difficulty in respect of being able to distinguish between the two types of flight.

Sir John Cope: Not many scheduled airlines will qualify wholly for the exemption as it stands, although Suckling, which flies from the constituency of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), is one. Most of the air operators who do not run scheduled services will be below the limit. Those operators, of whom there are more than 100 including air taxi operators, will be below the level and will automatically be exempt as a result of the exception about which we are talking.

Mr. Wallace: I was careful and deliberately used the word "scheduled". I accept the Minister's point about unscheduled services. People may use an air taxi to travel from A to B or, for example, from Cambridge to London. That service is not a lifeline service, but people who use that service will benefit from the exemption. However, for people in my constituency and in the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute and of the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), those flights are lifeline services and they will not receive the benefit of exemption. I am not saying that the exemption should be withdrawn and I can see the administrative benefit. However, if people receive the benefit of the exemption on convenience flights and air taxis while the benefit is not extended to lifeline flights, that highlights a considerable anomaly and unfairness.

Sir John Cope: The hon. Gentleman should not forget what I said earlier. The people who use unscheduled services do, for the most part, pay VAT on their travel.

Mr. Wallace: I accept that. However, they will still benefit from this exemption while those who are not using the services as convenience services will have to pay the duty.

It has also been said that there may be anomalies elsewhere and other areas might call for a similar exemption. Where might that happen? I understand that the planes which currently service the Isles of Scilly would all fall within the exemption.

The same arguments apply to the Isles of Scilly as would apply to the Scottish islands in respect of lifeline services. The Paymaster General should say which other parts of the country depend on those services as lifeline services before he says that people all over the country will jump up and down, claiming that they want a similar consideration.

What would be the result of the concession? Again in correspondence, the Paymaster General said:

> "The result of such concessions for all regions would undermine the concept of the duty and reduce the revenue to be raised from it, which might have to be made good from elsewhere."

In a written answer to me, he mentioned £2 million as the likely loss of revenue. Indeed, £1 million was mentioned to my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute, but it was not clear whether that was in respect of one-way travel. Therefore, if we are talking about traffic in both directions, it might be £2 million. For heaven's sake, if the country's economy has reached the stage at which the Government cannot withstand the loss of £2 million, we are in a far worse state than any commentator has led us to believe.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that £2 million would do incomparably greater damage to the islands than it could possibly benefit the Government's finances?

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Member for Oxford, East has taken the words out of my mouth. Seen from the perspective of the Treasury, £1 million or £2 million—I will not say that it is irrelevant—is peanuts, but, from the point of view of the highlands and islands economy, it is a considerable amount. The withdrawal of that amount could have a serious economic impact. I hope that such matters will be taken into account when the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer consider the likely impact of the duty.

Jetstream estimates that, according to available information—that is, an ABC flight guide and Department of Transport statistics—the revenue would be £380 million in a full year, which significantly exceeds the Government's estimate. I understand that the Government estimate revenue of £115 million in the first part year, £330 million in 1995-96 and £335 million in 1996-97. I understand also that the figure of £380 million excludes charter operations. Allowing for the fact that there appears to be the possibility of greater revenue than the Government have estimated, the loss made by extending the exemption for the islands' routes would be more than made up if the other figures prove to be right.

Jetstream argues that if the Government exempt all turbo-prop aircraft, that would account for only 9·6 per cent. of revenue. For example, the limit up to 69 seats amounts to about £36·6 million, whereas a limit of 70 seats and over amounts to about £347 million. The contrast shows that there is considerable room for the exemption to be extended so that the economies of areas that depend on air travel as a means of earning a livelihood and living can be properly taken into account.

I am grateful to hear that discussions are still going on, and I very much hope that we can persuade the Paymaster General and his right hon. Friends to make modest extensions of the exemptions—modest in terms of the impact on the Treasury, but very important indeed for people who live in the island areas of Scotland.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) emphasised the serious aspects of the proposed tax and outlined the realities of island life. He said that many people's incomes depended on air travel. The proposed tax will affect people in the islands far more than it will affect anyone else in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Gentleman's words contrast with those of the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who spoke on a purely political basis. He said that, yet again, the Government are raising taxes. However, the Labour party continually stresses that it wants to spend more and more. That would inevitably lead to higher taxation. The hon. Member for Oxford, East made some valid points, but, if he wanted to be seen to be serious, he would not have made some of his opening remarks.

I shall concentrate particularly on clause 28(3), which refers to clause 29. Clause 29(1)(b) refers to the 20-seat limitation. I have written to my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General and discussed the effects of the 20-seat limit on Jetstream aircraft and flights to the islands and the Western Isles. I, too, remember the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in his Budget speech. He said that most flights within the islands would be covered by the exemption in the Finance Bill.

5.45 pm

The aircraft that are used in the islands range up to about 70 seats. I hope that my right hon. Friend will reconsider raising the 20-seat limit. I recognise the licensing issues and that perhaps there is logic in determining the 20-seat option, but there is room to move towards the Chancellor's intentions in his Budget.

Ms Eagle: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that perhaps the best way of dealing with the problem of travel between the islands and the mainland and between islands is to exempt the routes rather than mess around with the number of passenger seats?

Mr. Gallie: No. My preference is certainly to change the limit on the number of aircraft seats. Jetstream is located in my constituency, and I am very keen to promote the interests of turbo-prop aircraft. That is the basic reason for my opinion. Island services are provided by turbo-prop aircraft. We have an opportunity now to do some good for the islanders and also for Jetstream Aircraft in my constituency.

A 30-seat limitation would benefit the sale of Jetstream 41s, but a move to a 70-seat limit which included exemptions for advanced turbo-prop aircraft would be important to the islands and to the United Kingdom's manufacturing base.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said that a change from the Jetstream 31 up to the Shorts 360 involved a tax change. Perhaps that would be an inducement not to buy Shorts 360s and to spend a bit more on Jetstreams.

I should like my right hon. Friend to acknowledge what I have said and to make a commitment to continued consideration of the matter.

Ms Eagle: We are considering just one of the 12 tax increases of the Budget—a tax-raising package that the Chancellor, in evidence to the Treasury Select Committee, admitted is the equivalent of a 7p increase in basic income tax. Taken together, the increases amount to the largest tax increase in British peace-time history——

The Chairman: Order. The Committee is debating amendment No. 1, with which we are taking amendments Nos. 2 and 3 specifically on the airport tax.

Ms Eagle: I was about to come to the question of airport taxes. When we are dealing with individual taxes, it is important to consider the general taxation background.

The Chairman: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me her thoughts. However, I am chairing the Committee, and I would be grateful if she went straight to the subject of airport tax.

Ms Eagle: I can assure you, Mr. Morris, that I have absolutely no ambition in that direction.

When we consider new taxes, we need to examine why the tax is levied, the way in which it is levied and whether it is the most sensible and efficient way of collecting money. I shall make some comments on each of those points.

The tax is being levied because of Tory economic mismanagement which led to a sudden scramble for revenue at the last minute. When we look at some of the administrative details and the way in which the tax was imposed, we see that all of the arrangements were made at the last minute. As to the administrative details of the collection of the tax, the lack of consultation before the announcement of the tax led to the promulgation of administrative arrangements which have caused many anomalies, some of which we are discussing today. Those anomalies need to be ironed out if the tax is to be efficiently and effectively collected and if it is to impact fairly on all those who pay it.

Why should airline travel, and no other form of public transport, be singled out when considering tax increases? Naturally, the airline industry has pointed that out in its reaction to the way in which the tax is levied. Indeed, while I do not say that we should tax other forms of public transport, it seems odd that the airline industry, out of all the systems of transport to get from one place to another, has been subjected to this tax.

When the Government announced the tax, and it was expected that value added tax might well be put on public transport, I received petitions from bus operators and representations from Mersey Rail expressing concern about imposing VAT on public transport. There was a great sigh of relief when VAT was not extended to public transport. Then the airline industry was hit with the sudden announcement of a new airline tax, even though it is set at a low level at present.

Administrative arrangements are in the process of being put in place. My colleagues on the Front Bench have expressed concern that the scope of the tax will be increased in the years to come and that what we have now is the thin end of the wedge. We should bear in mind that, when value added tax was introduced, it was only a modest tax. In the past 15 years, its scope has been extended 14 times, and the level has increased from 8 per cent. to 17·5 per cent. The potential of VAT as a revenue-raising measure has been milked by the Government in a desperate search for cash.

As the Government continue to mismanage the economy and fail to balance the books, what guarantee do

[Ms Eagle]

we have they will not regard this airport tax as yet another way of increasing revenue in their desperate search for cash for the Treasury? We have had only one comment from the Minister on this matter. When he was asked whether the scope of the tax would increase in the years ahead, he made the usual coy Treasury comment that he could not possibly say what the Treasury's tax plans would be in the future but he thought that the tax was levied at a reasonable rate at present. All I can say is that we must look at the precedent of value added tax to see what sort of guarantee the Minister's assurances give us.

Why is the tax being levied? Obviously it is being levied to raise revenue. It seems to be a minor way of raising revenue. Indeed, some of the administrative problems that it will cause hardly seem worth the revenue that it will raise. Scott Grier, the managing director of Loganair, one of the airlines that will be affected by some of the exemptions in the tax, said that the exemptions were arbitrary and unrealistic. I refer to the loophole which exempts passengers on aircraft with fewer than 20 seats and weighing under 10 tonnes. Of course, that exempts executive jets. It was sold in the Budget statement as an attempt to ensure the viability of flights and services between Scottish islands.

Several of my hon. Friends have eloquently demonstrated that that argument is fallacious. Indeed, only 10 per cent. of passenger journeys between the islands, and between the islands and the mainland, will be exempt. I associate myself with the comments made earlier about how this tax threatens island life and lifeline services. The Government must look seriously at that matter.

Unlike the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), I believe that the Government should look carefully at exempting routes, rather than attempt to levy the tax based on the size of an aircraft. Methods of avoiding tax are becoming increasingly ingenious these days. Listening to the hon. Gentleman, I suddenly had a vision of people taking seats from larger aircraft so that they could qualify for the exemption. People cannot avoid paying tax on routes and the Government should look seriously at exempting routes rather than using aircraft size.

The complicated nature of the administrative burdens in collecting the tax were captured impressively by a British Airways memorandum which was sent directly to the Minister by Sir Colin Marshall, the chairman of British Airways. In that memorandum, Sir Colin not only regarded the tax as unfair, which we would expect an airline to say, but made it clear that the application of the duty and the administrative arrangements which the Inland Revenue is in the process of working out will be very expensive for airlines to put into effect because they involve the development of entirely new systems.

The collection difficulties identified in the memorandum are interesting. Currently the Revenue is planning to collect the duty from the airline or the agency which sells the ticket, but payment of the duty will be made by the airline carrying the passenger. People who travel with any regularity on either charter flights or ordinary flights know that those two agencies are not always the same. At present, airlines do not have a system of identifying at take-off which passengers will be eligible to pay the duty if they have not already paid it. Therefore, British Airways suggests that the duty from airlines should be collected from the airline carrying the passenger rather than from the agency selling the ticket.

British Airways also suggests that duty should be payable after the airline has received the duty. The administrative arrangements of agencies which sell tickets and places on airlines are such that in a large number of cases the airline will be liable to pay the duty before it has received the duty from the agency selling the ticket. That may cause financial problems, especially for smaller airlines. It is unlikely to affect British Airways to any large degree, but smaller airlines in the market could have significant cash flow problems accruing from that administrative arrangement.

One of the more difficult and hard-to-justify arrangements announced by the Chancellor in his Budget statement is the idea that the £5 or £10 duty, depending on whether one is going to Europe or further afield, should be levied only on the outward flight, not on the flight back. On a flight, whether one is going out or coming back is never identified. The tax discriminates against those people who have one-way or single tickets, as presumably they would have to pay the duty on each flight rather than just on their outward flight.

It discriminates also against those who use automatic ticketing which, I am told, never involves a return ticket. Perhaps the Government should consider levying a £2·50 or £5 charge on the flight each way rather than simply attempting to do so on the outward flight. The way in which aircraft and ticketing systems operate means that it is often difficult to identify whether a passenger is flying out or coming back. The computer systems and the extra work which would be needed to try to identify that fact are not justified by the yield which the tax is planned to give to the Revenue.

6 pm

The Paymaster General asserted that there would be no significant effect on tourism. I attempted to point out to him the fallacy of his argument. On the one hand, he was saying that not many passengers would be deterred from using air flights after the imposition of the duty, while on the other hand British citizens would stay at home and holiday here rather than go abroad. That would thus be of benefit to the tourist industry. After considering those arguments, I do not believe that the right hon. Gentleman can have his cake and eat it. Either there will be a significant effect on the number of people who use aircraft journeys, in which case the duty and the yield of the tax will go down—that is involved with price elasticities—or people will continue to use flights and presumably also fly out of the country to go on holiday.

It has been said that a £10 duty does not seem to be too much for a single person, but it is different if one is flying out with a family. Obviously, the larger the family, the larger the duty to be paid. In the midst of the on-going depression when money is tight, I do not believe that duties of £40 or £50 at an airport for a family holiday are insignificant. British Airways has estimated that it will cost passengers £75 million a year, and I do not believe that that is an insignificant cost.

The Paymaster General expressed his wish that airlines would not seek to pass on the cost to passengers, and that they would try to absorb the cost of the tax. That does not seem to be happening according to the reactions of airlines which I have read. Almost all airlines—except Virgin, I believe—announced that they will be passing on the tax directly to their passengers in prices. That is yet another cost which will go directly on to the consumer.

The entire tax seems to have been hastily thought up and badly worked out in detail. The administration problems in the way in which the revenue is currently planned to be collected are particularly irksome, and contain anomalies which disadvantage particular groups. I believe that those problems need to be looked at again in some detail to see whether some of the anomalies can be ironed out to allow the tax to be more efficiently administered.

The economic mismanagement of the Government and the massive deficit which loomed before them meant that they were scrambling round for new ways of raising revenue. They came up with this one at the last minute, but clearly they did not do enough work to ensure that they had a reasonable, fair and well-administered tax with the minimum administrative burden and cost of collection. I do not believe that we have that yet.

The Government's motivation for introducing the tax is somewhat more sinister than they have so far admitted. This is one of those taxes which could be increased significantly. I do not believe that all of the administrative burden is being put on to air travellers merely to collect £350 million, which is the estimated yield of the tax in three years' time. I believe that there is a hidden agenda. There could be some significant increases in the scope and the level of the tax in the years to come.

The Government should try to iron out some of the anomalies in the administration of the tax. If possible, they should give us an assurance that they will not widen the scope of the tax. However, we know that assurances on the scope and the level of taxation—both direct and indirect—tend not to be worth the paper they are written on when they are given by the Government.

Mr. Forman: I rise briefly to support the clause and to oppose the Labour amendment, and I do so for a number of reasons. I was one of those who helped to write a pamphlet on the problems of London in the 1970s, when I first came to the House. The pamphlet was called "Maybe it's because we are Londoners" and I wrote it with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and other colleagues.

At that time, we canvassed the idea of a tax or duty similar to that which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has decided to introduce. I can see no objection at all in principle to such a measure, for the obvious reason that it contributes to the broadening of the tax base, which is worth doing in itself. Over a period, the broader the base of tax from all sources, the more likely it is that one can get to a lower rate of tax and also to a simplified structure. Those propositions tend to go together.

As my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General said in his opening remarks, the duty is very much in line with what other countries do. There is nothing outlandish or strange about a duty which is matched by Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Canada and the United States, to mention just a few examples.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): In Belgium, for example, the duty applies only to international flights. The difficulty that is faced by British Airways is that it has a substantial domestic operation. British Airways has to meet the infrastructure costs of its whole operation, and it will be placed at a disadvantage compared with the Belgian state-owned airline, Sabena. Will not Sabena have to satisfy only the international aspects of the tax rather than the domestic ones which British Airways will face?

Mr. Forman: Whether that is a weighty concern depends on whether the tax itself constitutes a significant extra burden upon industry. I was moving on to make the point that I do not think that it does constitute a significant extra burden. I suspect that much of the tax or duty will be absorbed by the operators.

Mr. Hoon: We have heard that Sir Colin Marshall of British Airways has said that he feels strongly that the duty is unfair. Has not he also said that he is concerned about the effect that the duty will have on the competitive position of British Airways?

Mr. Forman: A number of hon. Members know Sir Colin well, and they will know that he bats vigorously for his industry. I could say, "He would say that, wouldn't he?" I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is right to put excessive weight on that argument. It is perfectly understandable that Sir Colin should defend his corner as the boss of British Airways, but my judgment is—we will see whether I have been proved right or wrong in a few years—that it will be quite easy for all of the major airlines to absorb such an increase.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend made it clear that the Chancellor has agreed to delay the full introduction of the measure until November 1994. That is sensible, because clearly one would always want to avoid anything which resembles a retrospective effect. It is likely that any administrative complexity which might flow from the introduction of the duty will have been sorted out by that time because of the extra time which has been made available. I believe that my right hon. Friend is right to resist the lure of hypothecation in this, as in other areas. That way lies extra complexity for any tax system. It makes it much more difficult to sustain public support for the tax system if people can pick and choose the taxes that they want to pay on the basis of the purposes for which the money will be used. My right hon. Friend was right to resist that.

The burden of the debate this afternoon has been about the extent and nature of the exemptions that are to be allowed. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) was eloquent on that subject. I understand that. The difficulty is that with a relatively small measure such as the air passenger duty, which will not raise a large sum of money, if we introduce many exemptions we will find precisely the sort of problems that we experienced with other aspects of our tax structure. We would have a narrow base because of the exemptions. There would be extra complexity, which costs the fiscal authorities and the private sector money. On the whole, it is not advisable.

I declare an interest in the matter. The Committee will know that I am the parliamentary adviser to the Institute of Chartered Accountants. It is clear that the only people who would benefit from the introduction of a new duty that was excessively complex are those in the tax advice and accountancy profession. I am sure that those for whom I speak in that regard would not regret that, but it is not a good principle of tax policy that one should introduce too many exemptions in a new tax.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): How many accountants does the hon. Gentleman think that it would take to work out the effect of excluding the Scottish islands from the air passenger duty?

Mr. Forman: My short answer is, too many. The real reason why it is important to keep the tax structure for this or any other duty as simple as possible is that extra costs are incurred by both the public and private sector if there are too many exemptions.

I was amused by what the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said about the rather John Cleese possibility of changing the number of seats in a given aircraft. However, simplicity is something to which my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury should cling. I hope that they will not go too far down the route of making detailed exemptions.

Mr. Wallace: Surely the hon. Gentleman accepts that, even on the Treasury's figures, £2 million out of an estimated annual take of about £350 million is very small? Indeed, far from seeing any administrative difficulty the airline companies believe that it is important to allow exemptions. As parliamentary adviser to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland, my comments are motivated entirely by constituency interests, not by regard for the accountancy profession in Scotland.

Mr. Forman: I note the hon. Gentleman's point. I am sure that his colleagues in the accountancy profession will note it also.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I simply wish to back up my hon. Friend's point. He is right about the question of complexity. One could also add that if one exempted a particular area, within that area would live people who are well off, not so well off and downright poor, so we would be into the business that we are already in on a macro scale in universal benefits of giving tax exemptions to well-off people.

Mr. Forman: My hon. Friend makes a good point that strengthens the thrust of my arguments. I do not wish to add to it.

Certain exemptions are already allowed for in the Finance Bill. Will my right hon. Friend say what is the justification for exempting, for example, transfer passengers? He mentioned that exemption in his speech. If we are to take a clean approach, that also needs to be justified.

This extra duty will constitute a small proportion of the total cost of the relevant sums of money spent by people on flights. Even if one takes the example of trips to the islands, which have already been mentioned, £5 in the case of United Kingdom flights is a small proportion of the more than £100 that was mentioned. As most of the journeys are essential and people plan for them, it should be possible for people to meet that cost. I see the air passenger duty as a fair, sensible tax which is likely to be absorbed by the operators in any case. If all that it does in terms of deterring extra travel activity is slow down the rate of growth of foreign or domestic travel, that is not anything about which the Committee should be unduly worried.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): The hon. Gentleman is warmly recommending the tax to the House. He says that it is fair and sensible. How does it square with his Government's promise at the election, and no doubt his promise to his electors, to cut taxes? How does the introduction of a new tax that will affect his constituents square with his promise and his party's stance as a party of low tax and tax cuts?

Mr. Forman: That has already been made plain on several occasions by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and others. I am happy to add to their arguments by simply saying that the priority, as the hon. Lady must know, in the two Budgets of 1993 was to restore public finances. Regrettably, that made it necessary to increase taxation by both introducing new duties such as the air passenger duty and increasing the impact of existing taxes. I regret that, but it was the responsible course to take. You would consider me out of order, Dame Janet, if I followed that argument too far.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the hon. Gentleman look at schedule 6(8) on interest payable to the commissioners? Does he agree that such provisions will require horrific bureaucracy and, indeed, a contribution from the profession that he represents? Already, it is not a simple tax. The collection of this minuscule amount of money is simply not worth the candle. Even the hon. Gentleman's argument that it will reduce the public sector borrowing requirement seems nonsense.

While the hon. Gentleman is reading that schedule, will he comment on the clarity of the English? I do not think that it would win a plain English award.

6.15 pm

Mr. Forman: On the latter point, I am very much in agreement with the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, one of the representations made by the president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was about the lack of clarity in far too much of the legislative drafting. That is a point on which hon. Members on both sides of the House can agree.

On the point about the money raised, £350 million is a useful sum even in the context of the PSBR of towards £50,000 million. The Treasury should not regard that as inconsequential any more than it does the other new measure under the insurance heading, which we shall debate later.

In conclusion, the measure is sensible. It will have little impact on the volume of travel. Many of the arguments put before the Committee tonight by the Labour Front-Bench spokesman and others constituted a degree of synthetic indignation. I was interested to see that some of the measures, or similar measures, have already been canvassed by Opposition Members.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): The air passenger tax and the insurance premium tax that we are to discuss later are classic examples of the reckless fiscal opportunism of the Government as they flounder in the deficit that their economic incompetence has run up. Opposition Members might not be too worried if the air passenger duty represented the only tax increase in the Finance Bill. We should want to amend it nevertheless, but we would not be so worried about it. The new duty must be seen as part of the whole tax package—the biggest tax hike in British history.

People have said that the air passenger duty is a small tax, but we must bear in mind that in the past the imposition of new taxes has been the first stage. It has been the foundation on which increases could be built in following years. So in opposing the new tax this evening, we are aware that the 3 per cent. could be greatly increased in the years ahead. Given the shambles of the finances of this country, and the difficulty that the Chancellor will have in meeting the targets that he has set himself, it is more than likely that the tax will be increased in the future.

As many of my hon. Friends have said, there was no mention of the tax, or any new tax, in the Conservative election manifesto. All the talk was of the opposite—of reducing taxes. First, we are annoyed and concerned that the tax has been sprung on the electorate when no mention was made of it.

Secondly, we are concerned about the fact that there has been no consultation about the tax. My hon. Friends have described the many problems in the legislation that are a result of not consulting the airline companies. Now they are being consulted but they have been told that today is the final date. The Government cannot even get the consultation date right and I hope that we can have some sort of assurance about that.

Sir John Cope: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was here when I spoke. I said that today is not the final date for consultation. Of course, it is not—it is not the final date for our discussion on the Bill; discussions with the airlines and other interested parties will continue.

Mr. Chisholm: I thank the Minister for that assurance, which is what I was going to ask for. I hope that the comments of British Airways and other companies will be taken into account.

Not only was there no consultation but this must be the first new tax in recent history which was not even mentioned during Ministers' speeches on the Finance Bill. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury spoke for more than half an hour, but he did not mention this or the other new tax that he is about to impose. As far as I know, the only mention of the tax was a paragraph from the Chancellor in his Budget statement.

Hon. Members have referred to the way in which the tax was introduced. I would not like to accuse the Chancellor of being deliberately misleading about the Scottish islands. Perhaps we should put it down to the casual inattention to detail that has become his hallmark. However, his remarks have had a misleading effect and were not the only announcement in the Budget to do so. I can think of a direct parallel. Just as 90 per cent. of families on family credit cannot get the £28 that was emphasised in the Budget, so 90 per cent. of flights to the Scottish islands will not be able to claim the exemption which was suggested—to say the least—in the Chancellor's Budget statement.

The effect of the tax on island communities must be one of the main concerns of Opposition Members—not merely the Scottish islands, but the Isle of Man, the Channel islands and many others. The vast majority of flights to those islands have to be made by large aircraft. It seems strange that the Government are prepared to grant exemptions for people who dart from one island to another when most people on the islands are more concerned about visiting the mainland.

The amendment tabled by the Opposition asks—at the very least—for a report on the effect of the measure on island communities. Perhaps the best solution is to exempt flights to certain destinations. In the first instance we are asking for a report because once again the Government appear not to have researched the effect of the measure on island communities. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) mentioned that many businesses in those islands have rather low profit margins and that the tax would seriously affect them. It will also affect ordinary people on the islands and those wishing to visit them. The report is one of the major demands in our amendment and I hope that the Government will consider it sympathetically.

Apart from the islands there are other concerns. Several routes in this country do not make a profit and one or two others make only a slight profit. Some of those routes may be put under threat if additional costs have to be borne.

The possible effect of the tax on the tourist industry is another worry. In many ways we are already a less attractive destination because of other costs—or so I am told by the travel industry—and the tax could therefore have a disproportionate effect on tourists who come here from abroad. One would have thought that the Government would at least have done some research on that subject and borne it in mind when presenting this legislation.

The tax will also affect British families who want to travel abroad. If it were the only extra expense that they had to bear as a result of the Budget we would not mind too much, but the average family will face an enormous increase in their tax bill in April—£12·50 per week for a typical family. This tax is another burden; a family of five will have to pay £25 extra to visit a European Community country and £50 extra if the destination is not in the Community. We must bear in mind the effect that that will have. Many people may not go abroad, as the Government have acknowledged by suggesting that there will be a 2·5 per cent. reduction in holidays abroad.

Finally, I am concerned about jobs. What effect will all the other tax changes in the Budget have on jobs? They will directly affect the airline industry, but will also have an impact on the tourist industry, among others, because they will take demand out of the economy and thus contribute towards making this Budget the most deflationary in the past 60 years.

I am worried about the cumulative effect of the measure on employment and particularly on the airline and tourist industries. I hope that the Minister will give me some assurances when he replies to the debate. He has said that he will listen to what people say and I draw his attention to the long submission from British Airways, which contains many detailed suggestions. For example, British Airways has said that the tax will be very expensive to implement—an expense over and above the tax. If the tax must be pushed through, the Government should consider implementing it in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

The Minister has already been asked about the possibility of future increases in the tax by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). Can he state firmly that he has no plans to increase the tax next year or the year after? That may reassure one or two people, but I have my doubts about it reassuring many more.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I support the amendment. I must preface my remarks by saying that I find it surprising that people will have to pay an extra charge to get away on holiday or business trips at a time when more people than ever before are totally fed up with

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

the Government and would like to get away from this country and a Government who are imposing extra taxes that they had not expected.

My hon. Friends have referred to a number of anomalies. The difference in charges is particularly peculiar. For instance, if the members of a family of four go on a skiing holiday and choose to fly to Salzburg they will have to pay £40 in airport tax, but if they fly to France they will have to pay only £20. That seems a little odd, and the Government should reconsider it.

Another problem is that people who land here unintentionally and have to stop over will have to pay the tax. It will not merely hit people who are trying to get away from this country to drown their sorrows abroad in places where they can relax; people who come here unintentionally because they are diverted will also have to pay, and that seems unfair.

Several hon. Members have asked whether the tax will remain at a fairly low level. Significantly, the Paymaster General could not assure us that the tax would not be increased before the next general election. He gave me the usual answer that he was not able to predict what future Budgets would bring. Perhaps that illustrates the point that was so ably made on Second Reading: the Treasury's advice to Ministers is always that, when a new tax comes in, start it at a low level, nobody will object, then raise it later. With the present state of the country's finances and our large public sector borrowing requirement, it is likely that future Chancellors—or even the present Chancellor—will choose to raise the tax again and again and, in the present financial climate, see it as an easy means of raising money.

6.30 pm

Airlines lobbied hard against the imposition of VAT on flights. I suppose that there is a certain amount of relief that that has not happened, but British Midland said that it had won the battle but lost the war. That is a recognition that, having got as far as imposing the tax, it is open to be raised in future Budgets, and that airlines might pay just as much in future as they would have done had VAT been imposed.

Much has been said about whether airlines will be able to absorb the tax. British Midland estimates that it will cost it between £17 million and £20 million if it tries to do that. It has given no indication that it intends to do so. Virgin Atlantic Airlines is the only airline to have indicated that it may well absorb the tax. Even then, the estimated cost to it is some £15 million. That is by no means an insignificant amount.

The overall impression of the tax, as with so much of the Budget, is of a series of rather fiddly and complicated small taxes that have been added in a rather ad hoc way, quite against the trend of previous Chancellors—at least the previous two—who attempted to simplify the taxation system. That has not been continued by the present Chancellor. We now have a sophisticated and complicated taxation system that would be difficult to untangle by a future Labour Government. Perhaps that shows that the Chancellor has a certain lack of detail and finds it a rather difficult subject. I suppose that the issue whether the Chancellor is up to the job will be raised at some stage.

Much of the airlines' concern centres on the method and the cost of collection, so let me now look at the question of domestic flights and how the system will work. It has been suggested that airlines are charged £5 on the outward journey and nothing on the inward journey. The problem that I can see is this. If I fly from Stansted to Edinburgh, how is the airline supposed to know whether I originated in Stansted on an outward flight or Edinburgh on an inward flight? There will be much bureaucracy for the airlines in identifying and distinguishing ingoing and outgoing passengers.

That is not all, because a passenger flying from Edinburgh to Heathrow and then Istanbul will pay £10 in Edinburgh and, as I understand it, nothing at Heathrow. But a passenger flying from Edinburgh to Heathrow and then to Paris will pay £5 in Edinburgh and nothing at Heathrow. A passenger travelling from Edinburgh to Heathrow on the return journey will pay nothing. There will be a number of passengers, all on the same flights, some of whom will pay £10, some £5 and some nothing at all. There will be a great deal of confusion, bureaucracy and administrative muddle in trying to levy the tax in the best possible way.

A further anomaly is this, as people in my area will find. I like to use my local airport whenever I can—it is not always possible—but if I decide to take a trip to Edinburgh and fly from Stansted early in the morning and decide to come back at a time when there is no convenient flight to Stansted I might have to fly to Heathrow instead. The problem is that I will not qualify for the £5 internal domestic flight, and would have to pay £5 from Stansted to Edinburgh and another £5 from Edinburgh to Heathrow. That is not a fair system.

In its detailed submission, British Airways asked that domestic passengers be taxed at £2·50 on each leg of the journey. Although I am not convinced that that will make life easier for it, it seems that it will be much fairer for the passengers, particularly those people in my part of the world who may wish to use Stansted but find that they are unable to do so because of the inconvenience of the timing of the flights.

BA made a number of detailed points in its response to the Government's consultation. Despite the fact that it has been done in a great hurry, I think that BA's submission has been well thought out and its points are worth noting. One of its suggestions was that all passengers whose journey commences and terminates outside the United Kingdom should be exempt from paying the airport duty.

I should like the Paymaster General to consider that point carefully and perhaps tell us in his reply whether he would consider amending the legislation, as drafted, to include that point. I think that BA is trying to make the point that the legislation distinguishes between transfers in the United Kingdom and stopovers. BA competes with airlines such as KLM, which offers stopovers in Amsterdam. On a number of flights, BA offers stopovers in London. The Dutch Government do a great deal to promote tourism to Amsterdam. BA is naturally worried about the adverse effect on its flights and also on the tourist trade in London if people who stop over in London are charged the tax.

Another point that BA made was that United Kingdom hotels are already more expensive than elsewhere in Europe, particularly at the bottom of the market, and that the £10 airport tax will add considerably to an already rather expensive hotel bill.

My hon. Friends have mentioned that there should be exemptions for passengers for whom no fare has been charged. I should like to endorse that, particularly for airline employees who have to travel to start their work, but perhaps more seriously for the many charity flights that are carried out by BA, which has a number of flights in which it takes seriously sick children on holidays in different parts of the world. It would be extremely sad if those children were to be charged an airport tax.

I do not know enough about the highlands and islands to join in the argument about how the tax will affect journeys in that region. I have listened carefully to that argument, however, and I agree that exemptions should be offered on journeys to certain destinations rather than on small aircraft with a certain number of seats.

The argument between direct and indirect taxes was rehearsed earlier. I find it a little surprising that the Government always argue in favour of indirect taxes by claiming that there is an element of choice as to whether people pay such a tax. They argue that income tax, a direct tax, is not so easy to avoid. I accept that I can choose whether to turn on my heating and whether I should pay VAT on fuel. The Government have used that argument in favour of the airport tax, but it does not apply in the highlands and islands.

Passengers will not be offered a choice as to the size of aircraft in which they may fly. They may turn up at the airport to find that they are booked on a 40-seater aircraft rather than a 20-seater one; they will therefore be subject to the airport tax. It is extremely unlikely that any airline will be able to offer a passenger the choice between a 20-seater or a 40-seater aircraft in order to allow that passenger to exercise choice about paying the airport tax. That lack of choice invalidates the argument in favour of levying an indirect tax rather than a direct one.

The cost difference for a family of four who fly to Salzburg rather than to France will be enormous. British Airways has argued that the £5 band could be extended for the entire European economic area and not just to countries within the European Community. That would be an infinitely sensible extension.

The Government could eliminate an unnecessary expense for airlines if they deferred implementation of the tax until after the holiday season. The reason behind that is simple: it would save airlines and tour companies the unnecessary cost of reprinting their holiday brochures. I hope that the Government will consider that argument.

Mr. Forman: Does not the hon. Lady realise that implementation of the tax is being deferred until November 1994?

Mrs. Campbell: The airlines have made it clear in their submission that that deferral is not long enough. They would like implementation to be subject to a further delay to encompass the entire holiday season, because some of their brochures have been printed up until the end of December.

Airlines should be compensated for the cost of collecting the tax on the Government's behalf. Whatever means the airlines choose, the tax will be expensive to collect. It has been suggested that the tax should be levied on the ticket rather than collected at the airport. I thoroughly endorse that argument because of my recent experience in Japan, when I had to queue for some time to pay the airport tax.

If the tax is to be collected at airports, it will be necessary to erect a barrier at which people will have to queue. That means that airports will be faced with the additional expense of building a barrier and other necessary infrastructure. Barriers will cause congestion and great annoyance, because, as one of my hon. Friends has already mentioned, imagine how someone will feel who has spent his last £10 of English currency on a taxi to the airport only to find that he must find another £10 to pay the airport tax.

I believe that the tax is unnecessarily complicated. It is a niggling sort of tax which will be difficult to administer and collect. I hope that the Government will take my arguments on board. When the Paymaster General replies to the debate, I hope that he will make it clear that he will consider them.

6.45 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I should like to speak in support of amendment No. 3, which is part of the clutch of amendments that we are now discussing. I support the demand for a report to be made on the effects of implementation of the tax which the House could consider before its imposition.

I am sure that all hon. Members, irrespective of their opinion of the airport tax, would agree that we have already had sufficient experience of the Government imposing taxes which were simply not thought through. The Government had to backtrack on the poll tax, for example, at immense cost to the public purse. I know that the House has considered the principle behind the airport tax, but we should think carefully before moving down that same path.

Mr. Hoon: Flight path.

Mr. Stevenson: Yes, indeed. I hope that any problems with the airport tax will not be on the same scale as those caused by the disastrous poll tax.

If hon. Members just took a cursory glance at the valid points made by the travel industry, they would be bound to share some of its concerns. I am sure that they, too, would then call for a full report to be made on the effects of the tax, which could be considered by the House. We could then avoid a repetition of expensive past disasters. Hon. Members should consider the amendments carefully before we embark on a course that could lead to further expense on the public purse and force the Government to backtrack.

I appreciate that the principle behind the tax has already been accepted, but it simply will not work because of its massive impracticalities. The Government have already accepted that the tax is bound to damage the travel industry. They estimate that it might lead to a 2·5 per cent. reduction in business, but I know from people who work in the travel industry that that is a serious underestimation. Those people believe that the estimate has more to do with the Government's attempt to show the tax in a favourable light than with reality. The Government must consider what that tax burden will do to an industry that is desperately fighting to attract more tourists to our country.

Mr. Forman: Is it not implicit in what the hon. Gentleman is saying that we are discussing estimates of damage to the industry? Nobody knows what it will be, and nobody will know reliably until there is empirical evidence. Is it sensible to have an amendment that says that duty should not be charged until the Government have presented a report on the effects of that duty? Unless the duty is charged, we cannot know the effects.

Mr. Stevenson: The hon. Gentleman has made my point for me, so I might as well sit down and rest on the laurels of what he has just said. He admits that nobody knows what the effects of the duty will be. The Government are imposing a serious tax which, by the way, they did not mention in their manifesto. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman told his constituents about it when he asked them to vote for him. I should like to see a copy of his election address saying, "I intend to support the imposition of an airport tax". He says, in support of the Government, that the tax will be imposed when the Government have not a clue about its effects. Having sat on these Benches for two years, I am sure that the Government do not know what the heck they are doing. But when Conservative Members say that they accept that, I should have thought that it would lead the hon. Gentleman to the conclusion that he should support the amendment.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman has wilfully misunderstsood the point that I sought to make. How can he expect the House to take seriously an amendment that says:

> "This duty shall not be charged"—

which means levied—

> "until the Government has presented a report . . . on its effects"?

Clearly, there is a logical inconsistency because we can reliably know the effects only once the duty has been in operation for a year or two.

Mr. Stevenson: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's further intervention. If the Government have no idea about the effects of the tax until it has been imposed, how can they assume that the damage to the industry will amount to only 2·5 per cent.? The hon. Gentleman seeks to argue all the way down the yellow brick road on which he has embarked and, the more he intervenes, the more he makes the case for me. If he would like to intervene again, I should be only too happy to allow him to do so.

That the tax will dramatically increase airlines' costs is beyond doubt. However, exactly what those costs will be in pounds and pence is another matter.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I apologise for arriving late. The hon. Gentleman hits the nail on the head. For the life of me I cannot understand—neither can the airlines in my constituency at Heathrow—why the airlines should be responsible for collecting the tax. Abroad, either the airport authority or the Government collect it.

Mr. Stevenson: I share that view. However, that situation is perfectly consistent with the Government's policy of imposing a tax, getting others to collect it, and then blaming them for it. I do not simply make a party political point on that.

If an airline were to say that it could specifically identify the cost of the administration systems that the tax will impose on it, I should be dubious about that. But if the travel industry, and airlines in pariticular, said—as they do —that the tax would impose serious additional costs on them, I would accept that because the ticketing, monitoring and administrative implications of the Government making airlines into unpaid tax collectors are very serious.

I have studied the Bill and done what I can to examine the arguments. I have looked at the research done both by the industry and by the House of Commons Library, but I can find no reference by the Government to the significant costs that will be imposed on airlines as a result of the tax. That is another good reason why I hope that we can persuade the Government to take a step back on this. They can maintain the principle if they wish, but they must not go ahead and impose the tax when they do not know its effects, particularly on our airlines. Conservative Members may say, "He would say that, wouldn't he?", but it seems to be sheer common sense. If the Government do not know what effect the tax will have, why step off the cliff edge? Conservative Members may step off the cliff edge if they wish, but taking the airline industry with them would be going too far.

Mr. Dicks: Another nonsense about the tax is the fact that it is imposed only on travellers who go by air. Why is it not imposed on those who go by boat or through the channel tunnel? The airlines feel that it is grossly unfair.

Mr. Stevenson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I shall come to that point in a moment. The more Conservative Members intervene, the more I recognise that they will be joining us in the Lobby in support of the amendment and I look forward to continuing this exchange there.

Only recently, the President of the Board of Trade said that he was determined to cut a swathe through regulations and burdens on industry. Yet within a few days the same Government returned to the House and said that they intended to impose another burden on industry. This burden is unnecessary, impractical and will prove very damaging.

The industry has described its reaction to the proposal as "resigned pessimism". Is there any wonder? I have discussed the additional serious but unnecessary costs that will be imposed on the airline industry as a result of this tax, but there may be another way of looking at the matter. The airline industry had better establish a system to impose the tax now because it will not be long before the Government impose VAT as well. Some members of the Government may be saying privately—a secret agenda has been mentioned—that if they can get the airlines to put in the systems now it will be nice and easy when they come to impose VAT on them.

I understand that the Government intend to embark on "educational visits" to the industry by October 1994. I should be grateful if the Government would explain what they intend to do on those visits. Do they intend to educate the airline and travel industries or—dare I suggest it—to seek a little education themselves? If so, and if they learn about some of the difficulties faced by these industries and about some of the problems that the tax will entail, will the Government be prepared to admit that they have got it wrong in some ways and that they need to examine the problem a little further? Will they compile a report and put the issues to the House in the proper manner?

7 pm

I would certainly welcome any comments by the Paymaster General on the purpose of the educational visits. I hope that they will not consist of officials embarking on a propaganda exercise on behalf of the Government. I hope that this will be a two-way process in which the Government confront some of the problems that will result from the tax and that they will be prepared to consider their findings carefully.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On these visits, might not the airlines point out to the Government the dangers of overseas airlines moving to use Frankfurt and other airports instead of airports such as Heathrow?

Mr. Stevenson: There is indeed a distinct danger of that. In other parts of Europe the collection of such taxes is the responsibility of Governments, so the administrative burden does not fall on the airlines. Such a move might well be attractive to certain airlines, the more so if this proves to be the thin end of a wedge. Although the tax may be only £5 or £10 today, before we know it the figure may be £15 or £20. I should like a clear commitment from the Minister that the Government have no intention of increasing these taxes once they are imposed. That is the least that we can expect——

Mr. Gallie: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that his Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), would give a commitment that if his party ever came to power it would get rid of such taxes?

Mr. Stevenson: Any Conservative Member who talks about trust on taxation is on very thin ice. I am prepared to debate the principles of taxation with any Conservative Member but I fear that you, Dame Janet, would not allow me to today. In any case, the hon. Gentleman's intervention added not one iota to our debate.

Under the Government's proposals, journeys that start outside the United Kingdom will be generally exempt from the tax, provided that people re-embark on flights departing from United Kingdom airports. In other words, someone who starts a journey in Frankfurt and comes to London but goes on to New York will be all right. Somone embarking on an aircraft from Frankfurt, coming to London, but wanting to go on to the Channel Islands or the highlands and islands will not, however, be exempt—so far as I can tell. Where is the logic in that? Why cannot the Government accept that it is illogical?

The Government will have to explain all this to people in the far reaches of Scotland, in the Channel Islands, in Northern Ireland and in the Isle of Man. It is quite illogical that those making onward journeys to those places should have to pay the tax. The Government may just think, "We've got you!"—a good headline for *The Sun,* and a vital point about the new tax. It is another anomaly to which the Government appear oblivious.

I know, since I am a regular traveller, that it is still a damned sight easier to go from Frankfurt to New York via London than from Frankfurt to anywhere else in the United Kingdom via London——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): And cheaper.

Mr. Stevenson: Quite. Why are the Government prepared to build in such unworkable and anomalous systems? Why will they not reconsider? The tax will be in danger of losing all credibility because of the anomalies.

We are told that domestic tax will be levied on the first leg of a flight, but not on the return leg, provided that the return leg is from the original airport of destination. That, too, will need explaining. Who is to know whether the return journey is made from the airport of original destination? The complexities are huge. It is no good the Government fobbing off pleas from the industry on the ground that it is just moaning and groaning: there are real problems here, and they will face anyone trying to travel.

I promised to return to the point made by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), who asked—to use the Government's example—why someone who flies via London to somewhere else in the United Kingdom will be subject to the tax while a person coming through the channel tunnel by rail and travelling on to Scotland or Northern Ireland from a London airport will not. That seems to be a serious anomaly, too. What will happen to someone arriving by ferry who wants to come to a London airport and then travel elsewhere? He would have to pay the tax, but someone arriving in London from Frankfurt and travelling on to New York will be exempt.

The Government will never convince me that this tax is justified, practical or required, but they will have to explain it to the people who will have to pay the tax; or are the Government not bothered about what people think? I note that no one wants to intervene to answer that.

I note, too, that people starting their journeys in the United Kingdom will pay one amount, depending on their final destination. People who will have to pay an airport tax when leaving the continent will face the possibility, depending on where they are going, of paying another airport tax when they arrive in an airport in the United Kingdom. That looks like double taxation. It is no good saying that what people do in other countries is no business of ours. People who have to pay twice will not like it. Paying once is bad enough; paying twice will make them very angry.

Another problem arises with cancellations. People may pay this additional Tory tax only to find that their airline has cancelled the relevant flight. What will happen then? What will happen if they are transferred to other airlines? The Government information, so far as I can see, does not refer to that. Another airline will be responsible for collecting the tax and will say, "Hang on a second, we want to know through our system that the tax is payable by us. We cannot accept someone saying, 'It has been paid.'" Does the tax have to be paid again if there is a cancellation and a passenger is transferred to another airline, or will the Government introduce some scheme by which the second airline can be guaranteed that the tax has been paid?

Some hon. Members may think that this is just a bit of fun, but I am asking serious questions. What happens when people are rerouted? We have all had experience of turning up at an airport and being rerouted because of bad weather or goodness knows what. Presumably the tax has already been paid. Will the second airline say, "Hang on a minute, we will not take these people unless they pay their tax again." There is no point in saying, as the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said, that we cannot know the effect of the tax. The British people are entitled to know its effect; otherwise, they will encounter serious anomalies.

One of our most successful airlines, British Airways, has said—although I do not believe all that it says—that some of its loss-making domestic routes could be pushed over the edge. Have the Government considered that, or do they think that it is just a bit of drum banging by Lord King? After all, he tried to push Virgin over the cliff. Perhaps the tax will do that to some of his own routes.

I am coming to the end of my speech. Many hon. Members have said that there are serious practical problems.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I hope that my hon. Friend will not conclude just yet. He mentioned a great

[Dr. John Marek]

many things that are wrong with the tax and says that we should vote against it. Does he agree that there may be a case for levying the tax on airports that have benefited from infrastructure improvements paid for by the Government? For example, Heathrow has benefited from a great deal of concrete paid for out of the public purse. The constituency of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) is half covered by concrete. Should not the users of that airport pay the tax to recompense the public purse for the extra infrastructure? Of course, the highland and islands airports, which are on beaches, would not be subject to the tax.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. This is a long intervention.

Dr. Marek: What does my hon. Friend think of that suggestion?

Mr. Stevenson: That is another issue that the Government have not considered.

This is a tax on success. I am sure that Conservative Members will recognise that phrase because they have used it often enough. The more passengers an airline carries, the more tax it will pay. However, the loss-making but vital routes will be in danger of being pushed into the financial abyss. This is the worst of all possible worlds. Perhaps a better way to impose the tax is to examine investment at airports to see how the public purse has been affected and whether European Community money has been involved. Such airports could be told that as they have benefited it is right for the Government on behalf of the British people to levy the tax in this way. However, I suspect that my hon. Friend's intervention will fall on deaf ears because it makes far too much common sense.

For the Government, this is a simple matter and they do not mind if it taxes success. It is like saying to the airlines, "Do not try to find more passengers because if you do, you will have to pay more tax." That is an interesting concept and I am sure that Conservative Members will wrestle with it before deciding whether to support the tax.

I accept that there are many disagreements on aspects of the tax. That is to be expected, but for the Government to go ahead and impose the tax in the light of serious anomalies and sheer impracticalities, and in the knowledge that it will impose additional burdens on airlines at a time when they are fighting in a market riven with overcapacity, makes no sense.

7.15 pm

I spoke to people in the airlines and in the travel industry and they have told me that there is massive overcapacity. British airlines are fighting tooth and nail for every passenger in one of the world's most viciously competitive markets, and all that the Government can do is impose an unnecessary tax on them.

I have seen many examples of the Government shooting not themselves in the head—they will do that eventually —but shooting the British people and many industries in the head. At a time when the airlines and the travel industry are facing such competition, it is sheer lunacy to impose a tax on them. It defies logic.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: When we were quietly discussing these matters another matter arose. What will happen to air miles? A person who wants an air miles ticket approaches the air miles operator, which is some company in Croydon. At what stage will the money be paid?

Mr. Stevenson: I do not want to take up too much time, but if I had sufficient time I could give an endless list of serious objections to the tax. My hon. Friend has mentioned one. I cannot answer his question, but the Minister should answer it. Such schemes were introduced by the airlines because of the vicious competition. To qualify for such a scheme a person has to buy an airline ticket and will pay the tax—depending on the journey— when he buys that ticket. Presumably when he collects the air miles and buys another ticket he will have to pay the tax again.

How do the Government propose to deal with schemes that are designed to attract the maximum number of passengers? Such schemes are presumably in line with the competitive ethos that the Government love to promote. When people go to collect their air miles do they have to pay the tax again? Should not this question be put to the Minister before Conservative Members go into the Lobby in support of the Government? These issues are not flippant; they are very serious. What we are talking about is double taxation imposed on services designed to attract passengers to British airlines, which are facing severe international competition.

Dr. Marek: I wonder whether my hon. Friend is absolutely right about this matter. I think that air miles, far from being subject to double taxation, are subject to zero taxation. Perhaps this is a matter that the Inland Revenue ought to look into.

Mr. Stevenson: If my hon. Friend is correct, he makes a valid point. Either way, the matter must be addressed. People claiming their entitlement under the various schemes initiated by the airlines have to present their tickets at an airport before they travel. Do they have to pay tax again? If so, surely that is double taxation. You are in enough trouble with single taxation: I expect that when you impose double taxation your already tattered reputation —whatever is left of it—will take another nose-dive.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. It is not my reputation that is in tatters.

Mr. Stevenson: If my words implied any such thing, I apologise unreservedly, Dame Janet. I am sure that you will allow me the luxury of making it clear, however, that I do not apologise to one Conservative Member.

This is an important point which must be addressed and I hope that in the summing up speech the anomalies that have been identified will be addressed. The more that is known about them, the more the tax will be under threat, and the clearer it will be that the amendment must be supported. These issues must be considered thoroughly and reported on to the House before this unnecessary, damaging and dangerous tax is imposed on the British people.

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few points in this debate, which concerns an issue in several aspects of which I have a particular interest.

This is one of the major taxation issues arising from the Budget. It is worth noting, in passing, that, the day after the Budget, it was seized upon by *The Sun* for its front-page headline as epitomising the whole spirit of the Budget. I would not dissent lightly from the populist touch of *The Sun* in making that selection. Perhaps Conservative Members should take the matter a little more seriously.

The local elections in May will be followed by the European elections in June, and this tax will come into effect in November. In other words, it will begin to operate just about a month after the new Prime Minister has been put in place. The first thing that he will be hit with is the introduction of the take-off tax. As *The Sun* and many hon. Members have pointed out, this tax will be resented by many. It is symbolic. People will realise that it has no rhyme or reason, that it is not fair or just, that it is simply another means of raising revenue. It is just another way of screwing people, and, for that reason, it will be deeply resented.

The whole Budget could be described as a fiscal Kama Sutra, but this measure will be the subject of very deep unpopularity. The levity with which Conservative Members have treated the matter in this debate will be shown to have been misplaced.

There is another preliminary point that I should like to make. It is the policy of airlines to charge for children from the age of two. As the father of two young children, I regard this as a fairly punitive policy. My little fellow of two and my daughter of five are charged half of what are very substantial air fares. One of the oddities of this tax is that it makes no distinction between adults and children. My hon. Friends and I have been trying to come up with another example of the imposition of a direct tax on two-year-olds.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): At full rate.

Mr. Wilson: Yes, at full rate.

Have the Government descended so far? Are they now reduced to charging two-year-olds £5 or £10 for the privilege of accompanying their parents? Is this the first toddler tax? If so, do the Government have plans to extend the taxation of two-year-olds?

Mr. Gallie: The tax on sweeties is probably a direct tax imposed on two-year-olds.

The hon. Gentleman has accused hon. Members of levity in this debate. Does he, like me, regret the fact that no member of the Scottish National party has been present for any of this debate?

Mr. Wilson: That is a matter between the hon. Gentleman and members of the Scottish National party. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will ensure that his words are noted in the appropriate quarter.

I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's parallel. I do not know many two-year-olds who go into a shop and buy their own sweeties. So far as I know, sweeties are not subject to VAT. *[Interruption.]* Apparently some are. We are back to the fiscal Kama Sutra. What we have here is a quite specific measure to introduce a personal tax that makes no distinction between two-year-olds and adults. This is an oddity which ought to be looked at.

As I indicated at the beginning of my speech, I have several constituency interests in this matter. I am privileged to have in my constituency the base of one of the biggest travel agents in Britain. I refer to the remarkable company of A.T. Mays, which operates from Saltcoats and has branches all over Britain. This is a company of which everyone in my constituency is extremely proud, and it provides several hundred jobs. It is axiomatic to say that any tax that hits the tourist industry, including package holidays, and business flights will hit A.T. Mays. This is one very sound reason for my opposition to the duty.

Secondly, many of my constituents are employed by Jetstream at Prestwick. As other hon. Members have said, Jetstream, which forms part of British Aerospace, has set out some very good reasons for objecting to this new tax. I shall come to these in a moment.

The most important of my constituency interests, however, is the same as that of every other hon. Member. For many working people a relatively cheap package holiday is no great luxury. It is something that is saved for and looked forward to, and in many cases paying for it involves considerable sacrifice. The gratuitous slapping on such holidays of a tax of £40, which bears no relationship to the value of the product being purchased—the holiday may have cost £199, or even less—is insulting and offensive and is very much to be regretted. This disproportionately high tax, on top of all the other extra taxes that people are being asked to pay this year, will be very unpopular indeed.

I should like to refer briefly to the Jetstream objections. Among hon. Members, it is no secret that Jetstream is going through difficult times, from which we hope very much that it will emerge so that it may continue to provide a very high level of employment in Ayrshire as the major engineering firm in Scotland.

Crucial to that company's success is the ATP airplane that services most of the regional routes in Britain and Scotland. Jetstream supplies both British Airways and Loganair—which recently placed an order for two aircraft. There is no reason why there should not be further orders in future. However, it is a marginal business. Anyone who flies those routes knows that the load cannot produce a large profit. If 5 or 10 per cent. of passengers are lost to those routes, some services will be unable to continue.

7.30 pm

The Government should take account of that strong point. It is not just a question of the travel industry or the social case but one of considerable importance to aircraft manufacturers. If regional services erode as a consequence of the tax and other factors that militate against them, there will be fewer aircraft orders and jobs—a point forcefully made by Jetstream.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I draw my hon. Friend's attention to a number of conversations that I had with small airlines that want to operate between Carlisle and London. For them, Heathrow landing fees are a major preoccupation. That touches on the same principle as my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend is right. Although there are well-established regional routes in Britain—and most highlands and islands services fall in that category—everyone knows that new regional routes are constantly introduced, but fail because the margins are so tight. There will be less continuity of service or development of regional airlines if they have both to meet high landing fees and to suffer the consequences of the new tax.

It is not enough to defend imposing a new tax simply because that would be in line with other countries. The absence of such a tax in the United Kingdom has probably been a contributory factor in higher landing fees—a cost

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which airlines already absorb. In future, airlines will continue to pay high landing charges and their passengers will have to meet the new tax. The Jetstream brief states:

> "The proposed APD, with the associated implications for fare levels and passenger traffic, will at the very least create uncertainty amongst airlines. In view of this and the substantial capital outlay and risk associated with the acquisition of new aircraft, airlines will be reluctant to commit to new orders until the full economic impact of the APD is known. This will result in the further delay of new aircraft orders and depress aircraft prices as manufacturers compete for scarce orders. Without new orders at profitable pricing levels, the recovery of the aircraft manufacturing industry will not take place and further reduction in manning levels will be inevitable."

I want the Minister to answer that point tonight. This debate concerns not just air fares and the social consequences but jobs in aircraft manufacturing—particularly at Prestwick. That aspect is one to which the Minister should address himself. I hope that the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) will join us in the Lobby tonight—hope, but doubt.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): We heard today that British Aerospace has to sell Rover. Does not my hon. Friend agree that air passenger duty sends the wrong signal to manufacturers of air frames and aircraft engines? Is not the reason for BAe's sale of Rover the need for resources to develop its manufacturing activities? Has not the new tax been introduced at the wrong time? It also sends the wrong signal to airlines.

Mr. Wilson My hon. Friend is right. Different interpretations can be placed on the implications of today's statement for Jetstream and other parts of British Aerospace. British aircraft manufacturing is a fragile industry which needs encouraging, nurturing and every support from Government—rather than another kick in the shins. I hope that the case made by Jetstream will be given due attention. It is not the only manufacturer of the sort of aircraft used for regional services but it is certainly the principal one.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): My hon. Friend said that the imposition of such a tax by other countries does not mean that the United Kingdom must follow. Other countries also subsidise certain services for social reasons—particularly those serving far-flung areas. The Republic of Ireland, for example, subsidises the Dublin to Kerry route, which is of an equivalent distance to that between Stornoway and Inverness, but, after the subsidy, the fare is half that from Stornoway to Inverness.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. I want to present the islands argument, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will deal with it at considerable length if he catches your eye, Sir David.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I will give my hon. Friend an example of how marginal is the profitability of certain routes. In six years, three separate airlines have operated between Carlisle and London, where every cost is critically important—and none of them can make a profit from that route.

Mr. Wilson: That is a good point. Such airlines are not looking for a large profit, and they are extremely vulnerable to any influencing factor. However, I will be slightly selfish and emphasise the islands argument, because it has distinctive facets. The most important of them is the words used by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement. It is not a matter of semantics. There is no doubt what was meant by the right hon. and learned Gentleman and what he was perceived by all hon. and right hon. Members to mean.

The Chancellor was not perceived to mean that exemption would apply only to some flights within islands, but to mean that he was announcing exemption for most flights involving the Scottish islands. For that, he raised a loud cheer from the Conservative Benches. Conservative Members cheered everything that he said that day, in a somewhat irrational fashion, but the cheer that was raised at that specific statement was due to the perception that the Chancellor was considerate enough to exempt Scottish island flights. That is the truth of the matter.

Good faith is involved as to whether the Government will renege on that undertaking. I am willing to be charitable and to believe that the Chancellor thought that he was doing as I said. It is not really his job to go around checking how many seats there are on the flight from Glasgow to Islay or on inter-island flights between Lerwick and Kirkwall. That is scarcely the job of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We assumed that he had taken advice and that his perception was that if aircraft with fewer than 20 seats were exempted, most of the flights that hop to and from and between the Scottish islands would be exempted. But that is not the case.

In terms of what is now being rigidly applied, the Chancellor gave virtually nothing. If the Government proceed as they intend, the House will have been conned. In fact, the Budget statement exempted barely 26,000 passenger flights a year involving the Scottish islands; the only exempted flights will be the inter-island flights within Orkney and Shetland, and the little-used service between Wick and Kirkwall. Every flight to every destination on the west coast will be subject to the tax. I shall be very surprised if the Paymaster General can say that that is what the Chancellor thought he was telling the House.

Sir John Cope: The hon. Gentleman has described this as a semantic point. I am not sure whether he was present earlier, when I spoke more widely about the islands, but I assure him that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor knew precisely what he was saying, and said it very clearly. Moreover, our intentions were made clear by the back-up pieces of paper that were issued on Budget day.

Mr. Wilson: In that case, I am extremely disappointed in the Chancellor, because what he said was deception. It is inconceivable that he meant to create the impression that roughly 5 per cent. of flights involving Scottish islands would be exempted. Let me add that, at a subsequent briefing given by the Scottish Office, the Scottish press were given—forcefully and specifically—the message that all Scottish island flights would be exempted.

If the Paymaster General is saying—I am surprised that he should say it in specific terms—that the Chancellor of the Exchequer knew that such a limited range of services was to be exempted, let me tell him that that was a shameful way in which to pull the wool over hon. Members' eyes, while raising false hopes in the communities affected. The first argument for exempting island flights is the spirit of what was said in the House that day, along with the Scottish Office briefing. Ministers are not allowed to mislead inside the House, and those who speak for them are not allowed to mislead in briefings outside.

A second argument differentiates the islands from all other areas: the social argument. In virtually every other part of Britain that has an airport, the choice between flying and other forms of transport is relatively marginal in terms of time and convenience. A train journey will probably take six or seven hours at the most; a plane journey will take about an hour. Factors of cost and difficulty will, of course, be involved.

The arguments relating to islands in the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and the hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) are entirely different. Someone travelling from Islay to Glasgow cannot simply say, "I can take the train or the bus, and travel for three hours rather than travelling for 40 minutes on the plane." He must take the ferry—whose timetable is quite sparse, especially in winter; he must sail for about two and a half hours; as there is no railway, that will be followed by a long and pretty uncomfortable bus journey, lasting nearly three hours, from the port of Kennacraig.

Most Conservative Members would not contemplate such a journey. My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles, however, would have to sail for five and half hours by sea from Barra to Oban, in some of the most treacherous sea conditions that could be found around the British Isles —or, perhaps, much further afield. Those without personal transport are then faced with a long train journey—and an occasional service—from Oban to Glasgow.

That choice must be made by people who may be ill or travelling with young children. Surely no hon. Member would suggest that such people should be forced to go on such long and arduous journeys in this day and age if aeroplanes are available. That is the social argument which separates the Scottish islands from every other part of the United Kingdom.

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) said about Carlisle. I have travelled to most of the regional airports in the country, and all have a story to tell; but if lines are being drawn—in the spirit of what was said earlier—there is a valid case for drawing such a line around the mainland, and exempting the islands. That would be easily done. I am not persuaded by the argument of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), who suggested that the accountants would be unable to work out the arrangements, and that they would lead to enormous bureaucratic complexities; this is a simple principle, which could easily be enforced.

7.45 pm

Mr. Macdonald: My hon. Friend is right. He knows the islands very well and, as he said, the island of Barra is five and a half hours from the mainland by ferry. Although there is an air service there, there is no aerodrome or airstrip as such: the plane lands on the beach when the tide is out. Under the Government's proposals, however, those who use that lifeline service will be taxed in the same way as business men travelling on the shuttle from Edinburgh to Heathrow.

Mr. Wilson: Indeed. I do not know anything about Carshalton——

Mr. Darling: I do.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend does, apparently; but there is no reason why all hon. Members should know everything about every corner of the country.

But before imposing a blanket tax, the Government should—for heaven's sake—take account of the vastly differing circumstances in different parts of the country, and the different reasons why people need access to air travel. Having made that distinction, they should draw a sensible line; in my view, they could draw it between the islands and other areas.

Mr. Forman: I have been to Barra, which is a lovely place. My plane landed on the very beach mentioned by the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald). My point was simply that taxes involving too many exemptions were, on the whole, bad taxes, leading to problems of narrow base and high marginal rates.

Mr. Wilson: As others have pointed out, there are already quite a few exemptions. Some of my hon. Friends have drawn attention to the existing complexities. I do not think that, when the Chancellor gave the impression that he offered from the Dispatch Box, the first reaction of Conservative Members was "Oh dear, what a complexity he has just added"—nor do I think that any particular complexity would be added now.

Air services are disproportionately important to the islands. Some people who would not dream of travelling by air from Glasgow to London must make a difficult decision when travelling from the islands, perhaps with young children or an elderly relative. Do they pay the significant extra amount to fly or do they endure the arduous sea crossing? People living on the mainland generally do not have to make such decisions, and to add the burden of this tax strikes me as gratuitous and wrong.

Some islands have lost their services because of the thin balance between what is economic and what is not. Skye lost its air service after being the last to lose Scottish Office subsidy. As a result, Skye is a much more difficult place to get to and from. Mull once had a scheduled air service, but it has lost it. If the balance is tipped a little more the other way, more services could be lost. That would be a regrettable and unnecessary consequence of this legislation. I am sure that the proposal was not dreamt up with that consequence in mind.

I strongly urge the Government to think again about amendment No. 3. No enormous point of political principle is involved. Considerable weight should be given to the fact that, in the view of hon. Members on both sides of the House, the Chancellor appeared to give a certain impression.

We are talking about a charge of £5 now. As I have said, that is a substantial sum for many of the people who use those services. We all know that the tax could become £10, £15 or £20 once it is established as a revenue-raising device. It is important that we do not think of it in terms of being only £5 now. We should establish the principle that the islands are different and should be treated differently.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) said, roughly, that there are rich people in the islands and poor people in cities. Of course that is true, but one can work only in generalities. The generality has been established and recognised by the European Community: the highlands and islands are an objective 1 area. The social needs of the islands are generally recognised and I am sure

[Mr. Wilson]

that that applies to other islands around the British coast. There is a perfectly sound case for recognising them in the context of this legislation.

Mr. Dicks: I want to make a few very quick points to my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General. First, there is a solution to the problem that has been raised about the islands. Quite simply, the tax should not be imposed within the United Kingdom. The proposal was a nonsense from the outset and it should never have been considered.

In a sense, the principle of an airport tax can be understood. However, the way in which the tax is to be administered is, as is so often the case with such things, wrong. We have little or no consultation and decisions are taken.

I cannot understand the thinking behind the idea that the airlines should have to administer the tax. If anyone had bothered to contact the airlines and those who work with them on a daily basis, as I do at Heathrow, it would have been clear how difficult and costly it would be to collect the tax.

There are customs officers at Heathrow now. Why cannot we impose on them, if there were additional staff there, a duty to collect the tax? When one leaves New Zealand from Auckland airport, one goes to the Bank of New Zealand desk, presents one's boarding pass, and pays one's money. The back of the boarding pass is stamped and one is allowed to board the aeroplane. The process has nothing to do with airlines. The device is simple and anyone going through the departure door must go through that procedure. It is simple and easy and there is no red tape. The boarding pass is stamped, the money is taken and everything is filed away.

Dr. Marek: The Government want the money and they do not care about the ill-effects that will result from getting the money. However, worse than that, the Government can be incompetent. At the moment, the Government are losing about £500 million through the escape of excise duties across the border because of the lack of harmonisation in excise duties on tobacco and alcohol. Basically, the Government are stupid. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is a member of that Government, but the stupid Government cannot get their tax policy right.

Mr. Dicks: I have been a Member of this place for too long for the hon. Gentleman to expect me to be caught by his intervention or to go down that avenue. The hon. Gentleman made a very pleasant intervention, but I will ignore it completely.

I cannot understand why the tax will not be imposed on those who use the ferry and the channel tunnel. What is so special about those people that they do not have to pay a tax to depart and so odd about people who want to fly on aeroplanes who have to pay the tax? The answer is for everyone to pay a departure tax, irrespective of the mode of transport or any other consideration. There should be no taxes for internal flights or movement.

The proposal is nonsense and a dog's breakfast. If there had been any consultations with the people who work with the airlines and who know about these matters, if British Airways and people like me had been consulted, we would have been able to say how damned stupid it would be to collect the tax as proposed.

The principle is right, but the administration is a cock-up of the first order. As I have said, we need only have someone in one place, for example at every terminal at Heathrow, to collect boarding cards and to take the money and then to stamp those cards. The tax should be introduced for everyone departing by sea or via the channel tunnel in exactly the same way. We should then do away with the internal tax. The revenue from those travelling by ferry or through the tunnel would more than make up for the revenue lost in respect of this stupid internal tax. I say no more as I believe the case is made.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): It is absolutely outrageous to have to come here to talk about a new tax when we consider that the Government approached the last general election on the platform of no new taxes. Lo and behold, we have been hit by a new tax.

I represent Renfrew, West and Inverclyde which includes Glasgow airport. The headquarters of Caledonian MacBrayne is in Gourock, which is in my constituency. The M8 runs right through my constituency. These points will become relevant later. The Erskine bridge is also in my constituency. Since the Government came to power and promised no new taxes, the Erskine bridge tax has been doubled and Caledonian MacBrayne has been forced to increase its fares because it serves the islanders.

Roughly 15,000 workers are employed at Glasgow airport. They rely on folk flying into and out of the airport because that is what attracts the money. That is what provides them with a job. Just the other week, Renfrew enterprise trust set up a programme which might mean a £400 million investment at Glasgow airport. A further 15,000 jobs could be created. The argument is that Glasgow airport is a good place for businesses to set up and work from. The British Airports Authority has invested £120 million in Glasgow airport. However, this very damaging and punitive tax is affecting BAA's attempt to make Britain a good place to come to, to stay and to work.

It is objectionable that the Chancellor can pick out the air industry and decide to tax it. The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) was right when he asked, "What about the rest?" We should not be levying a tax which will affect Glasgow airport. The Government have got it wrong. Because of their mad, blundering economic policies, they are costing the country nearly £50 billion a year. The Chancellor is so desperate to raise money that he has decided to reach for the sky. The phrase, "Reach for the sky" used to be used by highway robbers who ripped money from people's pockets. The Chancellor is clearly the skyway robber of British politics. He is going to rip the bucks from holidaymakers.

That is not in keeping with trying to encourage a dynamic air industry which is the envy of the world. The Chancellor has his beady eye on the industry. He hopes to rip off a few bob—some £330 million—from holiday folk.

I object to families having to find an extra tenner or £40 to go to Benidorm, for instance. It is the height of nonsense that we are to levy a tax that will rip off somebody going on holiday. My hon. Friends are right; it is a sick tax. It is pie-in-the-sky stuff.

8 pm

I have with me a book entitled "A Wee Dribble of Dross" by Walter McCorrisken—here is a wee plug for him—and I quote a section about a church collection. I am delighted that the Chancellor is present. The quotation epitomises the Government. It states:

> "I put five pence into the bowl then carefully looked about,
> Nobody was watching me, so I took a fiver out."

The Chancellor has looked about and said, "I will take a fiver our of that." The channel tunnel is charged nothing. It is objectionable. The tax is utterly unfair to large families. Families are entitled to a wee holiday abroad, the same as anybody else.

The islands and highlands are dear to the people of Scotland. We saw the highland clearances by the lords and masters 100 years ago. The folk down here in the south did enough damage in those days. We are seeing another punitive measure on people who have tried to cultivate the highlands and make them live. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) will speak admirably about his constituents in the highlands. However, folk in my constituency need jobs.

Many people come to my constituency to use the local hospitals for operations and so on. Is the Chancellor going to guarantee that those folk will get the £10 paid? Will he ensure that for folk who need medicine or treatment the tenners will be paid, or is it that, because they live on an island, they will suffer once again? It is a disgrace. Islanders and highlanders live in remote areas that are important to the infrastructure and the economy of this country, and they are not being given due attention and support to live. Instead, rural areas are being turned into shooting estates for the lords and gentry whom the Chancellor seems to look after more than anybody else.

I am not a great lover of some of the folk who run some companies, but Sir Colin Marshall, chairman of British Airways, said:

> "The new air passenger duty proposed discriminates against this nation's most successful transport sector and penalises airlines while rail, coach and ferry companies will escape, as will the channel tunnel."

I certainly do not want a tax on services to the islands, but I am not too concerned about the channel tunnel. I would like to hear what the Paymaster General has to say about that. Sir Michael Bishop, chairman of British Midland, the country's second biggest scheduled airline, with 3·8 million passengers a year, said:

> "Air travellers in and from Britain do not deserve to be singled out in this way. Why should they be forced to pay more and why should road, rail and sea travellers be exempt?"

The tax is not universal; the Chancellor has singled out air travel.

By the way, the Government should be doing more to keep our airlines in the air. More important, they should also ensure that British Aerospace and other companies, which provide many aeroplanes for Britain, continue. The Government must not take too much out of the kitty.

I do not want to take up too much time, but, as I have said, Glasgow airport is in my constituency. It presently handles 5 million passengers a year—very welcome passengers. The projection is that, if the infrastructure is built and we keep flying high, the airport has a chance of reaching 8 million passengers a year. This measure will damage its chances of reaching that target, and, once again, that will inflict further unemployment on Scotland. The Government will take from the people of Scotland, especially those in the islands, money that they badly need to continue to develop the islands to make them a decent place to live. I am delighted that the Chancellor is present to hear my speech.

There is no doubt that the measure has been brought about because of the blunderland that is Britain now. There is no doubt that, because of their £50 billion blunder, the Government are looking everywhere to dip their hands into people's pockets. I am sure that Walter McCorrisken, the famous Scottish poet, will have somthing to say about the Chancellor's mad, wild plans to get Britain out of a hole. The right hon. and learned Gentleman should keep out of the sky. I am sure that he will damage Britain's prospects of communicating with the rest of the world by imposing this punitive tax.

Mr. Hoon: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) on his wide-ranging contribution. I shall address four specific points in relation to the proposed new tax: first, the bureaucracy involved in what will clearly be a complicated tax for the airlines to administer; secondly, the likely implications of the tax for the single European market; thirdly, the effect of the tax on British airlines in competition with other airlines around the world, and the implications of that for the British tourist industry; and, fourthly, the effect on regional airports.

On bureaucracy, the Chancellor's justification for the introduction of the tax, according to his Budget speech, is that air travel is undertaxed compared with other sectors of the economy. If that is the case, clearly it was open to the Chancellor to consider other ways of raising tax from the airline industry—perhaps simpler forms of revenue raising based on taxes that they pay already.

It would be helpful if the Paymaster General indicated what consideration was given to other courses and what was the administrative cost assessment of using that avenue of tax raising rather than increasing taxes elsewhere. Obviously, the Government must justify that in relation to the introduction of what all hon. Members accept is an extremely complicated tax to administer. If the Paymaster General does not accept the complexity of that from me, I hope that he will accept it from people in the industry.

Sir John Cope: It was not clear what other tax the hon. Gentleman thought we should use to raise money from the airline industry.

Mr. Hoon: I was suggesting that the airlines are likely to be paying taxes elsewhere and that, therefore, it would be possible to increase other taxes if the justification for this taxation were accepted, which is that the airlines are undertaxed. Presumably the Government could have embarked upon an exercise to determine the most efficient way of raising tax from the airline industry, and that must involve an assessment of the administrative cost of this tax. I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman would enlighten the Committee on what alternative considerations were made, assuming that I accept the Chancellor's argument that the airline industry is undertaxed.

The bureaucracy becomes clear to anyone who reads the Customs and Excise briefing that was prepared to assist hon. Members on the proposal. Paragraph 9 is entitled "Scheme of Control". I propose to read it in full because it is a useful indication of the glib way in which the

[Mr. Hoon]

Government have approached the problem. In due course, I shall contrast that with the reaction of British Airways to the proposal. I quote:

> "Control arrangements for Air Passenger Duty will be systems audit based and airlines will be required to maintain records accordingly. The prime control will be a manifest list of passenger loads compiled from information on ticket coupons. Record keeping requirements will focus on several areas, including:
>
> An account to provide a visible audit trail for duty declared on returns;
>
> Manifest or passenger load lists in suitable form; and
>
> Commercial documentation, including information provided to airport authorities."

That is the glib outline provided in the briefing from Customs and Excise. Presumably that is what the Government now think will be required to introduce the tax.

It is necessary to contrast that superficial approach to the proposal with what British Airways says about it. It is a different approach because the Government assume that British Airways, together with 199 other airlines, will collect the tax. British Airways says:

> "As proposed collection of duty from passengers will be by the airline selling the ticket but payment of the duty is by the airline carrying the passenger on the dutiable sector. There are no existing systems for airlines to identify at uplift which passengers are eligible to pay the duty. It would be very expensive to develop systems to do this, requiring computer and additional manpower resources. Even then the system could not identify all exempt passengers. Furthermore there are no systems by which one airline can collect from another duty which should have been collected; indeed an airline cannot force another to collect a duty on its behalf."

From the simplistic outline set out by the Government and their officials, which presumably will be defended by the Paymaster General, the reality is something different. An expensive computer system will be required with significant extra costs for airlines if they are to implement the scheme dreamt up by the Government.

If the Government are in any doubt about this difficulty, they should visit any major international airline at the airport, say on a Friday evening, especially at this time of year when there is the prospect of snow or fog which will disrupt services. They should watch the activities of people who are travelling from London to Paris, Brussels or any other major airport in the European Union.

What happens is that passengers may turn up with a ticket issued by British Airways for a BA flight. When they discover that the BA flight is delayed for an hour because there is a problem with the inbound flight, they then see whether Air France can take them, and they will re-register on an Air France aircraft. If that aircraft is then delayed, they will perhaps see whether British Midland can get them across. That means that each trail must be followed from one airline to another simply to collecct the duty of £5. That is something which the Government need to consider.

Not only will the airline be required to follow through the arrangement. I shall give an example of something that happens routinely every day at airports around Europe. Airlines will have to ensure that they are in a position to offset the various costs. If British Airways collected the tax when it issued the ticket, it must ensure that it is in a position to get the money back from the airline that carries the passenger on that short journey. That is only one of the many difficulties that I anticipate will arise from this poorly-thought-out proposal.

Other difficulties will be obvious to anyone who travels regularly by air. Increasingly, airlines are persuading people to fly only with them, and they offer discounts to people who buy multiple tickets. Many of the multiple tickets tend to be one way, so people buy a block of six tickets for journeys from one city to another and then a block of six tickets for the return. How will the proposals affect refunds with regard to the block purchase of tickets? I anticipate all sorts of problems with the proposals which the Government have not considered.

8.15 pm

Transfer passengers are referred to in the briefing, and there has already been some discussion about this matter. Many international flights start early in the morning, and it is commonplace for people travelling from a regional airport to stop overnight in London before taking their further flight. Does that mean that they will have to pay the tax twice? How does that differ from the position of someone who, for example, travels from a European destination through London to a regional airport? I frequently make such a journey. Frequently, I have broken my journey by arriving at Heathrow, going into London for a meeting, returning to Heathrow and continuing my journey north. Does that mean that I will have to pay the tax twice? How will anyone know that I chose to break my journey at Heathrow, came into London and then went out again?

There are all sorts of anomalies that the Government have built into the proposals. The matter of stopovers needs to be considered because it will have a significant impact on our regional airports. I hope that the Government have some concern about the impact of their proposals on airports outside London.

Mr. Macdonald: The problem with stopovers exposes some of the more ridiculous anomalies contained in this duty. For example, if one were to fly from Barra to Stornoway in my constituency, it would involve a stopover in Balivanish. One would have to change from a plane that carried fewer than 20 passengers to one that carried more than 20 pasengers. Halfway through a single journey, one is suddenly transferred from a category where one is not liable for the tax to a category where one is liable for it. How does my hon. Friend think that Customs and Excise will work out the complexities of such a conundrum?

Mr. Hoon: At the risk of testing my limited geographical knowledge, my hon. Friend has pointed out a further problem that the Government face in trying to make the proposal sensible, if they are bothered about that. It may well be that they are not too worried about making it sensible; they are more concerned about simply raising revenue. If that is the answer that the Paymaster General gives us, I suppose that we must accept it. If the Government will not raise revenue by the one mechanism that they studiously avoid—increasing the basic income tax rate—we must face such bureaucratic tax systems, which involve an inordinate amount of effort by those who are charged with the responsibility for collecting the tax, and the Government will have to face up to the decisions that they are taking.

We have been told that this is all about revenue raising. Of course, it is not simply about revenue raising; it is about the complexity of revenue raising and the difficulties in which the Government have got themselves. The previous Chancellor was proud that he abolished a tax each time he delivered the Budget statement. It appears that this Government's approach will be the reverse—not only to add new taxes to the portfolio of taxes facing taxpayers in the United Kingdom but to add new, inherently complex taxes.

I should be grateful if the Paymaster General would examine the suggestion that the tax is to be collected by the airlines and then effectively buried in the cost of the ticket. I hope that the Government intend to make it clear to the airlines that the tax must be displayed prominently on every ticket issued, otherwise the consumer—the taxpayer —will not be aware of the Government's additional cost of a holiday. I am sure that the Paymaster General will agree that, in the interests of openness, it is right that the taxpayer should be fully aware of the charge that the Government are imposing. I hope that the Government will make it clear in their instructions on how the tax will be collected that the full cost of the tax must be properly shown on each ticket.

The second matter that I mentioned was that of the single market. I sat with the Paymaster General through many hours of debate on the Finance Bill 1992, which was introduced specifically to establish consistent tax rules across the European Community as it was then, the European Union as it is now. We spent many hours debating the finer points of excise duty and VAT so that the 12 member states could begin to have some consistency in the rules which they applied for those two taxes. Perhaps the Paymaster General did not suffer as much as I did during those long hours in Committee. I tried to make him suffer occasionally, but obviously I was not as successful as I had hoped.

There is no attempt in the proposals to produce a common approach in the European Community. Instead, the Government are simply striking out on their own. They are saying that it does not matter what other countries are doing—they want to have this tax because they need to raise money. They are not concerned about the attitude of other countries to the proposal. I doubt whether the Government had any discussions with other member states about concerns that such taxes were anomalous in the European Community. I doubt whether any anxieties have been expressed by the Government on that question. When challenged, of course, they will say that other countries have such a tax and that therefore they are perfectly justified in introducing it.

Belgium charges a duty on all international flights but, because it is Belgium, the rate of duty varies between airports. The maximum rate, however, is about £9. Denmark charges about £6·50 on all international air departures, and Ireland has a duty of about £5 on all international departures with the exception of those to Northern Ireland. There is a precedent in the European Union.

The proposals, however, provide a different structure, with the tax applying both to domestic and to international flights. The structure is significantly different also from the way in which those three member states choose to impose their taxatioin and that will produce further anomalies. Perhaps the Paymaster General will next year make proposals to amend the tax to bring it into line with the other member states. It is unfortunate that, at a time when the Government are seeking to produce a standard approach in other areas of taxation with other European countries, they should strike out clearly on their own and introduce a tax quite different from any other in the European Union.

The third area upon which I should be grateful for the comments of the Paymaster General concerns competition with other airlines. The right hon. Gentleman has had drawn to his attention more than once today the letter from Sir Colin Marshall of British Airways. It does, however, repay serious examination. The point which he made on behalf of British Airways has been repeated by others in the airline industry. He was extremely concerned that the duty will not only hit airlines generally, but will hit British-based airlines particularly hard.

Sir Colin said in the letter that the tax will not apply to competitors, some of whom, unlike British Airways, are subsidised and do not meet the full costs of their infrastructure. He was also concerned that the tax will do serious damage to some of our services, particularly those domestic routes which are losing money. He also stated that he could not be sure that it would not precipitate the closure of some of the more difficult regional services.

If the Paymaster General is in any doubt about that, I suggest that he goes to Heathrow early on a Saturday morning and takes a flight to Amsterdam, as I had the opportunity of doing recently. I was expecting a comfortable service to Amsterdam on a virtually empty plane, because most of the passengers who travel from Heathrow to Amsterdam do so for business reasons. The truth is that Saturday morning flights to Amsterdam from Heathrow are packed, and it is extremely difficult to get a seat. The reason is that, increasingly, Amsterdam attracts large numbers of passengers who are using the airport as a stopping-off point before going elsewhere. Indeed, Amsterdam has made a virtue out of that for many years, and at one time described itself in an advertising campaign as the third London airport.

Amsterdam is increasingly competing directly with the London airports. It has much greater capacity because it has had a good deal of investment in terms of new building, and it has routes to elsewhere in the world. In terms of the proposals, I assume that the passenger choosing to go through Amsterdam will have only to pay the £5 tax for the internal service and not the £10 tax if the journey then goes on elsewhere outside the European Union. If that is not the case, it will create a further competitive edge as far as an airport such as Amsterdam is concerned and will further attract passengers away from using British airports and facilities. That will be to the benefit of our direct competition on the continent.

I am sure that the Government will simply say that that is a marginal consideration, but the fact is that it is a competitive industry and such marginal considerations are the difference between airlines and services going bust, or surviving and making a profit. The Government ought to address that point carefully.

Again, if the Paymaster General is unhappy to accept that argument from me, he should look carefully at what Sir Colin Marshall has said. He has said that it would be easy for foreign airlines to compete unfairly against British airlines by evading the proper duty, if the duty is collected as was proposed originally. A foreign airline would be able to route its passengers through its international base on the continent rather than directly to the United Kingdom. For passengers on long-haul services, that does not really pose

[Mr. Hoon]

much difficulty. If that gives foreign-based airlines which operate from the United Kingdom such a competitive edge, we will be seriously damaging our industry in the process.

In relation to the question of competition for British-based operations, it is also worthwhile for the Government to look carefully at the views of the United Kingdom-based tourist industry. The Government take some credit for encouraging tourism to the United Kingdom, and yet clearly the industry is extremely concerned about the impact of the tax on business.

The chairman of an extremely successful travel agency has said that the new tax will have a highly detrimental effect on Britain's tourist industry. In an extremely price-sensitive market, the chairman added that the United Kingdom is already seen as an expensive destination. He explained that increasingly in the provision of package travel holidays United Kingdom-based companies are competing with companies from France, Holland and other European nations. That kind of price differential may make a real impact on business.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the departure tax will not have the impact that he suggests? The British tourist industry has in fact advocated the extension of VAT to foreign package holidays so as to protect the domestic market. That would make the domestic tourist market much more competitive. Would not people who pay £500 to £700 for a foreign package holiday be perfectly able to afford a small amount extra if VAT were extended to that package holiday?

Mr. Hoon: I do not want to get into an argument about VAT. The Government are increasing taxation sufficiently as it is without my following the hon. Gentleman along that route.

If companies based in Britain are worried that they will be placed, however marginally, at a disadvantage in competition with tourist companies on the continent, the Government ought to take that carefully into consideration. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) used as an illustration a holiday costing £600 or £700, but the most fierce competition in the holiday business tends to be at the lower end of the package holiday market. So we are talking about holidays that may cost less than £200. When that expenditure is multiplied by, say, four or five, for a family the impact of the tax—whether it amounts to £25 for journeys within the European Union or £50 for journeys outside the European Union—will be a consideration in what is clearly a tight market.

The last of the four subjects that I said I wished to raise is the effect of the tax on regional airports. The type of taxation represented by the air passenger duty will have consequences for the regional airports. We tend to assume that regional airports are steadily growing. People look to airports such as Manchester as an illustration of a clearly successful airport that has attracted new services and is successful in competing against London.

8.30 pm

Let us contrast the position of Manchester airport with an airport rather close to home for me and for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. If the Chancellor wanted to fly from East Midlands airport to Heathrow—he might not choose to do so as a way of travelling to the House of Commons, but he might want to do so when travelling to an international summit somewhere—he would find that he would no longer be able to take that service. A service operated by British Midland for a long time has been withdrawn in recent months because British Midland now believes that it is no longer economic to run it. The company cannot justify the price to passengers of the service down to London.

The air passenger duty will add a further £5 to the journey cost. If people want to travel by air to Heathrow and carry on to some other part of the world, it will add £10. The duty will be a major factor in an airline's decision whether to operate a service such as East Midlands to Heathrow. Such taxation has a serious impact on a company. I know that because I have encouraged a variety of companies to offer routes from Heathrow. They all say that it is a matter of landing fees and the cost of getting the aircraft in the air.

Those seem to me, as someone who pays the fare, relatively marginal considerations when they are spread across an aircraft with people all paying what seems to be a high fare. But the truth is that such services operate on extremely tight margins. The air passenger duty could mean the difference between operating or not operating a service or—of more concern to many regional airports—whether a service can continue to be operated.

If, instead of travelling from East Midlands to Heathrow, the Chancellor of the Exchequer chose to travel from Birmingham to Heathrow, again he would be disappointed. Still more recently, that service has been withdrawn.

Therefore, I hope that the Government will consider the effect on regional airports. As several hon. Members have said already in the debate, I hope that the Government will examine carefully the way in which the tax will hit services other than those from London.

I repeat that air passenger duty will not simply be a tax of small impact for most people. Many people contemplating whether they can afford a holiday this summer, particularly if they are thinking of going to one of the destinations abroad for which there is fierce competition in the package holiday market, will wonder whether they can afford the extra cost. My constituents in Ashfield will wonder whether they can contemplate the extra cost imposed by the tax. If they have two or three children, the tax will make a significant difference. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members seem to find that amusing and entertaining. It is a matter of great concern to people. Instead of going on holiday, people will sit at home and blame the Government for two weeks. Perhaps that is what I really want them to do.

Mr. Allason: The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) has exaggerated the role of the air passenger duty. He should be aware that the domestic tourist industry has been disadvantaged in many different ways, and certainly by foreign competition. If one wanted to support the British tourist industry, the quickest solution would be to introduce a differential in value added tax to reduce, as in France, the level of VAT charged in restaurants, the catering business and hotels. That would give a tremendous boost to the domestic industry.

The domestic tourist industry is extremely successful and important. It is the largest earner of foreign currency in Britain. Therefore, it deserves some support. The simplest way of providing that support, and, indeed, benefiting the Exchequer, is surely to extend VAT to the purchase of foreign air travel and holidays. As the hon. Member for Ashfield said, the cost of a package holiday even at the lowest end of the market is about £200. If one multiplies that by the number of people in the family, it comes to exactly the figure that I suggested—£600, £700 or £800. The imposition of VAT on that figure would not be significant. It would have been an imaginative approach on the part of the Government, and the measure would have been welcomed by the British domestic tourist industry, to impose VAT on foreign air travel.

I wish to take a moment to examine the problem of the British domestic tourist industry. At present, if people decide to come to Torbay for their holiday—which I strongly recommend—the difficulty is that any hotel bill or restaurant bill has VAT at 17·5 per cent. added to it. If exactly the same family goes abroad, say to Spain or France, they may find that part of their holiday is subsidised by a rather lower level of VAT. There is a differential in those countries.

For many years, the Government and particularly the Treasury have resisted the idea of two rates of VAT. In the good old days of Ted Heath, the dual rate of VAT—one forgets how high the rates were—was broadly accepted. The Government have introduced a different rate for the new VAT on fuel. We shall have a dual rate for at least a year. Why not extend that and help the domestic tourist industry, which is extremely important?

Mr. Pike: Is the hon. Gentleman arguing against the main plank of the Government's policy, which is to shift the balance from direct taxation to VAT? That is a policy with which I wholly disagree. But in the—*[Interruption.]*

The Temporary Chairman (Sir David Knox): Order. The hon. Gentleman is going much too wide. We are on a much narrower point than the one that he is raising.

Mr. Allason: It is a narrow point. I am grateful for your guidance, Sir David. I strongly support the extension of VAT to the purchase of foreign holidays and foreign transport. It would be a good way of raising revenue to put an extra amount on the purchase of package holidays.

I am sympathetic to the argument made by the hon. Member for Ashfield about regional airports. The blame for part of the problem lies not only with the Treasury but with the European Union. If there had been true competition between domestic carriers, Air France and other continental carriers would have been allowed to come into the United Kingdom and, if they saw a market, to take advantage of it. How can one believe that, following the creation of the single market and the European Union, we are members of a free trade club when British Airways cannot pick up passengers in, say, Madrid and fly them to Rome? Surely the point of a free trade club is that the existing players should be able to take advantage of a market if they see one.

Mr. Hoon: While I appreciate that the liberalisation of airline routes in the European Union continues to be difficult, the hon. Gentleman needs to concentrate on the real difficulty facing regional airports: they are not getting the competition. Competition implies more than one airline, but most regional airports are having difficulty finding even one airline to fly a scheduled route—for example, between the East Midlands airport and London. It is not a case of many airlines queuing up to compete—the airport cannot even persuade one airline to take on that responsibility.

Mr. Allason: I accept that, but I am worried about the predatory nature of some of the airlines operating on the domestic market. I am especially concerned about routes from Exeter and Plymouth, which are regional airports on the brink of viability.

If we are members of a free trade club, why do so many restrictions remain? They mean that only a few airlines can come into the domestic market.

The Temporary Chairman: Will the hon. Gentleman keep to the point? He is getting far beyond it. We are discussing amendment No. 1.

Mr. Allason: I am grateful for your guidance, Sir David.

This measure is certainly unimaginative because it does not grasp the problem. While it is a straightforward and obvious attempt to raise revenue, I urge the House to consider carefully going further and extending value added tax to foreign package holidays. That would be widely welcomed and I urge the House to accept that.

8.45 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham: I and many of my constituents are worried about the implications of the air passenger tax. The amount of duty that the Government are introducing now is not necessarily the cause for concern—it is the amount that they might introduce next year or the year after. We are really concerned about the knock-on effects of the tax.

Travel agents are extremely worried about the tax and the implications for the future. In my constituency, the aero-engine business—especially Rolls-Royce—has gone through a lean time, as it has throughout the country—and today's announcement about Rover gives us food for thought. British Aerospace has sold off its holding in Rover to a German company and that should tell us a lot about the state of British Aerospace. It serves as an illustration that we should be concerned not only about the tax but about the future of the freight and aerospace businesses and, to a certain extent, the future of travel agencies.

My constituents and people in the west midlands will be wondering about the tax. They will not necessarily be worried by the amount at the moment, but they will wonder how much it will be in future and the effect that it might have on their jobs.

Mr. Pike: The tax will also cost something to implement, apart from the £5 or £10 initial duty. Is it not true that the cost of administering it will remain the same, even if the tax is increased? We have heard nothing to allay fears that the tax will not merely be £5 or £10 next year, but that once the door is open it will increase very quickly.

Mr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend's argument is far better than mine. He has summed up that area of concern very well.

Birmingham airport flies the flag for the west midlands. People in the west midlands will not have a lot of confidence in the industrial base there when they consider what is likely to happen to the airport and to the aerospace industry.

[Mr. Cunningham]

We are constantly being told that there is a recovery, but that it is fragile. The business community are constantly telling us that the full effects of the Budget have not flowed through and are apprenhensive about that fact.

Many people are worried about the tax and the effects that it will have on the morale of those who work in the travel or aero engine businesses. Many jobs have been shed in those industries during the past few years and it is the wrong time to introduce such a tax—it sends out the wrong signals to manufacturers and travel agents.

The Government will not know the implications of the tax until they have introduced it, but has that not been the sorry tale of this Government? Whether in the implementation of value added tax or other measures, they have failed to consult adequately or to listen to people who would be affected by the measures.

It is not merely a question of £5 or £10—this tax and the increases in value added tax, coupled with cuts in benefits, will have a net effect on families. We must consider the tax and its implications against a broader canvas than the amendment allows. However, I do not want to deviate too much.

The tax will affect tourism and regional airports such as Birmingham. Many of the smaller airports, such as Coventry, are seeking partners in the private sector because of the cost factor, as many hon. Members with an involvement in local government know. The tax will not encourage such partnerships, because the private sector will think that there is no profit in them. Once again, small airports will find themselves on the breadline and jobs at such airports may be under threat. The tax, therefore, also has implications for jobs, as well as for the tourist and aircraft industries.

The tax is totally the wrong message to be sending to the employees of British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce in Coventry and to people throughout the country—especially at a time when many thousands of people in the west midlands and in my constituency want the industrial base to grow. They certainly want the aircraft industry to grow again and want more jobs to be created in it and in other industries throughout Britain. Psychologically, it is the wrong time to introduce the tax and I question the need for it. I should have thought that the Government would consider other ways to raise the necessary revenue, instead of introducing this tax at the wrong time.

Many people—particularly small manufacturers which do a great deal of work for British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce—will not be so concerned about the level of the tax now as about the cost in the future. Anyone who is extremely concerned about this country's future and especially its industrial base must worry about that. The effects of this tax, coupled with the results of the recent GATT round, on the aircraft industry and on companies such as Rolls-Royce give rise to extreme concern, because they could deter customers from buying engines. As I understand it, the GATT subsidy will be totally eradicated.

Another factor is that the last remnants of the British aircraft industry might be taken over by a company from abroad—whether German or American—as happened with Rover.

Although the amount of the tax seems small, the effects will be devastating. We are playing into the hands of our competitors abroad. We are not helping to restore confidence in the British economy so that it can get out of recession. We are not restoring confidence in the business community to invest; it fears that it cannot trust the Government over taxation. The Minister may give assurances tonight that the tax is a one-off and that it will not be increased in future, but nobody believes him, because we were given the same assurances about the introduction of VAT some years ago. We have now found out to our cost that one cannot believe what the Government indicate or say. Many in the travel and tourism trades will be concerned.

Mr. Pike: Is not it a fact that, because of the tax, the travel industry and the air transport industry will fear that, within Europe, Frankfurt, Schiphol and other airports will develop at the expense of Heathrow and Manchester airports?

Mr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend is quite right. There is no doubt that some of our major airports will be under serious threat. In the longer term, the feeder airports will be under serious threat. Many people forget that some of the regional airports such as Birmingham rely on feeder airports such as Coventry. We need those feeder airports because they facilitate trade. When a business man or a company has to fly components to Frankfurt or anywhere else in Europe, those small airports are often the lifeblood of the regional airports, because a small company can fly its freight at short notice to meet the customer's needs. That boosts confidence abroad in British manufacturers and, in turn, means that one starts to build up the confidence and regenerate the British economy, particularly the industrial base of the west midlands, but, more importantly, cities such as Coventry, which is renowned not only for its ingenuity in motor manufacturing but for aircraft production in companies such as Rolls-Royce and electrical companies such as GPT. Those companies now need a morale boost. They do not need their path to trade expansion hindered by another new tax.

I am extremely concerned for the welfare of my constituents in terms of their jobs, whether in the aero-engine manufacturing industry, in travel agencies in Coventry, South-East, in the airframe industries in the peripheries of Coventry or the small companies that produce components for companies such as Rolls-Royce. Nobody can forecast future Budgets, but I hope that the Minister will pause before introducing the tax and start to talk to people who are involved in air travel and in the production of aero-engines, which are vital to the technology and craft of the country.

The Minister should think seriously about the consequences of the levels of the tax. He should think about the signal that he is sending to British industry, particularly in the west midlands, which has been on its knees for many years, and to companies such as Rolls-Royce, GPT and the small business men in Coventry and throughout the country.

The tax will have serious consequences. It is not a morale booster. I hope that the fears of small business men will not be realised when the full implications of the Budget are known after April. I hope sincerely that it does not dampen economic growth. It seems to me that measures such as this act as a deterrent to British manufacturers and workers, not an incentive. I hope that the Minister will think again about the tax.

9 pm

Mr. Macdonald: I am pleased to be able to join the debate this evening. I shall speak in particular to amendment No. 3 to clause 28, which asks that

> "This duty shall not be charged until the Government has presented a report to Parliament on its effects on the economies of the United Kingdom islands, on the travelling public and on the air transport industry and tourism."

I should like to focus in particular on the effects on the economies of the islands of the United Kingdom, but more specifically the Scottish islands and the more remote and distant Scottish islands.

I take on board what my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) has said about the wider economic implications of the duty, its effects on industry in general, on the manufacturers of aircraft, on business confidence throughout the British economy and the way that it potentially disadvantages British carriers as compared with continental carriers. However, the valid point has been made that, with the differentiation between travel within Europe being charged at £5 a head and international travel at £10 a head, there is an open invitation for carriers to try to skirt around the £10 charge by trying to use continental airports as staging posts to divert international passengers from the United Kingdom. That could adversely affect British carriers. The Government have failed to take that into account. I hope that that matter will be addressed.

Apart from the wider economic implications for the British economy and industry, I shall refer specifically to its impact on the Scottish islands, which, after all, were one of the high points of the Chancellor's Budget speech. He said that the Scottish islands were to be exempted from the effects of the tax and he instantly won some cheap and easy applause from his hon. Friends on the Conservative Benches, not that that applause was in short supply, because his colleagues gave the Budget an astonishing reception. One wonders whether they appreciated its implications, given that it has introduced the biggest peacetime tax hike in history, which will lead, eventually, to the highest peacetime taxes. Despite that, each new tax and each new increase received delirious applause and cheers from Conservative Members.

Although that reception might have been misguided, the exemption granted to the Scottish islands was met with genuine pleasure. Suddenly it seemed as though inter-party and cross-party argument had been suspended for the moment, because both sides of the House recognised the special position of the Scottish islands. We welcomed the fact that the Chancellor, too, apparently recognised that by granting that exemption. The special position of the Scottish islands has been discussed at some length and it relates primarily to their geographical location. They are found on the ultimate fringes of the continent of Europe. Their sheer difference from the industrial and commercial hub of Europe and the United Kingdom is one of the main disadvantages with which they must cope.

The remoteness of the northern isles and the Western Isles is recognised not just in the House, but in the country and throughout Europe. They are a special case precisely because of their remoteness and their very distance from the Scottish mainland. It takes five and a half hours to travel by ferry to the island of Barra, in my constituency, from the Scottish mainland. I do not believe that most hon. Members appreciate the distances involved until they are spelt out. They know that the islands are a certain distance from the mainland, but when they realise that it takes more than five hours to reach a community, most of them are surprised, and even shocked.

Mr. Wallace: I am not attempting one-upmanship, but just to illustrate the hon. Gentleman's point I should point out that to travel from Lerwick in Shetland to the Scottish mainland involves an overnight, 14-hour journey by ferry.

The Temporary Chairman: Order. Although hon. Members can allude to such matters, the debate is not about the length of time it takes to travel from one point to another but about a tax.

Mr. Macdonald: I was simply trying to illustrate, with the help of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), the effects of the tax upon the economies of the United Kingdom and the islands, as outlined in amendment No. 3, which is one of the group of amendments selected for debate.

One of the defining characteristics of the economies of the Scottish islands is their distance from markets. That was the point I was trying to make until I was superseded, or perhaps I should say one-upped, by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland.

I do not need to give the specific number of hours that it takes to travel to each island, but their remoteness is a defining factor not just in the life style of the islanders, but of the economic difficulties that they face.

The other singular feature of the Scottish islands, with the happy exception of the Shetlands because of the relevance of oil to its economy, is their economic fragility. The per capita gross national product of Scotland is some way below the United Kingdom norm, but the lowest of the lot is found in the Scottish islands. The level of unemployment is higher than average while earnings are considerably lower than those found on the mainland.

It is precisely because of that distance that prices on the Scottish islands are higher than anywhere else in Scotland and probably than anywhere in the United Kingdom. That crucial economic factor must be taken into account, because until one appreciates the economic fragility of the Scottish islands, the full impact of the tax—the slap in the face—cannot be appreciated.

When one takes the factors of remoteness and economic fragility into account, one realises that the air service to the Scottish islands is by no means a luxury. It is not a businessman's perk to go by plane rather than train. Rather, the air service is a lifeline for the Scottish islands. When one is faced with a ferry journey of 14 hours or even five and a half hours, the air service is not simply weighed up on the grounds of convenience but becomes a vital link between the island communities and the outside world, connecting them with the rest of the United Kingdom. Although the islands are so many hours' steaming from the Scottish mainland, travelling time can be reduced to only an hour because of the air service.

The matter is illustrated by the fact that there are three airports in my constituency. I wonder how many other hon. Members have as many airports in their constituencies.

Mrs. Ray Michie: I have.

Mr. Macdonald: The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) says that she has a similar number, and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland probably has, too. That shows that the air service is a lifeline for the remote communities of the Scottish islands.

[Mr. Macdonald]

The Government have recognised the extent to which the air service is a lifeline. When islanders need essential specialist medical care that cannot be provided on the Scottish islands because of their low population, they are flown to hospitals on the mainland, in cities such as Inverness, Aberdeen and Glasgow. That is a regular occurrence. One might expect that patients would be flown to the mainland if they need urgent medical attention, but close relatives, such as the mother of a young child who has been flown to the mainland, are entitled to Government assistance to visit their sick relatives in the mainland hospitals. The Government do not ask the relatives to take a ferry or bus from Ullapool to Inverness and all the way to Glasgow, but recognise the special nature of the Scottish islands and assist the relatives to fly, courtesy of the NHS, from the Scottish islands to the mainland.

I am at a loss to think of any other constituency where that would be so. It certainly happens nowhere in the rest of the country. The Government recognise the special nature of the Scottish islands and the fact that such a service is no luxury but an essential aspect of maintaining a viable community on those islands.

The tax also has an impact on the viability of the air services to the Scottish islands. To impose this tax on passengers is bound to affect demand for the air services. Indeed, the Government have given us an estimate of how much the tax may affect demand. In an answer to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute, the Paymaster General said:

> "Overall, the tax is expected to reduce demand for air travel by around 2½ per cent. There is insufficient information available to estimate the impact of the tax on airports operated by Highland and Islands airports. No information has been received from other European countries on the impact of the introduction of such taxation on transport."—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1994; Vol. 235, c. *643*.]

The Paymaster General seems to have been unable to estimate the reduction in demand for the highlands and islands, but I suggest that because of the economic fragility, the unemployment, the low earnings and the higher prices of the Scottish islands, the impact will be more severe there. Passenger demand is bound to be depressed. Taking into account the shuttle services between Scotland and the cities of England, I estimate that the decrease in demand for passenger services in the highlands and islands may be as high as 5 or 10 per cent.

I emphasise again that the air services to and between the Scottish islands are already on a knife edge of viability —just showing a profit. I might add that they receive no subsidies or assistance from the Government; they all have to pay their own way, apart from some help from local authorities for inter-island flights. A reduction in passenger demand of between 5 and 10 per cent. could mean that some of these air services are no longer viable. British Airways may have to decide that no longer can it run these lifeline air services to the Scottish islands because of the effects of the tax and the consequent falling off in demand.

This explains why my hon. Friend and I are asking the Government, when considering the tax, to take the special circumstances of the Scottish islands into account. I believe that there are overwhelming social and economic grounds for exempting them. I have even estimated that the Government could do so without much impact on their revenue from the tax. A complete general exemption for the Scottish islands could be achieved, I estimate, with a loss to the Treasury of only about £800,000. I have based that figure on what I have been told constitutes the passenger traffic within the Scottish islands and between them and the mainland.

I know that the Treasury is hard up these days and that the Government are in a bit of an economic hole, as the Chancelloer said before he became Chancellor. The sum of £800,000, however, out of a total budget of £280 billion, is one that I believe the Government could live with fairly comfortably. The Government need money so desperately that they are willing to put VAT on domestic fuel. This impost is a kind of poll tax of the air on lifeline services to the islands.

But the Government are willing to forgo certain revenues. For example, at the same time as they announced the biggest tax rise in history, they announced that they were abolishing sporting rates paid by landed estates in Scotland. That is an interesting contrast. Those sporting rates are not worth an enormous amount to local authorities, but a fair amount is involved.

9.15 pm

On 7 January the Minister of State at the Scottish Office told me that the total revenue accruing to Scottish local authorities from sporting rates in each of the past four years was estimated at about £2 million a year. The Government feel able to write that off to the benefit of the hunters, shooters and fishermen among the Scottish landed gentry, but they will tell us that £800,000 to rescue the lifeline services for the Scottish islands is beyond their means. We can draw our own conclusions from that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) spoke about the international comparison and said that just because other countries had such a tax did not mean that one should be introduced here. I understand that the air duties in other countries tend to be for international and not domestic flights. The Government's air duty appears to be more sweeping in its catchment.

We have lessons to learn from other countries. In an intervention, I gave the example of the Republic of Ireland. The air route from Dublin to Kerry in the west of Ireland, a remote area on the edge of Europe, faces many of the same social and economic problems as the west coast of Scotland and the northern and Western Isles. But instead of imposing a tax on the people of Kerry and others who use that service, the Government of Ireland negotiated with the European Commission and was allowed to provide a subsidy to maintain that essential service.

The journey from Dublin to Kerry is equivalent to that from Stornoway to Inverness—about 200 air miles—but while the Scottish islanders will have to pay about £130 for the journey, because of the subsidy negotiated by the Irish Government, a person travelling from Dublin to Kerry will pay only half that, £70. That contrast rather shames the Government. The Government of the Republic of Ireland were able to fight and negotiate with the Commission to provide a subsidy for their remote areas but this Government ended such subsidies a long time ago. They prefer to impose a poll tax on each person travelling to and from the Scottish islands.

The Government maintain that they have provided some exemptions. As I said earlier, the Chancellor made much of that. At the time, he received some easy applause. Actually, it was genuine and well-meant applause, as hon. Members on both sides thought that it was reasonable and proper to exempt the Scottish islands. No Conservative Member protested. Nobody shouted "Shame" when the

Chancellor appeared to be exempting the Scottish islands. All cheered, and I appreciate the sentiment that was thus expressed.

Unfortunately, a look at the small print revealed what I might call a Dudley-type promise—the Chancellor having said that promises made on a rainy night in Dudley were not to be taken seriously. In fact, the exemption is not what it appears to be. The Paymaster General has tried to defend what the Chancellor said in his Budget speech. Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman's defence reflects worse on the Chancellor than did what we thought was the position. We thought that the Chancellor's speech had been written by civil servants and that the right hon. and learned Gentleman could not possibly have known the details, could not possibly have known that what he was reading out was highly misleading. But we have now heard from the Paymaster General that the Chancellor knew all along that what he was saying was misleading. That is regrettable and shameful.

The Paymaster General himself has tried to be a little economical with the truth in his attempt to justify these apparent exemptions. For example, in an answer given to me on 6 December last, he said that, based on October 1993 timetables, it was estimated that about a quarter of flights to the Scottish islands from the mainland and about three quarters of inter-island flights would be exempt. That sounds very generous. The impression it gives is that most people will be included in the exemption. But what we have in those words is only one way of describing the situation. On the basis of flights per se, it may be so, but the number of passengers being carried, the number being taxed and the number exempted present a completely different picture. Indeed, the position is the opposite of that presented by the Chancellor in his Budget speech.

If one adds together the numbers of people carried on Loganair and British Airways flights between the Scottish islands and between the mainland and the islands, one arrives at a figure of more than 210,000 passenger flights of the kind described in this legislation. Of these, only 42,000 would be exempted under the Chancellor's concession. In other words, 80 per cent. would be taxed, and 20 per cent. exempted.

We now find that the situation is even worse. On 22 December, Mr. Scott Grier, the managing director of Loganair, wrote to the Chancellor pointing out that, although at present 20 per cent. of passenger flights would be exempted, in the near future the number would be much smaller, as different kinds of aircraft would be used. Mr. Grier says:

> "Only a small minority are going to be exempt. On your proposed basis, only those passengers flying the eight-seat Britten Norman islander aircraft used in the Orkney inter-island service and the Shetland inter-island service are likely to be exempt next October when the duty is due to be implemented. Services currently using 18-seat De Havilland Twin Otter and Jetstream 31 aircraft are likely to be upgraded in the next few months, due to the Twin Otter no longer being manufactured, and the Jetstream 31 being unsuitable for the common requirements of the Highlands and Islands services to carry freight, newspapers and mail in addition to passengers. It is likely, therefore, that perhaps only around 20,000 passengers per annum would be eligible for relief if your proposed exception criterion is applied."

An exception that was to apply to 20 per cent. of passengers when the Chancellor made his Budget statement will apply to only 10 per cent. next year. That is very different from the message that the Chancellor apparently tried to convey in his Budget speech.

I want to explore not only that deception—if that word is permissible—by the Chancellor, or his misleading statement, but an aspect that might cause concern to even the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the Paymaster General themselves. I refer to the enormous number of anomalies that will be thrown up when the duty is introduced late next year.

To understand those anomalies, one must distinguish between the two types of aircraft used on Scottish island routes. One type is represented by the Jetstream 41 and the Shorts-360, which carry 29 and 36 passengers respectively. The other type carries fewer than 20 passengers. I mentioned the Jetstream 31, which carries only 17 passengers. The Islander carries six to eight passengers, and the Twin Otter carries 15 to 18 passengers.

The significant point is that aircraft that carry fewer than 20 passengers will be exempted, whereas those that carry more will be subject to the duty. The aircraft that carry more than 20 passengers also account for the highest number of passengers carried on the entire inter-island network.

Those two types of aircraft create a whole series of anomalies. I will give the example of one flight serving the Western Isles and another serving the northern isles. An inter-island flight in Orkney or Shetland using a Jetstream 31 or Islander will be exempted from duty. However, a flight from Barra to Balivanish in the Western Isles operated by the same company—Loganair, involving no greater distance, and serving a community every bit as impoverished, economically fragile and remote as one in the Orkneys or Shetlands, will require that passengers pay the full whack of £5 per head. Surely that discrepancy cannot be justified.

The absurdities become even worse. I refer to the flight from Barra to Stornoway, or from there to Barra. As I have already mentioned, the inter-island flight from Stornoway to Barra, or vice versa, has a stopover half way up the island chain at the airport at Balivanish. Passengers travelling from Barra to Stornoway stop over at Balivanish and have to change plane. They have to change from a Twin Otter aircraft, which carries fewer than 20 passengers and is therefore exempt from the tax, to a Shorts 6 aircraft, which is tax liable and will carry them for the remainder of their journey. Half way through their journeys, passengers change from a tax-exempt aircraft to a taxable aircraft.

9.30 pm

I scratch my head about how the duty will be assessed in such a case. Will the significant factor be the direction in which passengers travel? If they come from Barra and start off in a tax-exempt aircraft, will that determine the tax status all the way to Stornaway? If they come from Stornoway, they will start their journey in a tax-liable aircraft, so will they be taxed all the way to Barra? Will passengers who get off at Balivanish have to fork out £5 extra on top of the fare that they have already paid at Barra? It is absurd and shows the ridiculousness of trying to base exemptions on the size of the aircraft.

There are also anomalies involving flights from the islands to the mainland. The social and economic need for protecting those flights is perhaps greater for island to mainland flights than for inter-island flights. The connection between the islands and mainland is economically, socially and psychologically important. Again, there are various anomalies. A flight from Kirkwall to Glasgow, which currently uses a Jetstream 31, will be tax exempt. A flight from Stornoway to Inverness, which is a shorter flight and uses a British Aerospace advanced turbo-prop aeroplane, will be taxed. What possible justification is there for that? Likewise, the flight from Sumburgh—an important oil station—to Edinburgh, the financial capital of Scotland, will be tax exempt. But the flights from Stornoway to Inverness and Balinvanish to Glasgow will be hit by the tax. There is no social or economic logic in that anomaly.

Let us take a different sort of illogicality and anomaly, which is even more absurd. Some routes use different planes on different days—for example, the flights from Kirkwall to Wick and from Sumburgh to Edinburgh. If one takes one of those flights one day, one will be taxed, but on another day one will be exempt. That is clearly absurd and ridiculous. The Government have to consider the position more seriously.

Some days the Sumburgh to Edinburgh route uses an ATP and on others it uses a Jetstream 31. On some days the Kirkwall to Wick flight uses a Jetstream 31, which is below the 20-passenger limit and is tax exempt, but on other days it uses the Shorts 6, which is above a 20-passenger limit and is therefore tax liable.

That creates a real problem for the Government, whose intention is to tax people on return rather than single journeys. People will not be taxed twice if they take a genuine return trip, but what if they use different planes on different days? What happens if they go out on a Jetstream 31, but come back on a Shorts 6 or an ATP? What will happen to people who fly out on a tax-exempt aircraft and return on a tax-liable one? Have the Government even considered that absurd anomaly? The notion of providing exemptions based on the size is riddled with such anomalies, which makes the whole process nonsensical —especially in regard to the Scottish islands.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) pointed out that there were rich people in the islands and poor people in the cities; why should the islands be treated differently? It is widely acknowledged, however, that the islands are a special case, in both social and economic terms: hon. Members on both sides of the House have agreed that. Moreover, most rich people in the islands do not live there: they occasionally spend a weekend hunting, fishing and shooting on their estates, but most travellers on commercial flights to the islands will not find them in the neighbouring seat. Such people hire their own Jetstream 31; they are wealthy, busy business men, for whom time is money. They will hire a Jetstream 31 to Stornoway, and step off it tax exempt.

That is the real irony. An islander visiting a relative in a Glasgow hospital, using the air link from Barra, must walk across the sand to board the aircraft; that person will be hit by a £5 tax. The millionaire jetting into his Hebridean estate for a weekend's shooting—on his Jetstream 31—will be exempt. We have come to expect such anomalies from the present Government, but they are not justified.

I wrote to the Chancellor raising some of those points. On 13 January, the Paymaster General wrote back to me, trying to defend the current illogical position; I believe that he wrote to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland in similar terms. He wrote:

> "There is a logic to the proposed exception for flights in small aircraft . . . These criteria relate to CAA licensing requirements whereby carriers exclusively involved in operations with aircraft below this size"—

that is, with fewer than 20 passengers—

> "are subject to less rigorous financial obligations. It follows from the proposed exemption that all holders of this type of licence will know immediately they need not register for this duty."

That is fine, but Loganair and British Airways do not exclusively use aircraft of that kind. It is completely and utterly beside the point to bring that aspect of Civil Aviation Authority regulations into the argument to justify exemptions in commercial flights to the Scottish islands. That is completely irrelevant and it is not germane to the argument about the Scottish islands.

The letter contains another argument for the exemption. That piece of logic states:

> "Another consequence of this criterion, which Kenneth mentioned in his Budget speech, is that the majority of flights between the Scottish islands will be exempt from the duty as they use small aircraft. Many of these small aircraft use Avgas which is subject to excise duty and therefore, unlike most other domestic and all international flights are already subject to some indirect taxation."

That argument for fixing the exemption of planes with fewer than 20 passengers is that they already pay some form of tax and duty because they use avgas which is a different kind of fuel from that used by regular scheduled commercial flights. Therefore, to impose an extra tax would involve a double duty.

The only problem with that explanation is that none of the aircraft servicing the Scottish islands uses avgas. Only five of Loganair's planes use avgas and they are used for the air ambulance service. None of the passenger flights to the Scottish islands or between those islands uses avgas. That attempted justification for the duty also runs into the sand.

The lesson is that there can be no justification for this absurd, inequitable and deeply damaging tax. There can be no justification for this poll tax of the air. The weakest form of argument that the Government can advance is to suggest that if an exception were granted for the Scottish islands, somehow that would be a slippery slope towards the destruction of the duty in its entirety; if the exception were granted, other areas would want similar exemptions. However, that argument ignores the obvious fact which is widely recognised by hon. Members on both sides of the House that the Scottish islands are a special case because of their fragility, remoteness and distance.

That point could be recognised by the Government in the structure of the new tax in a way that would be accepted by everyone inside and outside this place. The Air Transport Users Council wrote to Mr. David Hock of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. It made the point that it would make

> "economic sense to extend the exemption . . . to embrace all island services".

The council does not believe that such an exemption would lead to a wider form of exemption. It recognises the special position of the islands. Loganair and British Airways are of the same opinion. In the notes which British Airways has given to hon. Members explaining its views on the new tax, it states that, instead of having a silly categorisation of below and above 20 passengers, it would be better to exempt specific journeys which have economic dimensions.

I appeal to the Government, when we retire upstairs to deal with these matters in greater detail and, dare I say it, at even greater length, to reconsider the way in which the duty will operate and its impact on the Scottish islands. If they genuinely extend the exemption to cover all flights to and from and between the Scottish islands, they will again receive applause from all hon. Members, and deservedly so.

Mr. Enright: I shall be very brief because I would like to see the Paymaster General wriggle. There is great excitement among waiting Conservative Members—all eight of them, one in semi-recumbent posture and two loitering with intent. I must not deprive them of their pleasure.

9.45 pm

The Government simply do not learn from history. I remind them of the tale of Daedalus and Icarus. Daedalus carefully designed wings so that Icarus would be able to fly, but he did not put enough planning into it, Icarus plunged into the ocean and drowned, and Daedalus mourned ever after. All that we are asking the Government to do is what Daedalus did not do—a bit of planning and a bit of examination to see what is wrong and what real effects the Bill will have.

We are told that the measure will not involve many bureaucrats and that £5 and £10 are easy to collect, but that is not true. When hon. Members considered the Sunday Trading Bill in Committee, I suggested that those shops which opened on Sundays might pay the charge which they cost to local authorities. I was told that it was, in truth, not possible; Ministers said that it was too difficult to collect such a small amount. Yet here we are talking about £5 and £10. Therefore, I cannot think that it is about the £5 and £10: I must think that it is about the Government's future intention to tax even more than they are doing now.

The excise charge which at this moment is £5 or £10 will quickly leap to £25 and £50, and that is just judging by the Government's record. On interest payable to commissioners, schedule 6 paragraph 8(1) states:

> "Where, due to an error on the part of the Commissioners, a person has paid by way of duty an amount which was not due and which the Commissioners are in consequence liable to repay to him"—

and so on. First, that is gobbledegook and the Government will not win any prizes in the plain English competition. Secondly, it is an almost impossible clause to administer, as the Government will see if they look at it carefully.

Over the page, we see "Preferential debt". Why should that be a preferential debt? We know perfectly well that other debts which are due to the Government are not preferential. For example, I refer to Unicorn plc, which not only does not have to pay back its debt of £200,000 but is given a tax rebate for the rest of the people who invested in it.

The measure will have a damaging effect, too, on regional airports. In particular, I refer to Leeds-Bradford airport from which people in my constituency depart on the holidays for which they have worked hard. For an average family of six there will be another £60 to pay. It is very difficult for people in an area such as mine to find £60. The measure is certainly not acceptable.

The problem with the Government is their philosophy on tax. They want to tax but they do not know why they are taxing, except to make sure that the rich pay less and the poor pay more. They have soaked the poor in order to pay the rich.

It is not just on their policy of taxing aeroplanes that the Government will perish, but on their general philosophy——

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. So far as I am concerned, the debate will be only on the airport tax.

Mr. Enright: I accept that absolutely, and I shall speak only to the airport tax.

In conclusion, I remind the Government of the closing words of the film "King Kong":

> "Oh no! It wasn't the aeroplanes. It was Beauty killed the beast."

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Sir Michael——

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Member should use the terminology "Chairman" or "Mr. Morris". Either of them is appropriate.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am much obliged, Mr. Morris.

My constituents will not immediately notice the impact of this tax because, unhappily, a high proportion of them never have the opportunity of travelling on aircraft. However, they are concerned about any dampening of enterprise and commerce in this country, because it has an impact on their capacity to get employment.

They are also conscious of the fact that close to my constituency is the underused airport at Stansted, which has a great opportunity for enterprise and creating work. However, the opportunities for Stansted to expand will be affected by the imposition of this tax. Clearly, Stansted airport relies on the creation of new routes from inland airports in the United Kingdom and the islands. This tax will deter airlines and those wanting to create new routes into London from expanding or creating new enterprises.

The imposition of the tax, and the work and duty that it places on airlines to collect it, and do all the paperwork, makes a nonsense of the Government's claim that they are in the business of deregulation and making life easier for commerce and enterprise. It is nonsense when an Essex Member of Parliament who is the Minister of tourism, the hon. Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat), says in documents released to us that he will take a personal interest in promoting tourism and then sees his colleagues imposing a tax which will have an immediate impact on those who want to expand tourism and mobility in the United Kingdom.

I am the Secretary of the all-party Manx group. My comments are not made on behalf of the group; nevertheless, I am pleased to take an interest in the fortunes of the Isle of Man and the people there. It is wrong for some hon. Members to assume that people who live on the Isle of Man are wealthy. For many, the position is quite the reverse. Many ordinary, working people on the Isle of Man depend on the opportunity of travelling to the United Kingdom, especially those who have children following further and higher education in the United Kingdom. The cost of travelling to universities and colleges in the United Kingdom is a heavy price for parents who live on the Isle of Man to pay. I am sure that the same is true with regard to Jersey, Guernsey and the other islands.

The proposed tax is unfair. Have the Governments on the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands been consulted about the impact of this tax? I believe that there is a convention that they should have been consulted. It seems that the Government have not complied with the spirit of that convention. I hope that the Minister was paying attention to my question so that he can reply to it. There is a customs arrangement in relation to the Isle of Man, and it seems to me that there is a danger that the Government

[Mr. Mackinlay]

of the Isle of Man may well feel forced to react to this tax by imposing a similar tax within their jurisdiction. Again, I hope that the Minister is paying attention and that he will be able to respond to that point.

There have been speeches from Labour Members on behalf of the highlands and islands, and I have been pleased to refer to the interests of the people who go to and from the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. Many of those people reside in the United Kingdom and they will take note that it is a Conservative Government who are imposing the tax, and I hope that that will be remembered in future. The tax will also affect those who use Liverpool airport to go to the Isle of Man. The fares for students from Liverpool to Douglas will increase by 25 per cent. as a result of the tax, and that will have an impact in Douglas and at Liverpool Speke airport.

I am also aware that there have been no speeches in the debate from hon. Members from Northern Ireland, none of whom is present. I hope that it will be noted in the six counties that Labour Members have spoken up against the tax on behalf of the people, not just of the mainland but of the six counties of Northern Ireland. The airports at Belfast, Belfast City and the new airport at Derry, or Londonderry, will be hit by the impact of the tax, and the beneficiaries of that will be airport enterprises in Dublin. That will be the effect of the tax, and the Minister should be aware of that, having previously been a Northern Ireland Minister. It will put at a grave disadvantage those whose incomes and enterprises depend on their work at the Northern Ireland airports.

Mr. Andrew Smith: We have had a full and thorough debate on the issue, thanks to the excellent speeches of my hon. Friends who have launched a battery of attacks on the iniquities and the administrative burdens of the tax.

There has been a special emphasis and strength of feeling throughout on the position of the Scottish islands, and the damage which the tax would inflict on their economy, culture and family visits. There is one significant point of which the House and the country will want to take note. There have been speeches from around 14 Labour Members, six Conservative Members—that stretches it, because two of them were not happy with the tax and one was the independent hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason)—and two speeches from Liberal Democrat Members. Is not it extraordinary that, on an issue which so concerns the people of the highlands and islands of Scotland, not for one instant have we heard the sound or seen the sight of the Scottish National party? When the people for whom it claims to speak needed it to speak on their behalf, it was absent and that fact will not be lost on the electorate of Scotland.

The imposition of the tax is damaging to communities that depend on air transport for a lifeline. It is bad for the airline industry and it imposes an administrative burden which, in any other circumstances, Conservative Members would describe as a job-killer. The legislation shows every sign of having been rushed forward without the consultation which should have taken place. The Government have no mandate for this poll tax on wings, and we shall be pressing our amendment to a vote.

10 pm

Sir John Cope: We have had a long and sometimes repetitive debate running over many of the points that arise from the air passenger duty. I spoke about some of those points in my opening speech. Other points will arise later in the Standing Committee stage, as will some of the same ones.

All sorts of things have been mentioned, including Daedalus and Icarus, referred to by the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright). I was not sure whether I was cast as Icarus or Daedalus, but never mind—he moved on to Sunday trading fairly quickly. That did not seem to matter.

The first point that I wish to make is that consultation on the air passenger duty has not finished. Some hon. Members tried to make out that it had. Quite a few hon. Members quoted the letter from the chairman of British Airways. That letter was part of the consultation process with British Airways. One of the arguments that hon. Members made in quoting that letter was in favour of a sales tax. They argued that it would be easier to collect. That is wrong. It would be more difficult to collect and control, particularly when sales took place outside the United Kingdom.

The taxable event would be outside United Kingdom jurisdiction. It would be difficult to collect the tax from a large number of traders who have no presence and no business in the United Kingdom It would mean, in turn, that the tax would bite more heavily on United Kingdom citizens because foreign travellers who purchased their tickets outside the United Kingdom could escape the charge.

Many other points were raised in the debate, including transfer passengers, stopovers and so on. If hon. Members care to consult clause 30, they will see that the detailed arrangements for connected flights, and the definitions which affect the matter, will be found in secondary legislation, about which we are also consulting.

All sorts of other combinations of flights were also mentioned by various hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson). They are summarised in the document that was issued on Budget day, but the detailed arrangements will be found in the secondary legislation in due course. We even had a reference to air miles, which are simply another way of paying for a ticket. Such tickets will be dealt with in the same way as any other.

Many more detailed points came up——

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Sir John Cope: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He spoke earlier and I gave way to him in my opening speech.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman now give me the assurance that he refused to give earlier? Will he assure the House that the Government, who have no mandate for the air passenger duty, will not raise the tax before the next general election?

Sir John Cope: I said clearly earlier in the debate that we believe that we have set the right rate for the tax. Of course, as the hon. Gentleman and the House know perfectly well, I shall not forecast future Budgets.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) made a point about children, particularly children under two. We shall use the airlines' definition. I am sure that that is the best thing to do. There was——

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Sir John Cope: I will not give way. There was a series of other points——

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Member who has the Floor is not giving way. That must be painfully obvious to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). I should be grateful if he would recognise that fact. Perhaps I may also say that the House should listen to the Paymaster General, who is responding to some interesting speeches made this evening.

Sir John Cope: Several other detailed points were raised which will come up during discussions in the Standing Committee. Several hon. Members spoke about the Scottish islands. I referred to them at the beginning of the debate. The matter will also come up later.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Sir John Cope: No, I will not.

In all the speeches made by Labour Members this evening, no one responded to the point that I made about Labour's interest in such taxes, expressed in the London Policy Forum headed by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). The report clearly said:

> "Labour will consider introducing an airport tax such as that levied in many other countries."

At another stage, it said:

> "This could mean examining options such as a tourism tax".

That is another of the attacks that has been made on the tax. Her Front-Bench colleagues seemed not to listen to the hon. Member for Peckham's views in that report, but she may find that the Government have listened to her more on this occasion.

I reject the amendment, but we will consider much of the detail that has been raised during further debates later in Committee.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 278, Noes 312.

Division No. 94] **[10.4 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bames, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alaxander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbemauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springbum)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milbum, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin

Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*

Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. James Arbuthnot.

Question accordingly negatived.

THE CHAIRMAN, *being of the opinion that the principle of the clause and any matters arising thereon had been adequately discussed in the course of debate on the amendment proposed thereto, forthwith put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 67 (Debate on clause or schedule standing part),* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Question agreed to.

Clause 28 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

To report Progress and ask leave to sit again.—[Mr. Conway.]

Committee report Progress; to sit again tomorrow.

Business of the House

10.23 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to make a short statement about a change in the business for tomorrow.

The business for tomorrow will now be a timetable motion on the Finance Bill, followed by conclusion of proceedings in Committee of the whole House on the Finance Bill.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So far we have debated one clause of the Finance Bill, and it was quite clear that progress was being made. We were ready to debate the next clause, on which it was also quite clear that progress would be made. It was equally clear that the Committee would proceed tomorrow in an orderly manner.

It is therefore quite outrageous that the Government should try to timetable the Finance Bill—one of the longest ever introduced—when it is quite clear that the Bill would have been debated properly. The fact is that the Government are no longer confident of their own legislation, which is why they wish to guillotine a Finance Bill, an action unheard of in recent times.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Was it in order for the Leader of the House to announce a guillotine motion without giving the House the benefit of an explanation why it is necessary?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): The Leader of the House is entirely responsible for his own statements.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South) *rose*——

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The right hon. Lady has not been here.

Mrs. Beckett: Quite right. I was not here because I had no notice of the statement from the Leader of the House. He did not even do me the courtesy of giving me 30 seconds' notice, as he did on the last occasion, of the fact that the Government proposed to guillotine after one day's debate a Finance Bill of more than 200 clauses.

I do not know why this Government even bother to come to Parliament, they have such contempt for the parliamentary process. Is there any Bill that they will not guillotine? They simply cannot be bothered to make their Members stay here to debate crucial issues that affect the British people and the tax package that they will have to pay in April. That is disgraceful, and the Leader of the House knows it. He is not fit to do his job.

Mr. Newton: I have three points to make in response to that. First, anyone who has followed today's proceedings —including speeches verging on an hour's length and many others lasting half an hour, some made by Members who were not in the Chamber at the beginning of the debate —will have recognised organised delaying tactics when they saw them.

Secondly, every effort was made by my hon. Friends in good faith to achieve an understanding. They thought that they had achieved one; manifestly it was not adhered to.

[Mr. Newton]

Thirdly, if the right hon. Lady would engage in sensible discussion through the usual channels, we would not be in this position.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Leader of the House rather gave the House the impression that he was making a business statement. Would it not have been more helpful to know clearly that that was what he was doing, thus enabling hon. Members to ask him questions about whether he intended to timetable the entire Bill or merely the clauses taken on the Floor of the House? Important —and very long—Bills such as this, which are not usually timetabled, surely demand some opportunity for discussion in the House and for questioning the Leader of the House about his precise intentions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a business statement, so a modicum of discussion and questioning is appropriate.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was quite obvious to some of us who wanted to take part in the debate on clause 46 and who have been in the House since 3.30 pm in order to do so that there were only seven hon. Members in the Chamber at 4.30 pm, and such was the poor attendance that many of us suspected that the business would collapse— that it would be a struggle to keep it going until 7 pm.

Hon. Members do not have to sit in the Chamber for hours on end to see what is going on there. What has happened here tonight has been a disgraceful waste of public money, and my right hon. Friend is entirely right to introduce a timetable motion.

Mr. Newton *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Leader of the House answers, I must say that I should be grateful if hon. Members would remember that they should ask questions, not make statements of opinion.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) confirmed one of the points that I made in responding to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). I apologise as I certainly intended no discourtesy by not responding to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). It is our intention that the timetable motion should cover the rest of the proceedings on the Bill as a whole, and should provide probably more, and certainly no less, time than was spent on the previous Finance Bill. It is intended to ensure that the Bill is discussed in the proper and orderly way that both the House and the business community are entitled to expect.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Leader of the House admit that those of us who have been in the Chamber for most of the night were expecting to debate the subsequent clauses—I have my speech ready for the clause that I thought we would go on to debate. We were not in any way attempting to delay business.

What the Leader of the House has done is an absolute disgrace. He has curtailed debate on a Bill that is twice the length of the previous Finance Bill and will enable highly technical legislation to pass through the House without proper scrutiny. The right hon. Gentleman has no proof of any attempt to filibuster. As an Opposition Member, I am proof of the fact that we did not discuss that tactic as I have my speech for later tonight. What has happened is a complete disgrace.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady appears to be confirming that it was the Opposition's intention that such important matters should be debated right through the night, or at least through a good part of it. That is exactly what people outside consider to be a silly way to carry on.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Leader of the House has spoken about a silly way to carry on. I sat through the events. The Serjeant at Arms was unaware of what was happening when he moved the Mace to its position; you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, did not seem to know as you came from one Chair to the other——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I was well aware of what was happening as far as I could see. I am quite clear about what is happening now.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have a business statement, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will ask a question. If not, he should resume his seat.

Mr. Foulkes: I was not clear whether it was a business statement because it started with a point of order and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, taking points of order— *[Interruption.]* I understand that it says "Point of order" on the annunciator screen. It has not been clarified——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. With the greatest respect, we are on a business statement. I am not interested in what appears on the screen; the hon. Gentleman should be paying attention to the Chair. If the hon. Gentleman will ask a question of the Leader of the House in the normal manner, I am sure that he will receive an answer.

Mr. Foulkes: Did not the Leader of the House rise and say, "On a point of order"?

Mr. Newton: I rose and said that, on a point of order, I should like to make a short statement.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As it is a statement, why does not the Leader of the House have the guts to admit that what he is doing tonight with the guillotine motion is simply because the two wings of the Tory party are fighting like Kilkenny cats? They will not stay up at night in order to get the legislation through, and they treat the British people and taxpayers with arrogance and contempt. The Government are pushing through legislation to introduce 12 more taxes and put another £10 a week tax on everybody's pay packet. They are achieving all that by using the guillotine motion. It is time they packed their bags and went.

Mr. Newton: The contempt of the public—or whatever phrase the hon. Gentleman used—is shown in the deliberate tactic to discuss important matters in the middle of the night.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does the Leader of the House acknowledge that the step being taken is pretty unprecedented in relation to a Finance Bill? Will he undertake that the timetable motion that he tables will contain provision for a Committee to be set up to consider the allocation of time on the clauses of the Finance Bill? That seems to be the very least that the Government can do in such extreme circumstances.

Mr. Newton: The Finance Bill was guillotined in 1968, in 1975 and in 1992, just before the election. I intend that the timetable motion should provide for a Business Committee in the ordinary way.

Mrs. Beckett: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you said a moment ago that what appears on the communicator was not your concern, and I understand that it was not your responsibility. You will recall that on a previous occasion it was said that if the communicators did not show "Business statement" hon. Members would not know what was happening. You may also recall that there were clear assurances by the Government to the Speaker and to the House that on no subsequent occasion would the Leader of the House rise on a point of order and make a business statement announcing a guillotine without hon. Members being warned of it. I understand that the House was assured that at least 10 or 15 minutes would be given. This is a gross discourtesy to the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I am sure you are well aware.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are on questions about business and the Leader of the House is about to respond to the right hon. Lady.

Mr. Newton: I should certainly have wished to give notice, but that was not practicable because of the particular circumstances and, specifically, because of the inter-relationship of the various motions before the House.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield) : Why is it necessary so soon in the progress of the Bill to table a timetable motion? Why is that considered necessary after only one clause has been debated? If the explanation by the Leader of the House is that it is because of some failure to reach an agreement with an Opposition Member, will he say with which hon. Member he considers he had an agreement?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will know the contacts to which I am referring, which were not contacts with me personally. If he does not, it would not be right for me to give details of them on the Floor of the House. I have no reason to doubt that they were undertaken in good faith by all those involved. The hon. Gentleman provided his own answer to the first part of his question. The reason for the guillotine is that it has taken all day to debate only one clause, and in a way that made it quite clear that delay was intended.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I took part in the debate on the amendment because my constituency covers Glasgow airport, which is an important employer in my area. My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) spoke for 50 minutes because the issue is vital to his constituents who live in the highlands and islands. How can that be a reason for guillotining business that is also important for the rest of Britain?

Mr. Newton: I entirely accept the legitimacy of hon. Members raising constituency issues, but I do not think that it takes 50 minutes or an hour to do it.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Is it not the case that the Leader of the House is supposed to protect the interests of Back Benchers? Is it not in the interest of Back Benchers to debate in full a Finance Bill that contains more taxes at a higher level than have ever been put to the House?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) make it quite clear that he thought that his interests as a Back Bencher were being protected by what I have announced.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Does not the Leader of the House accept that the guillotine has been imposed for the simple reason that we in the Opposition wanted to give proper scrutiny to a new tax that was mentioned nowhere in the Government's election manifesto? The Government are running away from a proper debate on other taxes that were also not included in that manifesto. Can the Leader of the House find any precedent of a Finance Bill being guillotined after only one clause had been dealt with?

Mr. Newton: I cannot find any precedent either for an Opposition behaving in the way that this one is behaving. If the hon. Gentleman wants proper scrutiny of the Bill, I am giving him an opportunity to do that at sensible hours in a sensible way.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): If the Leader of the House thinks that we ought to debate matters at sensible hours, why, last week, did he direct his hon. Friends dealing with the criminal justice Bill to engage in debate until 4.30 in the morning? Will he tell us the precise terms of the guillotine motion that is to be moved tomorrow? Has he yet thought of them—or is the government to be conducted as he goes along?

Mr. Newton: The guillotine will be tabled very shortly —if it has not been tabled already—and it will appear on tomorrow's Order Paper. I have already indicated its general terms. It will provide for the conclusion of the proceedings on the Floor by 10 o'clock tomorrow night.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ordered,

That Dr. Michael Clark be discharged from the Trade and Industry Committee and Mr. Robert Banks be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Child Support Agency

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sydney Chapman.]*

10.40 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Naturally, in one sense, I am delighted that, as a result of the circumstances and of the statement that we have just heard, this Adjournment debate is taking place somewhat earlier than the Minister and I might have expected. That is good, as it means that we can devote our intellectual powers—which I hope are considerable on this occasion—to this very important matter. I am very glad of the opportunity to raise a serious problem affecting a constituent of mine, Mrs. Terri West, and her family as a result of the activities, decisions and rulings—at least on a provisional basis—of the Child Support Agency.

There have been many cases of husbands or former husbands suffering from sharply increased payments for which their circumstances did not allow. In numerical terms, those have constituted the main preoccupation of most hon. Members. In this case, things have gone in the other direction, with the wife, or former wife, suffering very grievously as a result of at least the provisional ruling of the Child Support Agency. I shall go into the details of the case in a moment.

I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security for coming to the House to reply to this important debate. I hope that he will indicate tonight—and if the occasion so demands, as I think it inevitable that it will, in later correspondence —that this case will be examined very thoroughly, not only because of its grievous effect on one of my constituents, who has fought with great courage to highlight it, but also because of its effect on a large number of other people. We are receiving more and more evidence of the numbers involved.

The tax status of a former head of household is also affected—a very important matter about which there must be consultation between my hon. Friend's Department, the Treasury and the Inland Revenue. This affects the Child Support Agency's behaviour and procedures in its still early days, notwithstanding the improvements that my hon. Friend and his colleagues introduced just before December as a result of the various helpful suggestions of the Select Committee on Social Security. The rigid procedures of the Child Support Agency need to be made more subtle and more supple with a view to dealing with problems such as those that I wish to highlight.

The appeal and reviews too are affected. We must make sure that those work correctly, and not to the detriment of hard-pressed families such as the one involved in this case. There has been a considerable amount of press publicity about this matter. It is not easy for a member of the public to take such a decision, especially when he or she bears in mind the possible effect on the children—in this case, one son and one daughter, who attend local schools and are doing very well—as well as on the rest of the family including, in this case, Mrs. Terri West. She has shown great foresight in her determination to draw attention to her case. Often people will think of doing so, but the thought of the publicity that will inevitably rain down may deter them from action which could benefit many hundreds of others, if not more.

The problem arose because of the CSA's assessments in this case. Thankfully, I can emphasise that they are only provisional. The trouble started recently as a result of the agency's determinations. As I will explain later, I have not found its replies so far to be satisfactory.

In 1986, a divorce court ordered Mrs. West's ex-husband to pay £75 a week maintenance in respect of their two children, but that was reduced to £57 as a result of the CSA's ruling.

I thank the press for their interest in the case; various journalists who have been in touch with the West family, me and others; the solicitor acting for Mrs. West—Mr. Anthony Andrews; and others closely involved.

I and others are alarmed at the way in which the agency examined the status, income potential and wealth of the ex-husband in this case, and we question whether its adjudication is right and fair.

That mother of two children is struggling bravely. As we know all too well from our surgery cases, people still suffer from harsh economic conditions even in the south, where we are traditionally used to prosperity by comparison with the north of England. Mrs. West visited my surgery some time ago, having decided that she would not take the matter lying down. I am glad that she has committed all her energy to arguing her case, and I am proud to do so on her behalf in this Adjournment debate.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to give a cogent answer tonight as to why the CSA reached the wrong conclusions in Mrs. West's case and is treating her and her family in an oppressive way. He may be tempted, understandably, to say that CSA rules and procedures mean that he cannot comment too much on the confidential details of an individual case. But that will not be enough: he must give at least a part answer tonight. If he wants to defend the CSA, I shall listen carefully and perhaps his answer will continue in later correspondence. If, however, the CSA's rules of confidentiality are just used as an excuse not to answer properly the public's queries, problems and complaints, much more frustration will be generated.

In her letter to me of 26 January, Mrs. West places great emphasis on the crux of the matter. Her husband is not a conventional employee for tax purposes, and now has another potential or actual marriage partner—to whom he is paying an allowance for her work as a secretary in his own company. He created a one-man, limited company. His above-the-line deductions for legitimate business expenses according to Inland Revenue calculations made the below-the-line amounts far too low and the CSA's assessment ridiculously low for a former husband who is extremely prosperous and well off and who can pay far more for the upkeep of his former family—for the care of his children, in particular, and other expenses incurred in maintaining Mrs. West's household.

A moral obligation is involved. If an ex-husband has with his former spouse brought children into the world, there must be a solemn moral obligation as well as a legal requirement for him to acknowledge his obligations, even if he has developed a second family, and to make sure that the children by a former marriage are not harshly treated in the already hard climate of the modern world.

Mrs. West wrote:

> "The most important fact that creates my situation is the fact that the CSA cannot consider the income of a 'one-man' limited company, enabling my ex-husband to finance a large amount of

> his expenditure through his company, ie cars (registered solely as business use)—a Porsche and two BMWs . . . and entertainment".

He was also allowed to write off other costs as legitimate household expenses—such as a cleaner. The CSA ends up considering only the income that he contributes himself, after—as Mrs. West says in her letter—paying his second wife a salary of £20,000 as company secretary, which Mrs. West contends is an accounting procedure rather than a genuine form of employment.

In a genuine company, there may be an arm's-length relationship between directors, all the legitimate expenses and the normal salary arrangements for someone who may be classified as an employee or a self-employed director. That is one thing, but in a self-created, one-man company, are such arrangements really fair to a former wife and her children?

Mrs. West continues:

> "My maintenance agreed by the court in 1986 was £300 per month"—

I have already given quotations to that effect—

> "and . . . has been reduced to £57 per week".

The maintenance,

> "under the proposed amendments to the Act in February will be reduced by up to £22 a week because my ex has second family, leaving a sum of approx £35 a week, this amount will then be reduced by a further 25 per cent. because my children are between 11-14, resulting in a figure of approx £26 per week for 2 children . . . My exempt income has been assessed at £171 a week, and any amount I earn over this amount will reduce his payments further".

If she could earn £800 a month—she cannot at present; it has been a tremendous struggle for her—

> "my ex-husband"—

a wealthy entrepreneur with a gross total of £54,000 per annum—

> "could end up paying a notional amount"

of probably just over £2 a week.

That is a scandalous state of affairs which cannot be allowed to continue. The Government did not set up the CSA with such a device in mind; they did not want people to be able to escape their obligations. Whatever the rights and wrongs—whatever the circumstances in which families break up, and the reasons for which they do so —these arrangements are entirely wrong.

In her well thought out and well written letter, Mrs. West observes:

> "If this amendment goes ahead, I will then be forced into a position of selling the family home, as my sole income is £78·20 per week from Family Credit and my mortgage is £300 per month including endowment policy."

Talk about desperation and frustration!

In his reply of 27 January—for which I thank him—my hon. Friend the Minister stated:

> "As you know, strict rules of confidentiality will not allow me to discuss Mrs. West's particular circumstances on Monday in the House. I will of course, be able to address the principles of her case."

I ask my hon. Friend to bear in mind that I need some clear, cogent answers to the Government's dilemma about such cases. What further changes do they intend to deal with the CSA's behaviour?

Later, my hon. Friend's letter states:

> "Mrs. West has suggested that the Agency should assume the profits of Mr. Tsangarides' business as his income because he is the only director."

Mr. Tsangarides is Mrs. West's former husband.

> "This is not appropriate as the absent parent is employed by his company and it is his salary, bonuses, commission and taxable benefits that should be taken into account. This has always been the case . . . If someone is dissatisfied with a decision about their assessment they may apply for a review of the decision of the child support officer and a different child support officer will re-examine the decision in question."

I received a letter dated 28 January—the day after my hon. Friend's reply—from Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive of the CSA. It referred to the rules of confidentiality, but added:

> "Where such verification of financial evidence is required, and is not provided . . . a . . . Child Support Agency Inspector has the power to demand to see the accounts and such evidence or information as is deemed necessary."

I submit that in this instance that conclusion was erroneous and inaccurate. It is essential that the review gets to the facts and helps Mrs. West and her children by adjusting the figures. Perhaps my hon. Friend's letter to *The Mail on Sunday* yesterday will turn out to be more correct than we think at this stage.

10.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) on having the good fortune to secure this debate and on his enterprise in applying for it. I am also pleased that we are having the debate slightly earlier than might otherwise have been the case, which is for the convenience of hon. Members who are present in the Chamber.

I am glad to have the opportunity to discuss the operation of the Child Support Agency. As my hon. Friend is aware, and as I made clear to him in a letter, I am unable to discuss the circumstances of individual cases. However, my hon. Friend is entitled, as are others, to an explanation why. It is not an attempt to evade the issue. It is a recognition of two particular matters. First, such cases involve not just one party who has given consent to disclosure of information. At the very least, another party and children are involved. Therefore, care must be taken, particularly when allegations may have been made by one party rather than another. For those reasons, it is right that some confidentiality is kept.

Secondly, as my hon. Friend said, a review process is available. That review process has already been applied for and the case is being examined extremely carefully. For those reasons, it is not appropriate to go into the individual circumstances of the case in great detail. However, for the convenience of the House and of my hon. Friend, I can assure him that I have listened very carefully to the circumstances that he has raised tonight and I read carefully the letters and the previous explanation of the case given by my hon. Friend. The matter is receiving my attention and that of the CSA. I hope that that reassures my hon. Friend.

Mr. Dykes: Is my hon. Friend also liaising directly with the Inland Revenue on this matter?

Mr. Burt: With respect, it is not appropriate for me to discuss precisely what efforts are made in any particular case to verify matters. However, I will refer later to the principles behind my hon. Friend's question and he will see precisely how the agency might try to deal in general with the difficult circumstances that he has described and he may apply his own conclusions about how we might be dealing with particular cases.

My hon. Friend made a number of valuable comments, the principles of which I will deal with shortly. I am sure that it would be helpful, however, if I first set out the purpose and provisions of the child support scheme. I have,

[Mr. Burt]

of course, put the points before the House on other occasions in the past, but I make no apology for doing so again, partly because my hon. Friend has done a valuable service by referring to a woman's circumstances.

In recent weeks, we have heard a great deal about the position of absent parents. Nine out of 10 absent parents are fathers and there has been an over-concentration in the media on the circumstances affecting them. The circumstances of the case raised by my hon. Friend have brought to mind the fact that women can be left looking after children in extremely difficult circumstances. That is one reason why the legislation came into effect and why the agency was created. It is only right that I should stress that point.

The child support scheme was introduced because of growing concern about the lack of proper financial provision for children whose parents lived apart. The purpose of the scheme is to obtain maintenance for children and to improve on a discretionary-based system which had failed to halt the number of absent parents not paying maintenance. The scheme is designed to ensure that, wherever possible, parents pay for the maintenance of their own children rather than expect other people, often on a low income, to do so through their taxes. My hon. Friend was absolutely right to refer to the moral dimension of that.

The principle of parental support for children is not new. However, there is no doubt that the old, court-based system was failing the vast majority of children. More and more parents with care were becoming reliant on the benefit system as their means of support. By 1991, almost two thirds of parents with care received no regular maintenance from the absent parent. Where maintenance was in payment, the amounts seldom reflected the true cost of bringing up children.

It became increasingly clear that in many cases absent parents' incomes were improving, but that their children were not sharing in their parents' increased prosperity. There were inconsistencies in amounts awarded, although the circumstances of the people involved appeared to be very similar. The White Paper, "Children Come First", quoted the example where research had identified two fathers each with one child to maintain, each earning £150 per week net. One was required to pay £5 per week in maintenance, the other £50 per week. That cannnot be right. That is why maintenance is now decided not on an arbitrary basis but by a formula which was extensively discussed, both inside and outside Parliament. It ensures that both parents, where they can afford to do so, contribute to the maintenance of their children.

The formula is designed to produce consistent and realistic amounts of maintenance for children, taking account of the fact that children do not look after themselves, and, at the same time, ensure that children share in their parents' increasing prosperity. The formula takes account of the number and ages of all the children, and the income and essential expenditure of both parents. It is based on income support rates. Those are regularly updated and they provide a ready means of updating the amount of child maintenance to be paid, unlike the court-based system where there was no automatic increase. Court orders could remain in force for years at the same rate.

The formula applies to all families where maintenance is an issue, and it therefore eliminates inconsistency. It applies to people who are getting benefit and to those who are not. The formula is detailed because it is intended to deal with the complexities of individuals' circumstances. The effect of the formula is that people in similar financial situations will pay similar amounts of maintenance.

Undoubtedly, in some cases, once the formula is applied, the amount of maintenance paid to the parent with care for children, whether it was by order of a court or voluntary agreement, reduces. A reduction in those circumstances is a consequence of applying, for the first time, a set of rules that treats the income and outgoings of both parents in a similar manner. Where a court order included an award for the parent with care, that element remains. The parent with care can, if she chooses, apply to the court to have the order varied. I understand that that might be the circumstance in the case dealt with by my hon. Friend.

One of the fundamental principles of the new system is that parents have a legal responsibility to support their children financially if they can afford to do so. There is, however, no responsibility on a new partner to contribute to the maintenance of her partner's child from a previous relationship. If the couple have a child of their own, the new partner's income is looked at to see whether she can afford to contribute to that child's support, enabling the absent parent to contribute more to the support of his first family.

When the Child Support Agency works out how much maintenance is to be paid, it looks at the assessable income of both parents. Assessable income is income available for child maintenance. It is income left after allowance has been made for day-to-day expenditure against net income. Net income is the total income from all sources available to the absent parent or parent with care. The agency asks for evidence of income in all cases, with the main source of information about earnings coming from salary slips. If there is difficulty in collecting evidence of income, the agency can appoint a child support inspector to examine wage records where the absent parent is employed, or accounts if he is self-employed.

Inspectors have the power to enter any premises specified in their certificate of appointment and can look at whatever documentation they consider appropriate. Failure to co-operate with an inspector is a criminal offence. Inspectors, in practice, are used only as a last resort where an employer or self-employed person is not co-operating with the agency. Such investigative powers were not available to the courts under the old scheme and so, in some cases, awards would have been made without the full facts being known.

It is not uncommon that the two parties involved have a differing view of each other's income. That has always been the case in ancillary proceedings. Anyone with experience of such work in the courts knows that it was not uncommon, often representing a woman in financial proceedings, to receive an affidavit from the other party, look at the income declared and say, "You must be joking," and have a discussion with the client about the revealing or non-revealing of income and assets. It is impossible fully and properly to resolve that problem.

The difference perhaps between the courts and the Child Support Agency is that the Child Support Agency has available to it rather more extensive powers of investigation at its own expense rather than at the expense of one of the parties. In the past, just as it was impossible sometimes to trace an absent parent who had disappeared completely and a private investigator had to be employed, the same applied to expressions of concern about income and the like. It was necessary to employ private investigators to try to find out what the real income was. The Child Support Agency has more powers. But trying to ascertain what might be the true state of a party's finances, especially in the case of self-employed people, will always remain a problem. However, as I said, the agency has powers in this case to co-operate with a variety of other agencies to identify exactly how much money might be available.

It is not uncommon that, even if the basic facts of what the income might be are agreed, there might still be different interpretations between each of the sides as to how the money is obtained and what it is for. The earnings of a self-employed person are not always straightforward. There will be circumstances where, although one party feels aggrieved or unhappy about what has been accepted as a true indication of those earnings, they are legally correct. Accepting that that is the case can be difficult in some circumstances.

Once the agency has worked out how much child maintenance the absent parent should pay, both parents are notified in writing. The notification gives details as to how maintenance has been calculated, including details of the assessable income of both parents.

Mr. Dykes: My hon. Friend is giving the impression that he agrees with the agency's adjudication in this matter. If that is correct, it is very disturbing.

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is wrong; I am not suggesting that at all. I am not dealing with the facts of this specific case. All I am saying is that, just as in the past there was a dispute between the revelation of earnings in ancillary financial proceedings, and a dispute between the parties as to whether the figures were true and an adjudication had to be made—sometimes when the adjudication was made, there was still disappointment on one side or the other—the same circumstances can apply with regard to cases under the Child Support Agency. I do not know the circumstances of this specific case which a review or any subsequent appeal will find. I have no knowledge. All I am doing is setting out the process that the agency must follow to verify the facts. It may be that the facts are agreed, but there may still be a difference of opinion between the two parties with regard to the amounts that may be revealed. However, that is not a matter for me.

Mr. Dykes: What is the point then of a Member of Parliament raising the matter in an Adjournment debate?

Mr. Burt: That is not a matter for me. My hon. Friend did not approach me about the case before he applied for the Adjournment debate; otherwise I would have told him that the individual circumstances could not be discussed, as I made clear to him in a letter. I am more than happy to discuss what information I can with my hon. Friend in private, but I gave the reasons why I could not go into the matter in the House. A review is taking place, and other people's circumstances have to be taken into consideration. It was my hon. Friend's decision to apply for the Adjournment debate, not mine.

Having received a notification, either party has a right to ask for a review or to appeal. The agency is therefore obliged to set out in sufficient detail the calculation of the assessment so that both parties may make an informed decision as to whether the assessment is correct. A balance has been struck between the need for confidentiality of the information which is given to the agency and the obligation to provide information that is essential to enable a decision to be made on whether to apply for a review or to appeal. If parents with care or absent parents believe that the information the agency has used to work out how much maintenance should be paid is incorrect, they can ask for a review or seek an appeal at no cost to themselves. The agency does not disclose information other than is necessary for either party to make an informed decision about whether to seek a review or appeal. That procedure has been properly followed in this case.

The vast majority of lone parents are in receipt of an income-related benefit. However, we know that most of them wish to work now or at some time in the fairly near future, usually once their children are established at school. Maintenance payments therefore are valuable income which lone parents can take with them when they return to work; it is income additional to earnings. The Government recognise that lone parents may face extra problems combining the role of bread winner and child rearer and therefore there are special rules in the benefit system to help those lone parents who want to work.

The Child Support Agency has received its fair share of attention in the past few weeks. It is important to realise that the media choose to give only one side of the story in the vast majority of cases. But a more balanced presentation which seeks to explain that there are two sides to every story would go some way to balancing the scaremongering articles and programmes that certain elements of the media feel obliged to present.

Perhaps the tide is turning slowly. I was pleased to see an article in *The Times* today that put the case of one of the large groups whose voice has been largely unheard in the present debate—parents with care. The article stated:

> "The Child Support Agency has really done its bit for me. It has managed to get money that I would never otherwise have had . . . I didn't know what to do until the CSA took on my case. They have been super—really helpful."

The views of a parent with care seldom seem to get the publicity that they are due.

We recognise that, while the basic principles behind the new system are supported by Parliament and the country, there have been genuine concerns about the way in which the system has worked in detail. We recently announced proposals to bring forward a package of changes to child support arrangements which take account not only of the Select Committee's thoughtful and balanced report, but reflect representations which have been received from hon. Members and the public.

I hope that the changes will help. I can assure my hon. Friend in relation to the case which he has raised today that I am looking extremely carefully at the circumstances. The case has gone to review where it will be properly considered, and, should any lessons be learnt which are capable of wider application, he has my assurance that that will be the case. I expect to be discussing the matter with him privately in the future. I am grateful to the House for the opportunity to discuss the case.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 1 February 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BOURNEMOUTH-SWANAGE MOTOR ROAD AND FERRY BILL

SHEFFIELD ASSAY OFFICE BILL

FEDERATION OF STREET TRADERS UNION (LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES ACT 1990) (AMENDMENT) BILL

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON BILL

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time upon Thursday 3 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

Student Grants

1. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received about the changes in provision of student grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many representations he has received about student grants following the Budget statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): My right hon. Friend and I have received about 1,275 representations to date.

Mr. McAvoy: Does the Minister realise that, if the delegation of extreme right-wing Tory MPs to the Prime Minister gets its way, this may be the last occasion that he has the benefit of the company of the Secretary of State for Education? Does he accept that the cut in student grants to the tune of 10 per cent. in each of the next three years will result in students either applying for a loan or having to give up their studies? Will he admit that the Government have cut 10,000 places from higher education in the next academic year, and are trying to restrict expansion in higher education by putting financial restrictions in the way of potential students?

Mr. Boswell: If the hon. Gentleman is as prolix as that, he will put his place at some risk. As we debated extensively in the House in response to a prayer from the Liberal Democrats a fortnight ago, the answer is that we have a record participation in higher education, and we shall continue that percentage. Incidentally, it is twice as great as it was in 1988. During that period, when we made a progressive switch from grant to loan in the burden of support, the number of students and the participation of young people doubled.

Mr. Pawsey: I hope that my hon. Friend will ignore the ill-considered remarks of the hon. Member for Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy). Given the fact that we now have a record number of students in advanced education, does my hon. Friend agree that it is grossly unreasonable to expect taxpayers to fund the total cost of student support, and that the action being taken to bring grants and loans towards equilibrium is entirely right? It certainly underlines the dichotomy that exists on the Labour Benches about taxation and funding for students.

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) is entirely right. His view and mine is shared by the Royal Society, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and what I might call the lightly suppressed members of the Labour party. We cannot will the end of higher participation in education and, at the same time, not be prepared to tackle funding, which we are doing.

Dr. Wright: Is the Minister aware that his policy on student support and, indeed, the funding of higher education generally has effectively collapsed? It is now being made by the Treasury, not by his Department. It is causing massive hardship to students, and it is making it impossible for universities to plan. When will the Government come forward with a properly funded plan for the expansion of higher education and a plan for student support to go with it?

Mr. Boswell: I warn the hon. Gentleman that the taxi meter on Labour commitments is ticking away faster than ever. The fact that there are 1 million full-time students is not a failure of policy. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to tell the House when there were anything like 1 million full-time students under the Labour Government.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we were to attempt to fund the hugely increased number of students—the proportion has gone up from one in eight to one in three—the taxpayer could not stand it? Therefore, we would have to reduce it to a small number. Is that not an elitist policy on the part of the Opposition?

Mr. Boswell: As ever, my hon. Friend is entirely right: they are elitists on the Labour Benches. We are delivering a mass and popular participation in higher education on a scale never contemplated by the Labour party. What is more, in conjunction with our friends in the Treasury, we are finding a proper and fair balance of financing to do so.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Hon. Members: Ruskin college, Oxford.

Mr. Skinner: When I went for three months to Ruskin, the students I went with got grants. They did not have to rely on loans, and some of us got the grants from the trade union movement.

Why does not the Minister admit that the system has been a total failure, with £376 million being spent on loans and only £5 million being paid back, while the system is costing £11 million to administer? Is not one of the reasons why students cannot pay the money back because most of them cannot get jobs in the tinpot Britain run by this Government?

Mr. Boswell: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman said that he received a mandatory award for his brief sojourn at Oxford university. He certainly has a PhD in ranting. Every single figure given by the hon. Gentleman is wrong, and last year the additional student numbers of over 70,000 were equivalent to six new universities. Where is the elitism there?

Grant-maintained Status

2. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the financial benefits of grant-maintained status.

The Secretary of State for Education (Mr. John Patten): The key benefit is that the school controls 100 per cent. of its budget. Decisions can be taken quickly by those who know and care most about the needs of the school. Self-government enables schools to get good value for money and to spend that money where it really counts: in the classroom, on children.

Mr. Gill: In the light of that answer, and given the fact that there is far greater motivation in grant-maintained schools among both pupils and staff, does my right hon. Friend agree that most of the lingering opposition to grant-maintained status is purely ideological?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and, happily, there is no ideological opposition in my hon. Friend's county of Shropshire, where 11 schools were balloted on grant-maintained status and all resulted in overwhelming yes votes.

Mr. Steinberg: Despite the blatant bribes that the Government have made to opt-out schools, and despite the vast amounts of money that have been spent on advertising opt-out schools, the policy is a failure. [Hon. Members: "Question."] The previous Secretary of State for Education told us that there would be an avalanche——

Hon. Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: Order. I must have a question from the hon. Gentleman. It is Question Time, after all.

Mr. Steinberg: The previous Secretary of State told us that there would be an avalanche of schools opting out. That has not happened. [Hon. Members: "Question."] Is the Secretary of State aware that, in my constituency, not one school has opted out? Will he give an assurance that he will continue the ballots for opting out, and that he will not force schools, in particular, secondary schools, to opt out without a parental ballot?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman does not give good value to the National Union of Teachers for its sponsorship. He cannot even ask a proper joined-up question without prompting from you, Madam Speaker.

We have no intention of changing during this Parliament our general election pledge on the conduct of balloting for grant-maintained schools. I am happy to tell the House that, today, some 530,000 children are being educated in grant-maintained schools—that is about 16 or 17 per cent. of secondary school children. It is a popular and progressive policy.

Mr. Haselhurst: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the financial disbenefits which are beginning to creep in for grant-maintained schools? Local authorities that are dominated by the Labour party and by the Liberal Democrat party are starting to take retaliatory action against them. Is that not typified by Essex county council, which is proposing to withdraw—almost at point blank notice—the boarding allowance for Hockerhill school in Bishops Stortford?

Mr. Patten: That is a disgraceful act; it is typical of the dirty tricks of Lib-Lab councils up and down the land. Only yesterday afternoon I saw one of my hon. Friend's county council colleagues to complain about exactly that practice in Essex, and only last Friday, when I made a state visit to Swindon, I heard similar complaints from councillors and teachers at grant-maintained schools there about the actions of the Lib-Lab pact in campaigning viciously and untruthfully not only against grant-maintained schools but against denominational schools. I bet that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) does not realise that her friends in Swindon want to stop denominational schooling in Wiltshire, which is a disgrace.

Mr. Don Foster: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that, in the current advertising campaign—

paid for by taxpayers' money—to advocate grant-maintained status for schools, one of the advertisements for Hatchford school states that that grant-maintained school has been able to reallocate its funds for benefits in the classroom? Would it not have been more honest to say that the reallocation has meant that £68,000 was taken from neighbouring schools? Does not that demonstrate a clear breach of his departmental guidelines on advertising information about grant-maintained schools?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong—the advertisements contain factual information only. There is a level playing field. There are many differences between grant-maintained schools and maintained schools in terms of how they get their money, whether they have to pay value added tax and whether they can look to the county council or the local education authority to vire money from other capital programmes to capital programmes for grant-maintained schools. The hon. Gentleman must brief himself a bit better. Unless he is careful, I shall pay a state visit to Bath and deal with him.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are equal proportions of able, disadvantaged and poor children in grant-maintained schools and state schools, and that, when the Labour party continually attacks those schools, it is attacking poor and disadvantaged children—and it does not care?

Mr. Patten: I do not think that the Labour party has had an original idea in 15 wasted years in opposition. It has not advanced educational thinking one iota. My hon. Friend, with his long experience as a deputy head teacher, is right: our comprehensive grant-maintained schools, which are the majority, produce very strong results with children from all backgrounds.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Does the Secretary of State realise that parents and school governors, as well as some Conservative councillors, have rumbled him and now realise that the rewards to grant-maintained schools for their political correctness are running out? Will he confirm that two out of three grant-maintained schools have not received any capital allocation whatsoever for the year 1994-95, and that the abolition of cash protection for GM schools means that they will lose £8·2 million in annual maintenance grants? As it is now obvious that Government targets for GM schools will not be reached, will the Secretary of State tell us whether that is why he is threatening to nationalise all secondary schools? What does that say about his respect for parent power—or is he just a bad loser?

Mr. Patten: I do not know how the hon. Lady manages to speak with such apparent authority about grant-maintained schools. I understand—I will of course be corrected if I am wrong—that she has never visited one.

Mrs. Taylor: Yes, I have.

Mr. Patten: I am very sorry. I understood that she had not. I am glad that the hon. Lady has done so, because I would not like those on the Labour Front Bench to carry out a policy of educational apartheid by trying to marginalise grant-maintained schools.

The hon. Lady really cannot criticise a policy of devolving power to parents, which is admired in most of the western world and is one of the most original of our policies of the past 15 years, when, over the same period, there has been no original thinking on education policy from her or her hon. Friends—15 wasted years. If the hon. Lady were subjected to an educational brain scan, there would not be a flicker on the screen.

A-level Results

3. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what conclusions his Department has drawn from the A-level results in England in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr. Robin Squire): The 1993 results confirmed that GCE A-levels are popular and successful qualifications. More of our young people are taking them, more are passing them, and more are getting good grades than ever before. The recent report by the Office for Standards in Education has confirmed their reputation for quality and rigour.

Sir David Madel: Are the Government considering changes in the A-level system in view of the fact that the number of candidates for science subjects dropped in 1993, and that both Government and industry are keen that many more people should have A-levels in science and then go on to university?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. With his wide educational knowledge, he knows that, under the national curriculum, all young people are now required to take maths and science until the age of 16. Many of us trust that that will ensure that more students come to recognise that those subjects are neither boring nor, worse, only for boys—some of the myths that are spread. In due course, that will ensure that a greater number carry on to post-16 studies, whether via A-levels or via the new vocational qualifications.

Undergraduates

4. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many university undergraduates there are in England and Wales.

Mr. Boswell: The Government's policies have led to record student numbers and participation in higher education. There were some 755,000 undergraduates studying in England in 1992-93, the latest year for which figures are available. Figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Devlin: Does not that significant increase in the number of people studying at our universities show how wrong people were three or four years ago to argue that the introduction of student loans would mean a decline in the number of people applying to go to university? Is it not a welcome feature, and a real achievement of the Government, to have got so many talented young people into higher education, including at the two new universities on Teesside?

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I recognise the role of the two new universities on Teesside. Since 1988, the proportion of young people entering higher education has risen from 15 per cent. to more than 30 per cent.

Mr. Rooker: Notwithstanding the increase—the equivalent of a dozen or more civic universities in recent years—achieved by craimming students into existing facilities, is it true that, as a result of the decline in the staff-student ratio in universities, the vice-chancellors were warned privately by Ministers not to speak up about threats to quality because that would cause further problems with the Treasury?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman seems to have had some problems with his own party. We have no problems with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. We are currently engaged in debating issues of quality. My right hon. Friend and I are determined to assert higher quality, and we shall see some of the vice-chancellors and principals this afternoon at 4 o'clock.

Mr. David Nicholson: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the need for a balance between the cost to students and their families and to the taxpayer, and the point about student numbers. Will he continue to emphasise the lessons to be learned from international comparisons in funding in that respect? Will he also pay attention to the use and administration of access funds and, in conjunction with this colleagues in the Department of Social Security, to support for students during the long vacation in the recession, when many have been unable to find jobs?

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend will know that we decided, at the time of the introduction of student loans, to discontinue the general pattern of students' access to benefits. We did that alongside an increase in the funding package, which amounts to approximately one third extra for students who avail themselves of a loan. We continue to take account and careful note of authoritative studies on any student financial problems, and we recently reflected that with an increase of some £2 million in the sum provided for access funds in higher education for the coming year.

Mr. Bryan Davies: Will the Minister come clean with the House and the country and confirm that he has been trying to get higher education on the cheap? Is it not the case that, thanks to Treasury diktats, next year 10,000 fully qualified intending students, who are as well qualified as those who went into higher education this year, will be denied a place because of his policies?

Mr. Boswell: Once again, the taxi meter is ticking, and my hon. Friends will be taking careful note of it. The participation of young people in higher education is at record levels, and the numbers will remain at records levels over the next three years. I regard that as a success and, if anything, a compliment to the Treasury and to my colleagues, because we have achieved it, whereas the hon. Gentleman has yet to answer the question I recently put to him. How does he propose to pay for whatever he proposes to do, which he will not tell us?

Nursery Education

5. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on nursery education.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Eric Forth): The Government's policy is to promote choice, diversity, quality and cost-effectiveness of pre-school provision in the poublic and private sectors. More than 90 per cent. of three and four year-olds now receive some form of provision—more than half of them in maintained nursery and primary schools. We are now exploring ways of adding still further, as resources allow, to the choice parents have.

Sir David Knox: Is my hon. Friend aware that, although there is excellent provision for nursery education in Stoke-on-Trent, there is virtually none in the rest of Staffordshire? Does he consider that fair?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend knows well that the extent and nature of provision is entirely a matter for the local education authority. I should have thought that his local education authority would find it extremely difficult to justify its position to its electorate if its provision of nursery education were unevenly and unfairly distributed, as my hon. Friend suggests.

Ms Estelle Morris: Does the Minister realise that he has just made it clear that the Government do not seem to want to adopt a policy on nursery education? Does he accept that that attitude has left Britain at the bottom of the European league of nursery education providers? Is he happy with a policy under which whether one's child gets nursery education depends on where one lives and not on the child's needs? When will he ensure that young children in Tory areas get as good access to nursery education as those in Labour Walsall, Cleveland and Birmingham?

Mr. Forth: I wonder which of the hon. Lady's colleagues she agrees with? Would it be the Labour conference in 1993, which said:

> "nursery education to be available as of right to children from the age of four"?

Or does she agree with the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) on the Labour Front Bench who said about a year ago

> "The Labour party is, and always has been, committed to pre-school provision"?

Or does she agree with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) who said on radio just the other day:

> "there are no manifesto commitments at this stage . . . there is no commitment to spend money on anything"?

It is time that Labour Members came clean.

Mr. Evennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should have choice and diversity in the provision of pre-school education? Does he further agree that we should congratulate the work of the Pre-School Playgroups Association, which does a tremendous amount of good work for children throughout the country? The Opposition never acknowledge that good work.

Mr. Forth: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. It is part of the hidden agenda of Labour Members. By implying that they will extend mandatory provision for pre-fives but not telling us how they would pay for it, they are threatening the existence of the excellent pre-school playgroup movement to which my hon. Friend alluded. We acknowledge the excellence of that provision and want to promote continued choice and diversity for children up and down the country.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Will the Minister tell us—calmly, if he can—whether the Secretary of State ever speaks to the Prime Minister? If so, can he clear up the Government's shambles on nursery education? Last year, the junior

Minister said that I had an obsession with nursery education. As the Prime Minister now says that he is mad keen on nursery education, will the Minister clear up the confusion in the Conservative party and tell us, yes or no: do Education Ministers back the Prime Minister? Do they favour universal nursery education?

Mr. Forth: I think that the House will be much more interested in knowing whether—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I will answer—the hon. Lady's colleague, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), shares her obsession with nursery education. From what I said a moment ago, it would appear that he does not. The direct answer to the hon. Lady's question is this. In an excellent speech to the north of England education conference only a few weeks ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said:

> "The Prime Minister and I are therefore keen to find ways of helping to extend over time the amount of nursery schooling available."

I hope that that answers the hon. Lady's question.

Dearing Report

6. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what survey his Department has undertaken of the views of classroom teachers on the Dearing report on the national curriculum and testing.

14. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what responses he has received to the publication of the Dearing report on the national curriculum and testing.

Mr. Patten: I understand that teachers as well as almost all their associations and unions have since reacted with general enthusiasm for the report's main recommendations. They have, as the House knows, been accepted in full by the Government. I hope that we can continue to raise standards in our schools in the interests of pupils.

Mr. Greenway: From the school visits that I have made in my constituency, it is clear that heads and teachers hold Sir Ron Dearing in the highest possible regard. Given that he had a free hand with his inquiry, which was entirely independent, and that the Government have accepted all his recommendations, what possible justification can there be for any further disruption in our classrooms? Will my right hon. Friend call on the National Union of Teachers to copy the example of other teacher unions and call off the threat of industrial action.?

Mr. Patten: I was a bit surprised to learn that the National Union of Teachers is the only one of the teachers' associations and unions that has not accepted Sir Ron Dearing's report and is still unfortunately thinking of continuing the boycott. That is regrettable in the interests of our children. I hope that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) will make known her views on the stance of the National Union of Teachers and use her best endeavours to ensure that the curricular and testing changes recommended in the report go through smoothly in the interests of precisely the good performance of schools that my hon. Friend has seen in his constituency.

Mr. Luff: Does my right hon. Friend recall that a year ago I had a great deal of sympathy with the concerns, expressed by head teachers in my Worcester constituency, about the way in which we were approaching a national curriculum and testing? Is he aware that, a year on, those concerns have been entirely put to rest by the publication of the Dearing report? The report underlines the importance of the national curriculum and effective testing in our schools. Against that background, will he ensure that his Department follows, to the letter and the spirit, the report in the coming months and years?

Mr. Patten: Yes, I have accepted the report's recommendations in full. They have gone down very well in the classroom, as I saw in a school in Bristol only last Friday afternoon, where I talked to heads and, privately, to trade union members in a number of trade unions. It is an unfortunate reflection on the present state of one of the teachers' associations and unions that it uniquely wishes to continue, perhaps, to boycott testing in our classrooms. I cannot see that that reflects a modern attitude to education. I cannot imagine that a thoroughly modern Labour party would back that sort of action. I hope that the hon. Member for Dewsbury does not.

Mr. Enright: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge the considerable part played by local education authorities in the delivery of the national curriculum? Will he put his mind to considering the report on religious education that was sent to us this morning by his noble Friend the Minister of State and acknowledge that if central funding is taken away from local education authorities, the delivery of the curriculum will be quite impossible?

Mr. Patten: With his long-standing interest in these matters, the hon. Gentleman is probably aware that yesterday my Department issued new guidance to local education authority schools and to grant-maintained schools about the proper conduct of religion education in the classrooms of all state schools, and the critical importance of a daily act of worship and regular assemblies in schools, which, alas, is not taken as seriously in some of our schools as it should be.

Mr. Dafis: I wonder whether His Royal Highness might honour us with a state visit to Wales, in which, having studied the recent report of the Institute of Welsh Affairs, "Towards an Education Policy for Wales", he could speak to the institute about it. Does the Secretary of State recognise that there is much validity in the suggestion in that report that we in Wales should be looking beyond England for our standards and for ideas on developing the curriculum in Wales? Will he now ensure that he has a meeting soon with the Secretary of State for Wales to consider ways to strengthen the autonomy of Welsh educational institutions, including the Curriculum Authority for Wales, and other aspects, too?

Mr. Patten: My writ does not run as far as Wales, so I shall not be able to accept the hon. Gentleman's kind invitation and make an official visit; however, I am prepared to go privately. As for my having discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, ours is a long-standing and close political friendship dating back 20 years. We talk about these great issues most days of the week, and there is not a razor blade's distance between us.

Mr. Lidington: Will my right hon. Friend take careful note of Sir Ron Dearing's comments to the effect that rigorous national testing should remain an integral part of our state education system? While my right hon. Friend and his colleagues set about welcoming the Dearing recommendations—which are indeed welcome, being designed to reduce teacher work loads—will he also ensure that the Government do not lose sight of that important principle?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: I agree with all that he has said. I also think that all hon. Members in all political parties should concentrate, in the development of our education policies, on trying especially to help the 40 per cent. of boys and girls—young men and women—who have the greatest difficulty in achieving. It is in that regard that we seem to lag behind too many of our continental, Japanese and north American competitors; and it is in that connection that testing, based on the national curriculum, is likely to produce results that are not just good for the country and for schools, but good for individual boys and girls.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Let me remind the Secretary of State that all the teacher unions have accepted in the Dearing report those recommendations whose educational content is positive. May I point out that the unions accepted those recommendations because, for the first time, someone who had some influence over the Government had listened to what they had to say? The National Union of Teachers wants to continue teacher assessment, which Sir Ron Dearing says is more important than the tests themselves; the other two teacher unions want to continue only the tests, not the assessment. If the Secretary of State makes the tests a pilot for this year, he will find that he has everyone behind him.

Mr. Patten: Oh dear, oh dear. That just shows that there are differences between teacher unions and associations —which is perfectly reasonable as they are free agents. It also shows that there are considerable differences and confusions among Labour party members, who cannot give a straight answer. The straightest possible advice has been given by Sir Ron Dearing, not only in his report but in a number of recent statements. He has said—referring directly to the NUT, which he has named—that national testing should go ahead this summer. If it did not, that would be a terrible slap in the face for him.

Technology College Status

7. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools have now expressed an interest in obtaining technology college status.

Mr. Patten: There has been a very encouraging level of interest from schools and businesses. More than 200 schools have made inquiries to my Department or the City Technology College Trust on the technology college initiative.

Mr. Mans: Bearing in mind the particular need of industry in my part of Lancashire for training in technology, science and maths, may I ask my right hon. Friend to give special consideration and support to St. Aidan's school in my constituency if it decides to apply for technology college status?

Mr. Patten: Two hundred schools have already shown an interest in acquiring such status. We will certainly consider any application from the school in my hon. Friend's constituency, but it had better get a move on: there is a pretty long queue.

Mr. O'Hara: Does the Secretary of State recall that when the programme for the establishment of city technology colleges was first conceived in the late 1980s, two principal claims were made for them—that they would attract sponsorship from private industry and that they would become beacons of excellence in the system? As the House well knows, the first claim quickly foundered and the taxi meter has been working overtime ever since. Tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money was put into the city technology colleges. Moreover, according to the latest Ofsted report, not a single college has established itself as a beacon of excellence. Is not it time for the Secretary of State to apologise for squandering taxpayers' money, which could have been better spent on meeting the wider needs of the education service, on a misguided experiment?

Mr. Patten: Technology is vital. We have 15 excellent city technology colleges. Has the hon. Gentleman ever visited one of them? Unfortunately not, I think. I should very much like to take him along to one. We are attempting, in co-operation with business and industry and with a large number of schools, to ensure that the good practice of the city technology colleges is more widely disseminated. I hope that, when money allows, this idea will be extended to schools specialising in languages, schools specialising in business and—who knows?— schools specialising in the performing arts, one of which might be named after my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks).

Student Unions

8. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received concerning the proposed changes to student unions.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received about 1,300 representations since the Education Bill was introduced.

Mr. Riddick: Will my hon. Friend confirm that thousands of students wish to have the freedom to decide for themselves whether to belong to a student union? Does not this contrast with the complacency and—dare I say it? —the arrogance of some vice-chancellors, some peers and several Opposition Members, who think that the principle of voluntary membership is not important? Will my hon. Friend improve the Education Bill by making it spell out the voluntary principle more clearly so that we may abolish the student union closed shop once and for all?

Mr. Boswell: The House may have noticed, in relation to an answer that I gave a moment ago, that the number of representations on this matter is running marginally ahead of the number of those concerning student support. One of the interesting representations is that of my hon. Friend. I can confirm that we are determined, through our Bill, to secure the principles of choice, democracy and accountability and to ensure that these are universally observed in the activities of student unions. That we shall do.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Has the Minister considered the representations from organisations such as Student Community Action in my constituency of Cambridge, which does an enormous amount of good work in the community? Does not he think that, in their educational experience, students derive enormous advantage from helping such charities? Or does he care?

Mr. Boswell: As one of the Members of Parliament who have been active in student affairs in the past, I can confirm that our intention is not to frustrate student services or the proper carrying out of student activities. What I regret is the way in which a number of people, whether by accident or by intention, have caricatured our proposals, suggesting that they may, in some way, curtail those activities. We are providing a mechanism for the proper control of public funds. It will be open to institutions to fund activities.

Dr. Spink: Is my hon. Friend aware that my constituents who are taxpayers do not want to see their money spent by student unions on politically motivated campaigns? Does he agree that Labour Members are unelectable as a Government while they think that taxpayers' money should so be so used?

Mr. Boswell: Yes; my hon. Friend holes in one.

School Buildings

9. **Mr. Litherland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he last met the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to discuss the state of school buildings.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State, in the absence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, met representatives of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities on 20 July 1993 to discuss a number of issues, including the state of school buildings. Ministers and officials continue to meet representatives of the local authority associations on a regular basis.

Mr. Litherland: The Minister will be aware that local education authorities wanted to spend £1·5 billion on a three-year programme just to bring schools up to an acceptable standard. As large authorities such as Manchester want to spend—or need to spend—£1 billion over 10 years, does he agree that the situation is not only deplorable but potentially dangerous? Is not he ashamed of the Government's attitude to the well-being of our teachers and children?

Mr. Forth: I can confirm that most local authorities seem to want to spend more money most of the time, but that is nothing very new. The hon. Gentleman and the House should be aware that the National Audit Office report of 1991 said that many schools were in an acceptable or better state of decoration and repair and that schools were safe places in which to learn and work. It estimated that some £2 billion, at 1990 prices, was required to put schools to rights. I can confirm that £2 billion of capital expenditure was spent between 1986-87 and 1989-90 and that about the same amount again will be spent over current years. Efficient authorities can ensure that their schools are fit places in which to be taught, and I hope that they will all do so.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 1 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Gillan: Does my right hon. Friend agree—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Gillan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the combination of BMW and Rover, creating the largest specialist car manufacturer in the world, is good news for Rover, for its work force and for the United Kingdom? Given the demand for Rover cars around the world, especially for the Land-Rover, does he agree that this is a far cry from the days when Rover was a state-run bankrupt shambles, producing cars that nobody wanted to buy?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. I believe that the new arrangements will provide new export markets and more investment for Rover. BMW will be able to offer Rover access to new markets—for example, in Germany and the United States, where the Rover network is weak. With a world-beating product and that link, the prospects for Rover are excellent.

Mr. John Smith: In the light of that answer, is it now the Government's definition of success for a British company that it is taken over by a foreign competitor?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman really should catch up with the modern world. He simply does not understand how free markets work. Only a few weeks ago, he welcomed the Government's achievement in working for a successful conclusion to the GATT round. GATT stands for free trade. That means companies trading and buying across national boundaries. He may know that Marks and Spencer owns Brooks Brothers in the United States; Grand Metropolitan owns Jack Daniels; John Swire owns Cathay Pacific; and Hanson, GEC and Racal own foreign companies. That is the world in which we live, not the 1960s, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman covets.

Mr. John Smith: I deduce, Madam Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. If hon. Members wish to make interventions, perhaps they will resume their seats in the normal manner.

Mr. John Smith: I deduce from that rambling and defensive answer that the right hon. Gentleman believes that a takeover is a sign of success. Why does he think that that view is not held in Germany, France and Italy, which care about keeping their own car industries?

The Prime Minister: I deduce from that pre-prepared second question—*[Interruption.]*—that the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not listen to the answer. Is he suggesting—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]—does not like the fact that we know that he usually has all three of his questions written out, but is he suggesting that some form of protectionism is correct? Is he suggesting that we should have intervened to stop the sale? Is he suggesting that the ramshackle British Leyland that went into the private sector would have been the successful Rover that it is today but for that privatisation?

Mr. John Smith: Is not the truth that the deal has been done not to further the long-term interests of the British car industry but to satisfy the short-term need of British Aerospace for cash? Is that a good reason for losing our only independent car producer? Did the Prime Minister know of the deal when he told business men in Leeds that he was "betting on Britain"?

The Prime Minister: I was unfair on the right hon. and learned Gentleman. He should have stuck to his written question, which undoubtedly would have been a good deal better. BMW spent £800 million on Rover because it sees the potential for growth and prosperity. That would never have occurred if the right hon. Gentleman's policy had kept Rover in the public sector. We would have had the drip, drip, drip feed of public expenditure maintaining British Leyland, not a privatised, world-beating company.

European Council

Q2. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the level of public borrowing by member states and institutions of the European Union.

The Prime Minister: The member states of the European Union have already recognised the need to avoid excessive budget deficits. That objective was included in the broad guidelines on economic policy adopted by the Economic and Finance Council last December.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the Prime Minister showed great courage in facing up to the unpopular task of resolving our national finances, will he, in the light of the recently published figures, seek to persuade his continental partners and the EC institutions to follow Britain's splendid example of controlling borrowing instead of following the spendthrift policies promoted by Mr. Jacques Delors and the British Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I shall certainly seek to do as my hon. Friend suggests. We have taken tough decisions domestically about public expenditure. I believe that those are the right decisions for the British economy. At Edinburgh, we took a step towards controlling Community expenditure. I welcome that step, which means tighter restraint and control. In answer to one part of my hon. Friend's question, I am not sure whether I shall be able to persuade the Labour party. Last year, it called for a European recovery fund costing £77 billion, a public expenditure commitment which seems to have escaped the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Prime Minister recall that on 29 November the House, by a rather arcane procedure, approved the establishment of a European investment fund, and that while that was under the auspices of the European investment bank, the people responsible for providing guarantees of £2,000 million for private and public purposes had positions of great patronage? In what way are those people responsible to the Government and to the House?

The Prime Minister: Part of the funding to which the hon. Gentleman refers was funding that has for a long time been in the European Community budget. Those people are answerable through the Commission to the European Council and hence to this and other Governments.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 1 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pawsey: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the initiative of the Secretary of State for Education, who has today announced measures to combat truancy? Does he further agree that the main responsibility for ensuring that children attend school lies not with teachers but with parents?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend about that. Truancy is a terrible problem in schools and one which needs increasingly to be tackled with the head teachers and with the staff in the schools. All too often, the child who is found loitering on the street subsequently gets into trouble with the law. That is a problem which we need to tackle, Government and schools together, and we are determined to do so. That is one of the reasons for publishing performance tables, which help to reveal the size of the problem. It is a pity, to put it mildly, that the Opposition talk about the problem but argue against one way of dealing with it.

Mr. Ashdown: It is now some three weeks since the Prime Minister told us of his personal determination to open Tuzla airport—"as soon as possible", in his words —for humanitarian aid to Bosnia. Is he able to tell us what steps he has taken to fulfil that commitment, and in what time frame we might expect it to happen?

The Prime Minister: I also told the right hon. Gentleman that we would take the advice of the commanders on the ground. That is most certainly what we will do and the right hon. Gentleman will learn what is happening when we have had that advice and when we have taken the action that is appropriate.

Sir Ralph Howell: May I remind my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister of the excellent and far-sighted speech that he made a year ago—*[Interruption.]*—at the Carlton club—*[Interruption.]*—in which he suggested that the unemployed might be offered work or even required to work? May I thank him for setting up the North Norfolk action pilot scheme, which has proved a great success and is already saving £1,500 a year per person engaged in it? If that scheme were introduced throughout the country would not it save £4 billion? Could I ask him—*[Interruption.]*—if he will now sanction the Fakenham right-to-work pilot scheme which, if operated throughout the country, would save at least £13 billion?

The Prime Minister: As far as I could hear, my hon. Friend was welcoming the pilot schemes that were set up some time ago to help unemployed people. We are evaluating those schemes; they are showing signs of being successful. We shall examine them and decide to what extent they may be extended.

Q4. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 1 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Etherington: The Prime Minister will undoubtedly be only too well aware of the fact that only one in four crimes is being solved. Instead of following a path of retribution and vengeance, will he now consider crime prevention and the causes of crime? Instead of forever telling the House about rising crime trends in other countries, will he now do something for the citizens of this country, whom he purports to represent?

The Prime Minister: We spend a great deal of time, trouble and effort on crime prevention, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that I also believe in the principle of punishment for crime when people are caught. The hon. Gentleman may have noticed the remarkable success of the Metropolitan police in dealing with burglary. Operation Bumblebee has cut burglary in recent months by around 15 per cent. That is but one illustration of a series of innovative policing efforts, which are increasingly successful, by chief constables.

Mr. Lidington: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the protestations of Mr. Gerry Adams about his commitment to peace should be taken seriously only when he has been able to announce that the IRA will cease its violence for good?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. Neither Mr. Adams nor the Provisional IRA has given a commitment to end violence for good—a commitment which the House and everybody in the country and Ireland is waiting to hear. We should be clear about that central point. The joint declaration leaves no conceivable excuse for violence. All the words, all the prevarications and all the evasions of Sinn Fein will be utterly and completely hollow until they end violence.

Q5. **Mr. Mandelson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 1 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mandelson: Is the Prime Minister aware of the deep anxiety among parents and local communities in coastal areas as far apart as Scotland, the north-east, the Isle of Wight and Cornwall about clusters of babies born with almost identical limb defects, in most cases without hands? Is not the best way to get to the truth of that disturbing development to set up a properly resourced, national investigation? Will he therefore ask the Secretary of State for Health to establish such a study without further delay?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly seek advice from my right hon. Friend about the matter that the hon. Gentleman raises. Whether his proposition of how it should be dealt with is the right one needs further consideration. Clearly, it is a matter of concern, not only to the communities that he mentioned, but to others.

7

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I raise the question of the refusal last night of the authorities of the House to accept my early day motion because it included the word "shifty" with respect to the conduct of the Secretary of State for Wales? He first denied and then did not deny that he was aware of the affiliation to the Conservative party of David Rowe-Beddoe, whom he appointed as chairman of the Welsh Development Agency. I was told that I could not use the word "shifty" in that respect. That is why early-day motion 486 on page 1686 of today's Order Paper does not have the word "shifty" in it.

Your ruling yesterday, as reported in column 631 of *Hansard*, deemed that it was in order to use the word "shifty" as long as it did not personally attack the person concerned. However, the word used by the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) did concern the conduct of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), as appears from column 605 of *Hansard* of social security questions yesterday. That raises the difficulty—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Would hon. Gentlemen resume their seats? An hon. Gentleman is attempting to address the Chair.

Mr. Morgan: If it was in order for the hon. Member for Bury, North to use the word "shifty" with respect to my hon. Friend in social security questions, what is shifty for the goose must be shifty for the gander.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I do not want to enter into the wider debate, but, on the point that was made by the hon. Member for Bury, North, I have had a word with the hon. Gentleman about the specific words that he used in connection with me. May I assure the hon. Gentleman that I bear no ill will? He would be low on my list of hon. Members who were likely to slip into indiscretion and unparliamentary language.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): I am happy to withdraw the expression. I wrote to the hon. Member for Garscadden immediately after questions to give the proper construction of the remarks. The hon. Gentleman is not shifty. We have the warmest possible relationship—*[Interruption.]* Madam Speaker, there are times when one wishes the ground to open up. We have a good relationship, in the proper sense of the term, and I am happy to withdraw the expression and the connotation that it had, if that is of help to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. It is my turn, so that I may put the matter to rest. When the matter was raised yesterday, I said that I thought that the Under-Secretary of State had attributed the word "shifty" to the policies of the hon. Member for Garscadden rather than to him personally. On reading the *Official Report* this morning, I found that in fact the hon. Gentleman had attributed it to the hon. Member for Garscadden personally. That was unparliamentary and unacceptable. Had I not misheard the remark at the time, I would have required the Minister to withdraw it.

The matter has now been put right. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), as I am to other hon. Members who have raised the matter. It has now been put to rest.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is it the same point of order?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: No.

Madam Speaker: Very good.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Can you inform the House whether you have yet received an intimation from the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) that he wishes to make a personal statement to the House on whether Westminster City council ratepayers can have the £50,000 that was conned out of the rates account returned to them?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that it is not in order to refer to another hon. Member in that way. If he has a substantive motion, he should table it in the normal way.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order may be of wider interest than just to me. The other day the Table Office told me that the ministerial duties of the Leader of the House did not include responsibility for the parliamentary timetable. That came as something of a surprise to me. When I raised the matter with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, he too expressed surprise. As he said, he feels that he is quite busy. Could you elucidate the point for us all, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: There may have been some misunderstanding. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is referring to rules for Adjournment debates. If he is not, I do not want to have a discussion across the Floor of the House now. I shall look at precisely what he means and will give him a ruling on the matter.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Five minutes ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) was informed that the Leader of the House intends to move a privilege motion that concerns me. Is not it normal practice, when a privilege motion concerns an hon. Member, for reasonable notice to be given so that hon. Members are available on the relevant day, if they so wish? Despite an explicit request to the Government some two hours ago, no notice was given. In that case, would not it be preferable for the motion to be stood over until tomorrow's sitting?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct in saying that a motion is about to be moved; that is perfectly in order. I have looked at the precedents and this is exactly the procedure that the House always adopts on such occasions. I call the Chairman of the Committee.

Hon. Member for Banff and Buchan

3.37 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): It is with the greatest regret that I have to inform the House that at its meeting this morning, the First Scottish Standing Committee, to which the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill was referred, directed me to report Mr. Alex Salmond, the Member for Banff and Buchan, to the House because the hon. Member, not being a member of the Committee, was present in that part of the Committee Room reserved for members of the Committee, and, having been requested to do so, he declined to withdraw. As the House will know, neither a Standing Committee nor its Chairman has power to discipline Members and it is for the House to decide what action, if any, it wishes to take.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Chairman of the First Scottish Standing Committee in respect of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill shall have power to order any Member who is not a member of the Committee to withdraw immediately from the Committee Room; and the Serjeant at Arms shall act on such orders as he may receive from the Chairman in pursuance of this order.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you confirm that the motion is debatable? If so, may I give notice that I would like to debate it?

Madam Speaker: The motion is now open for debate. The hon. Gentleman is perfectly free to speak. I call the hon. Gentleman.

3.38 pm

Mr. Salmond: The point at issue is whether the Chairman of the Committee should be given power to exclude hon. Members from the Committee. My argument is that we should not give the Chairman that power. There is a substantial case for saying that the First Scottish Standing Committee, which is considering the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill, is improperly constituted under the Standing Orders of the House. Under Standing Order No. 86(2), the Committee of Selection of the House of Commons is charged to do two things with regard to the choice of hon. Members to serve on Standing Committees. It is charged with looking at the composition of the House as a whole, and the qualifications of the hon. Members chosen.

My submission is that the qualifications of members of that Committee are substantially in question. I refer to the qualifications of the hon. Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) and for Swindon (Mr. Coombs). The Committee has been certified by you, Madam Speaker, as being exclusively concerned with Scottish issues. How on earth can Conservative Members representing English constituencies be considered to be "qualified" to serve on the Committee when they have no constituency interest in the proceedings of the legislation? That is an important point of principle for myself and for my hon. Friends, who were willing to serve on the Committee but were not chosen.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself, I shall give way to him in a few moments.

The House might like to consider that the Committee of Selection had available to it other Conservative Members with Scottish constituencies. They were the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)—the Minister of State, Department of Employment—the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind)—the Secretary of State for Defence—and even the Secretary of State for Scotland. I understand that the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) was perfectly prepared to serve but was not chosen, apparently because the Government Whips believed that he would have been an unreliable ally on the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill.

In those circumstances, I cannot consider that it would be appropriate to give the Chairman powers over a Committee that may have been improperly constituted.

Mr. Connarty: How many Standing Committees has the hon. Gentleman volunteered to serve on or served on in the House since he came here?

Mr. Salmond: The previous occasion when there was a major Scottish Committee was in 1989. It was the Committee on Scottish self-governing schools. The hon. Gentleman may recall that again I volunteered to serve on that Committee and was excluded. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will appreciate the important principle that, if a Committee is certified by Madam Speaker as being exclusive to Scotland, it is important that Scottish Members have first option to serve on such a Committee.

I see Welsh Members in the Chamber.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On the issue of legislation dealing exclusively with Welsh matters, is the hon. Gentleman aware that there is a Standing Order that requires every hon. Member representing a Welsh constituency to serve on the Committee? That Standing Order has to be followed unless there is an express resolution to the contrary. When the Standing Order was put on one side for the Welsh Language Bill 1993, that action was fought vociferously by all Opposition Members. Should not the rule applying to legislation on Welsh matters also apply to Scottish legislation?

Mr. Salmond: I agree with that argument and with the Standing Order. The hon. Gentleman and I wish that other Opposition parties would view the matters relating to Scotland with the same concern as they view matters relating to Wales.

There are two effective and important precedents for such a resolution being brought to the House. The first was in 1989 during the passage of Scottish schools legislation. It was argued that the Chairman of the Committee should have powers to proceed. Two arguments were advanced in favour of that motion: first, that it would be proper for the Committee to be allowed to debate, for the debate to proceed and for each amendment to be judged on its merits; secondly, that people in Scotland had the right and ability not to use the schools opt-out legislation if they so chose. Neither of those arguments stands in the case before us.

If we consider the precedent set during the self-governing schools legislation, in Committee no substantive amendment was accepted by the Government,

[Mr. Salmond]

although debate was allowed to proceed. I suspect that, if debate is allowed to proceed in the Committee on the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill, a similar situation will arise. There would be no protection for people in Scotland if the House give the Government their way on the Committee.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if the House were to accept the principle that he has adumbrated, it would inevitably mean that any Bill dealing with England alone should not have on its Standing Committee a single Scottish or Welsh Member?

Mr. Salmond: I am prepared to accept that principle. The hon. Member will note that my hon. Friends do not vote on specifically English legislation, the most recent example of which was the Bill for Sunday shops opening. I thought that it was not appropriate for Scottish Members to decide for English Members whether shops in England should open on Sundays. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would extend the same courtesy to us in Scotland. In terms of the principle——

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Salmond: In a few moments.

As for the principle that he raised, the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) may like to remember that in connection with the White Paper, "Taking Stock" the Tory Government argued that many more measures should be debated in the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland by Scottish Members. How on earth can that principle be upheld if English Tories are required to gerrymander Scottish local government on a Scottish Standing Committee?

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): In view of the Scottish National party's declared anti-racist stand, I am sure that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) does not seek to drive irrational wedges between Scottish and English Members in the Chamber. Would he therefore care to pay tribute to the Opposition Members representing English constituencies who last night argued the case on behalf of important sections of the Scottish community with regard to the new duty on air passengers? In that lengthy debate no representative of the Scottish National party sought to speak, nor was even present from beginning to end of it. Some good may conceivably come from that debate for Scottish communities, so will the hon. Gentleman please accept that there are hon. Members representing non-Scottish constituencies who have a deep and genuine interest in Scottish affairs? Whether that extends to Conservative Members, especially on the Bill in question, is another matter, but let us not divide the House or the country on racist lines. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is being heartily cheered by the Tories. I should have hoped that on this occasion even the hon. Gentleman would agree that it is not right and proper for English Conservative Members to be parachuted on to the Committee on the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill. I remember that exact point being made—presumably it was not racist then—by the leader of the Labour party in the first debate in the new Session of Parliament. He said that it would be an outrage if English Conservative Members were put on the Committee on the Bills on local government in Wales or Scotland. If that was an outrage last October, it is still an outrage now. I would have hoped for some support from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), but perhaps I should have known better.

The first precedent dates from 1972, on the Local Government (Scotland Bill). That was the first time that a similar resolution was brought before the House, and it provides an important precedent. The action was taken by several hon. Members, three Liberals and three Scottish Labour Members—the late Jo Grimond, the late John Mackintosh, the late John Robertson, the late Tom Pendry and two Members who are still with us, the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). In 1972 those people thought it appropriate, on a Bill far less contentious than the Bill now before the Committee, to challenge the right of the Committee Chairman to exclude them from the Committee. There were then no English Conservative Members on the Committee, but it was still considered appropriate for those Liberal and Labour Members to challenge in what they thought was the most effective way. I wish that Labour and Liberal Members would join us today in making a similar objection.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Gentleman appears to be making a case why he should be on the Committee. That case may or may not have virtue, but the motion before the House relates to whether a Chairman has the right to tell a non-member of the Committee to go away. The hon. Gentleman is not arguing that point at all. May we return to where we are supposed to be?

Madam Speaker: I am listening carefully to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who is a very experienced Member of the House. I know that he understands what the motion is about, and I am sure he will ensure that his speech relates to it.

Mr. Salmond: Of course you, Madam Speaker, with your experience, will have noticed that I am talking about the precedents, when hon. Members came before similar Committees and similar resolutions were moved. That must be relevant to the context of the debate. In determining whether the Chairman should have powers——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am slightly concerned, because I understood the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) to describe the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) as the late Member. Was I right to be surprised, or has something happened to him?

Mr. Salmond: I meant to refer to a late Labour Member whose constituency was Edinburgh, Central, I believe—[HON. MEMBERS: Tom Oswald."] Tom Oswald. I accept that correction, but it is the only correction that I intend to accept from Conservative Members.

In determining whether the Chairman should have powers, we must determine whether the Bill should proceed in the light of the arguments put forward. I have no doubt that if the motion is successful, it will enable progress to be made on the Bill. I also have no doubt that progress on this Bill will be against the interests of the Scottish people and my constituents in Banff and Buchan. In Banff and Buchan, 92 per cent. of the people are opposed to the legislation. I cannot conceive of a situation where the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman)—he is keen on water privatisation—can have more knowledge than me about the views of my constituents. I would question whether the hon. Gentleman knows the difference between Peterhead and Portsoy.

Surely, when the Standing Orders of the House provide for exclusively Scottish legislation, hon. Members on both sides of the House should have the charity and understanding to allow exclusively Scottish matters to be debated exclusively by Scottish Members. We have a precedent in terms of the public Bill on legislation for Wales. It would be better if that precedent were followed in Scotland.

Some hon. Members will argue that the Chairman should have powers, otherwise the Government may move a guillotine. After yesterday's experience of five and a half hours' debate and the Government moving towards a guillotine, I thought that all hon. Members would realise that when the Government wish to move a guillotine, they will do so. The most effective way for Scottish Members and, indeed, Opposition Members to register their protest is to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the Standing Orders to deny the Chairman of the Committee powers which are otherwise restricted to Madam Speaker to order hon. Members off a Committee.

The key matter is the rights of Scottish Members as well as those of the Committee Chairman. If Scottish Members must accept the position where we are excluded from a Scottish Standing Committee so that five English Tory Members can be parachuted on it, not because of any qualifications that they may have in terms of the Standing Orders but as voting and Lobby fodder for the Tory Whips, surely we deny our own right as hon. Members to make our case against the gerrymandering of Scottish local government and against the pursuit of putting Scottish water into the private sector.

There is a specific Scottish interest which is recognised in the Standing Orders of the House. In arguing against this motion, I am doing no more than arguing that our Standing Orders should be respected with regard to Scottish legislation. It is possible for hon. Members who are opposed to the Bill to disagree on the specific tactics and to believe that the Chairman of the Committee should have powers. However, if it is not the place of Scottish Members to object to such an obvious injustice, what is our place in the House? What alternative do we have, knowing the make-up of the Committee?

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): Did the hon. Gentleman or anyone else in his party ask to be a member of the Committee debating the privatisation of the coal industry? If not, why not? The Scottish coal industry should be looked after by the people of Scotland. It is just as important as anything else.

Mr. Salmond: If the hon. Gentleman looks, he will see that the Liberal Democrats took the minority-party place on that Committee. Given that my hon. Friends and I put our names forward for the Scottish Standing Committee which we are discussing at present, I ask the hon. Gentleman to consider that it would be difficult for us simultaneously to nominate ourselves for another Committee.

Now that the hon. Gentleman has had a chance to consider the precedents and the objections that were raised by Labour Members in 1972, I thought that he would join us in arguing against the principle and practice of parachuting English Tory Members on the Committee. The hon. Gentleman has a substantial interest in the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill. Midlothian is one of the key issues before the Committee. How on earth can the hon. Gentleman accept the Midlothian boundaries being determined not by him, but by hon. Members representing Blackpool, Stroud and Leeds? The complexion of the Committee looks like the English football league, as opposed to a Scottish local government Committee.

The question is whether the Committee Chairman should have powers, and I say that he should not. Otherwise, Scottish hon. Members will find that the Bill and the Committee will be gerrymandered from under their feet. There is no other way to organise opposition to the Committee.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) is in his place. He has argued, I take it in all sincerity, that it is possible to persuade English Conservative hon. Members to rebel and to sacrifice their political careers to save Scottish local democracy. Is it likely that those five English Conservative Members who were chosen by the Whips will go on the Committee and rebel to save Scottish local government? I think that is highly implausible.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the question of parachuting hon. Members, could it be clarified whether a parachute was applied for by the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn)? When the name of the hon. and learned Gentleman was mentioned and it was suggested that the Minister did not want him to be a member of the Committee, there was a great shaking of the head from the Minister. Will the Minister now say what the position of the hon. and learned Gentleman was, because the Minister violently shook his head when the matter was raised? Could it be clarified whether the hon. and learned Gentleman wanted to be a Committee member or not?

Mr. Salmond *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. The House is moving quite a long way from what is a narrow motion. Will the hon. Gentleman who now has the Floor relate his speech more closely to the motion which is before the House and on which the House must make a decision?

Mr. Salmond: The question raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is pertinent, and perhaps he will have a chance to ask it at a later stage.

The motion, as you rightly say, Madam Speaker, concerns the question whether the Committee Chairman should have powers. My argument is that he should not.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): As the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, perhaps I may say something? I do not think that anybody on the Committee of Selection could forget the differences and the arguments which we had about the legislation. It was debatable whether the Government should have a majority of two or one, and in the end the Government have a majority of one.

[Sir Fergus Montgomery]

One of the hon. Gentleman's party colleagues wrote to me to suggest that all three Scottish National party Members should be on the Committee. I am afraid that I have not come across any Standing Committee that has the whole of one party's parliamentary representation serving on it.

The ratio for Committees is that the minority parties should have two Committee members. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), the spokesman for the minority parties, took that point on board and there is one member from the Liberal Democrat party and one from the SNP. As a reflection of those parties' numbers in the House, I would have thought that that was fair.

The hon. Gentleman said that he kept out of English matters, but I am afraid that all Scottish hon. Members do not. On a previous occasion on which the vexed question of Sunday trading was discussed, the legislation was defeated by the votes of Scottish hon. Members who denied my constituents their rights.

Mr. Salmond: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not making that point against me, as I did not vote on that legislation.

The hon. Gentleman has referred to Standing Order 86(2), which gives the Committee its guidance from the House. He will note that the first requirement placed on the Committee concerns not its composition, but the "qualifications" of Members. That is the first requirement which the House makes in the Standing Order.

My point is a simple one, but the hon. Gentleman did not answer it in his intervention: how on earth can English Conservatives hon. Members be qualified when there are even Scottish Conservatives whom he has not selected for the Committee?

Sir Fergus Montgomery: The Standing Orders say specifically that there must be at least 16 Committee members who represent Scottish constituencies, and that has happened with the Bill with which we are concerned.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman again fails to answer my question. What are the qualifications under the Standing Orders for the five English Conservative hon. Members? Incidentally, those five did not even turn up for the Second Reading debate. It is normally a prior requirement of the Committee of Selection that hon. Members should show an interest in the legislation.

Finally, Madam Speaker——

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): One of the hon. Gentleman's fears seems to be the threat of the guillotine hanging over the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill. May I give him some guidance? At a meeting in Edinburgh about two months ago, the parliamentary——

Madam Speaker: Order. I do not like to interrupt the hon. Member, but we are moving a long way from the subject with talk of whether there is to be a guillotine or whether there is not. The motion is narrow and concerns whether the Chairman should have the power to order an hon. Member who is not a member of the Committee to withdraw from the Committee Room. It is as narrow as that.

Mr. Salmond: I hope that you will accept, Madam Speaker, that, although I may have allowed——

Dr. Godman *rose*——

Mr. Salmond: Is it a point of order?

Madam Speaker: Or a point of frustration.

Dr. Godman: I am never frustrated with you, Madam Speaker, or with your pulling me into line. I was simply attempting to illustrate something for the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). I hope that I have your support for doing so.

Madam Speaker: When hon. Members give illustrations, they move a long way from the motion before us. I also have to take into account the business before the House today. I hope that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan will come to his conclusion, as I believe he said he would.

Mr. Salmond: I hope that you agree, Madam Speaker, that I have been sticking as closely as I can to the substance of the motion.

Madam Speaker: I agree. The hon. Gentleman has been doing so. Other Members have led him astray.

Mr. Salmond: Perhaps by giving way I have allowed myself to be diverted occasionally.

I want to come to the point of the resolution and to say why the Chairman of the Committee should not be given powers. The only effective way in which Scottish Members can protest against the Committee is by doing what I have done. It is not feasible to find another way to protect Scottish local democracy.

In support of that argument, let me cite the anonymous comments of a Labour Member in the *Scotland on Sunday* newspaper a week past Sunday. In reaction to the hon. Member for Hamilton, who believes that English Conservative Members on the Committee could be converted, that Labour Member said:

> "Everyone knows that that is not going to happen, but he"—

the hon. Member for Hamilton—

> "has raised expectations now and it is too late to water them down."

It is too late to water them down and it is the duty of Scottish Members to oppose the resolution and to ensure that they are seen not to accept the right of English Conservatives to gerrymander Scottish local government and to begin the privatisation of the Scottish water industry.

4.2 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I very much regret that we are having to have this debate and to devote valuable time to the antics of the Scottish National party when local government reorganisation and what the Government are doing to the water industry should be debated by the House and the Government's policies thus exposed.

This self-indulgent stunt today by the nationalists is a spectacular own goal for them and a huge bonus for a Government who are in deep and probably terminal trouble. Once again, just as they did last year when they voted with the Tories on the European Committee of the Regions, the Scottish nationalists have come to the Government's aid.

The Government do not need much of an excuse for introducing a guillotine and cutting sensible and reasonable debate in the House on any subject, including the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill—just look at what they are going to do to the Finance Bill this afternoon. At the instigation of the Scottish nationalists, we are having to debate this motion in place of discussions and possibly a vote on value added tax on fuel in the Finance Bill Committee.

Handing the Government, on a plate, the invaluable excuse of a wholly unnecessary delay in the Committee stage today was an act of pure tactical stupidity and political suicide by the Scottish National party. It seems that there is one iron law in Scottish politics—when the Government are in a hole, send for the nationalist firemen to bring them a ladder, and here they come.

I have a sense of déjà vu on this. Last year's Maastricht debate comes back to haunt me. Just before the debate on the Committee of the Regions, I stood in front of the Mace watching three Scottish nationalists wait until the Chamber drained of other Members. They were preparing to enter the Lobby with the Conservatives to defeat a Labour amendment that would have made it obligatory for the Government——

Madam Speaker: Order. That bears no relation whatever to the motion before us. I ask the hon. Gentleman, as I have asked other Back-Bench Members, to debate the motion.

Mr. Robertson: I appreciate your advice, Madam Speaker, and assure you that last year's betrayal of the Scottish people is relevant to the motion.

Madam Speaker: Order. It is my responsibility to determine the relevance of what the hon. Gentleman is saying to the motion before the House.

Mr. Robertson: In relation to the motion, as you rightly and properly direct me, Madam Speaker, Committee Chairmen have the power to exclude Members who are not Committee members. I support the motion and shall ask my hon. Friends to support it and give my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) that power, for the reasons that I am explaining.

Last year the nationalists, who instigated the move this morning and caused this debate, conspired to support the Government on the European Committee of the Regions. They are now conspiring again to get the butchery of Scottish local government through on time.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman has just said that he will go through the Conservative Lobby in a few moments. Will he recall when he did exactly the same thing in the early hours of the morning of 22 April, when he and his Labour Front Bench colleagues saved the Prime Minister's bacon on the referendum clause in the Maastricht Bill—

Madam Speaker: Order. These interventions are becoming irrelevancies.

Mr. Robertson: Not only irrelevant, but a complete diversion from a conspiracy which the nationalists conducted with the Government last year to defeat a Labour amendment.

The Bill on which the Committee is deliberating is bad for local government, local democracy and taxpayers in Scotland——

Madam Speaker: Order. I have already called the hon. Gentleman to order. We are concerned not about the Bill but about the fact that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) sought to sit on a Committee without the right to do so, and about the action of the Chairman of that Committee.

Mr. Robertson: It is important for that Committee to go ahead with its proceedings so that those matters can be considered. To do so requires the Committee Chairman to have those powers. I am explaining why those powers are necessary and why the arguments deployed by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) are irrelevant to the case and to the powers requested by the Chairman.

The nature of this bad Bill necessitates my argument that the Committee Chairman should have those powers. It is four Bills in one: on local government; on water quangoisation; on children's hearings; and on tourism reorganisation.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself, I shall give way in a moment.

Even if the Committee Chairman gets the powers which I hope the House will give him this afternoon, and even if we make brisk and proper progress in scrutinising the Bill, the Government know that there can be no justification for curtailing the Committee stage before May this year at the earliest. They know that it would be irresponsible and outrageous to guillotine the debates on water, children's hearings and the promotion of tourism, which is precisely why Opposition parties got together to maximise opposition against the Government on the Bill.

In giving the Chairman the power that he asks for, bearing in mind the arguments deployed by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan about why he should be on the Committee, it is important to remember how we have reached this stage. There was an agreement between the parties. The Opposition parties met and, because we were all united against the Bill, it was agreed that there would be an informal degree of co-operation among the Opposition parties in the Standing Committee considering the Bill.

We agreed to meet every Monday; we agreed that we would consider joint amendments and join forces on those parts of the Bill which we all agreed were against the interests of Scotland and its people. We discussed tactics for three weeks. The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) even congratulated Labour on the Government's self-inflicted delay, which was caused by the principled stand of my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) on the composition of the Committee.

However, last night the hon. Member for Angus, East did not make it to the joint committee; he did not come along because he was away conspiring with his leader, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, about how this year again they could do the Government's dirty work and get out of the political silage pit.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): If I understood him correctly, the hon. Gentleman said that I was away conspiring with my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond); but I did not meet my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan yesterday. That statement is therefore about as accurate as the rest of the

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

hon. Gentleman's speech. Is the hon. Gentleman now saying that such co-operation cannot exist? I have met him on those occasions and he knows that I sent my apologies to the meeting last night. I suggest that he would do better to concentrate his fire power on the Government. *[Interruption.]* The noise from the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends suggests that he withdraws all possible co-operation. Perhaps that was his master plan at the beginning.

Mr. Robertson: That is one of the feeblest excuses for not turning up to a meeting which was designed to maximise the discomfort of the Government but ended up with the Government having the huge comfort of a debate this afternoon that will delay the guillotine on the Standing Committee considering the Finance Bill.

Scottish National party Members were not around for the meeting that we had in Committee, nor for our meeting here. Nor were they here for the debate on the imposition of tax on air fares to parts of Scotland where people are crying out about it.

On behalf of his party, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan says that the disruption this morning was caused because he wants to serve on the Committee. The last time the hon. Gentleman served on a Scottish Standing Committee was on 10 November 1987. It was on the Scottish Development Agency Bill, it lasted for one morning session, and the hon. Gentleman did not raise a point of order about the fact that there was an English majority on that Committee.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan says that it is because he wants to delay the Committee stage of the Bill, but the hon. Member for Angus, East did not even know that the motion to report to the House was actually debatable and let it go. He was the only person in the Committee who voted at 10.46 not to adjourn the Committee. Presumably, he wanted to make progress on the Bill and keep it going for even longer.

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said that it is not right and proper to have English Members of Parliament parachuted on to the Committee, but the hon. Member for Angus, East serves on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs which has an inbuilt English Tory majority to make up the numbers.

When the House considered the poll tax Bill, there was no disruption by the then leader of the Scottish National party in Parliament and that point was not raised.

The nationalists say, as does the hon. Gentleman, that this is a brand new tactic, brilliant in its execution, which will not provoke an early guillotine, but it is a carbon copy of the self-indulgent opportunistic stunt that he and his hon. Friends pulled on 14 March 1989 on the Self-Governing Schools Etc. (Scotland) Bill. They lost a day's consideration in Committee and then the Government introduced a guillotine on the Self-Governing Schools Etc. (Scotland) Bill.

They say—not here, but outside the House—that they have more procedural tricks to play which are just as brilliant. Frankly, that is good news for the Government but bad news for Scottish local government and Scottish water.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: I am trying to make progress, Madam Speaker, but the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan keeps jumping up and down.

Mr. Salmond: Before the hon. Gentleman votes with the Conservatives, will he tell the House what progress he is making—according to his forecasts—in persuading English Conservatives to vote with him in the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill?

Mr. Robertson: On the night when the hon. Gentleman and his pals voted with the Tory Government, about 26 Tories voted with the Labour party to impose on the Government an obligation to have elected councillors on the Committee of the Regions. I am not making any prophecies as to whether the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) or others will see the benefits of the arguments in the Committee. That is a matter for the Committee. I make one prediction: as the SNP has not ended its co-operation with the Government, and as it has been helpful in the past, by gosh it is almost bound to be helpful in future.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Does not the hon. Gentleman agree wholeheartedly that this is a Parliament for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which includes Scotland, and therefore that my English colleagues and I have a perfect right to be on the Committee?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman was helpful during the Maastricht ratification process. Of course this is the United Kingdom Parliament. He has a right to be on the Committee. Nobody questions the right of English Tory Members who are on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, least of all the hon. Member for Angus, East who serves on it with them.

The motion before us is to give the Committee Chairman the power to exclude from its proceedings those who wish to indulge in this morning's stunt, to prevent other people from coming along and giving the Government an excuse or some vestige of respectability for the argument for an early guillotine. The nationalists will say and do anything to excuse their own stupidity. Just as they were rumbled and exposed throughout Scotland last year when they voted with the Tories on Maastricht, they will be exposed again this year. This morning's stunt was counter-productive and designed to get cheap publicity for the Scottish National party, which has always seemed to put its self-indulgence and tactical ineptitude before the real interests of the Scottish people.

The Scottish people want us to delay this bad Bill if we can, to get the verdict on it in the regional elections. They want us to destroy it if possible. That is the principal objective of the Labour party. They want us to change and improve it just in case it goes through on the ludicrously short timetable that the Government have set for it. Kindergarten parliamentary games will simply put advantage in the hands of the Government and we will have nothing to do with them. The nationalists want to divide the Opposition and, it would appear, to make life easy for the Government, as they constantly seem to want and desire. In that case, let them do it alone. But let them be conscious that they will bear the proper contempt of the people of Scotland if they do so. Therefore, I call on my hon. Friends to vote for the motion this afternoon.

4.17 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I believe that the House should support the motion. Everyone knows that, without the powers to remove disruptive Members, the Speaker would not be able to conduct business effectively within the Chamber. That is equally true of the Scottish Standing Committee. If it has those who are determined to cause trouble—we saw evidence of it this morning—the Chairman must have powers so that the Committee can get on with the important business of debating the issues before it. That is the same with the House. We should be getting on with today's business as well.

4.18 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I have listened carefully to the words of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). He said that he took a stand on the matter of principle that English Members in this Parliament should not be allowed to have any role in legislation that relates exclusively to Scotland. He then completely contradicted his principled stand by appealing to Members representing English constituencies, on both sides of the House, to join him in intervening in matters which relate exclusively to the people of Scotland, by denying the Chairman of the Committee the power to exclude Members who are in breach of Standing Orders. He really cannot have it both ways: he cannot tell English Members to stay away from Scottish debates, and then appeal to them to intervene directly in Scottish business to support the arguments that he tried to advance to the Welsh Committee.

I am prepared to accept the principle that hon. Members should be able to halt the proceedings of the House to defend a principle or to highlight an injustice; indeed, when my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) did precisely that during debate on the Housing (Scotland) Bill back in 1987, I supported him. There is, however, a limit to the number of times that such action can be repeated: eventually, other hon. Members will become sick of the constant halting of business, and the hon. Member responsible will begin to discredit his own principled position.

That is not just my view; it is the view of Scottish National party Members themselves. Let us consider the way in which exclusively Scottish business has been dealt with over the years. The Standing Committee considering what became the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990, for instance, consisted of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and four English Members representing English constituencies—and not a word of objection came from any Scottish National party Member.

It is a contradiction in terms. It seems that English Members cannot intervene in discussion of this Bill, although Scottish National party members did not object to such action on previous occasions. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan did not object to the involvement of English Members in the passage of the Scottish Development Agency Act 1987; the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) considered the Transport (Scotland) Bill—enacted in 1989—along with eight English Members, and uttered not a word of objection.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend and I both served in Comittee on the Bill to privatise the railways: I hope that we did a reasonable job in defending Scottish interests, along with other interests throughout the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend may recall that a place on that Committee —which was debating a matter of crucial importance to Scotland—was offered to the Scottish National party. The party turned down the offer, with the result that another place was filled by Labour.

Mr. McAllion: That is a fair point.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What is the essential difference between delaying a Bill and the Labour party's current policy of so-called non-co-operation?

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Gentleman must be patient; I shall deal with that point shortly.

It should be understood that the Scottish National party has a long tradition of refusing to serve on Committees. My predecessor as Member for Dundee, East—then chairman of the Scottish National party—turned down the chance to serve on the Scottish Select Committee; and I know that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has served on only one Committee in the six or seven years that he has been in the House.

Recently, the hon. Member for Angus, East was not even present for a vital vote in the Scottish Select Committee, in connection with the investigation of the Peterkin affair. Conservative Members, however, turned up to vote. I cannot use the word "hypocrisy", because it is not parliamentary; but a large dose of something very like hypocrisy is now emanating from the Scottish National party Bench.

When the House last debated a motion of this kind, it concerned the Self-Governing Schools Etc. (Scotland) Bill, enacted in 1989. Three Scottish National party members were ejected, and the House had to decide whether to give the Chairman power to exclude them.

At the time, the hon. Member for Angus, East explained why he thought that the Chairman should not be given that power, arguing that it was pointless to table amendments in Scottish Standing Committees, because the Government never accepted them—that the present Government simply could not be trusted. That was in 1989—a couple of years before certain hon. Members tried to make a deal with the Government by agreeing to support their opposition to a Labour amendment to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McAllion: I shall give way in a minute. I have not yet finished with the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman has learnt his lesson. He argues that we should oppose this motion as there is no point in Scottish Members tabling amendments to Scottish Bills; yet, in the case of this piece of legislation, there are amendments standing in his name, and no doubt he will argue that they should be supported in Committee.

If there is no point in tabling amendments, why has the hon. Gentleman done exactly that? I have spoken to members of a delegation from Scotland who have had discussions with the hon. Member for Angus, East. Their understanding is that the hon. Gentleman has given them an undertaking that he will support an amendment tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), who is a Tory.

Madam Speaker: Order. This is all very interesting, but it is not in order. If the hon. Gentleman wants to look at the terms of the motion before us, I will hand it to him. I hope that he will address his remarks to it.

Mr. McAllion: I am simply trying to deal with arguments that have been put to me by hon. Members who say that the motion should be opposed.

I shall give way to the hon. Member for Angus, East, as he seems to be getting rather agitated.

Mr. Welsh: What is the hon. Gentleman's standing in the Labour party? When he quoted me, he should have quoted also his hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), who pointed out that the Government simply did not accept amendments. I throw the matter back to the hon. Gentleman and to his hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson): which amendments to this Bill do they expect to be accepted? Which English Tories on the Committee does the hon. Gentleman expect to be able to convince about water boards or any other matter except boundaries? Which amendments, and which Tories?

Madam Speaker: Order. I now insist that the motion be debated correctly. Otherwise, I shall have to take steps in the matter.

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has argued that, as a matter of principle, we should oppose this motion. I am arguing that no principle is involved. Where principle is involved, hon. Members must be consistent in its defence. In this case, the Scottish National party has been wholly inconsistent. It is important that hon. Members understand this fact before responding to the appeal of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan.

Mr. Connarty: If we were not to give the Chair these powers, we could find ourselves having to deal with such indiscipline in the future. That possible difficulty is in addition to the loss of time today for debate on the Finance Bill. We ought not to lose very important time for discussion of such matters as value added tax on fuel and the Child Support Agency because of the behaviour of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend makes a very fair point.

The basic argument of the Scottish National party is that hon. Members who are serious about delaying the implementation of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill ought to continue to disrupt the proceedings. SNP Members believe that they can convince a majority of hon. Members. In essence, that would mean convincing Tories representing English constituencies that they should support moves to defeat the Government. That is clearly impractical: it simply will not happen.

The Bill contains 169 clauses and 14 schedules. It is two and a half times as big as any other Bill relating exclusively to Scotland. The Standing Committee spent 13 days on legislation dealing with housing in Scotland. The number of sittings was 24, and the number of hours spent was between 85 and 86. If the same principles were applied to this legislation, we could look forward to thirty-two and a half days in Committee, 60 sittings and more than 200 hours' debate. During that debate, we could expose the Government for what they are trying to do in Scotland, and seek to have some amendments accepted.

It must be remembered that the Government have a Committee majority of only one. They do not want to spend 200 hours knowing that a Division could be called at any moment. They would have to ensure that every Member was present. They are desperate for a guillotine, not only to curtail debate, shorten the timetable and enable them to hit their target of April 1995 for shadow elections to the new councils; but also to ensure that they will know when Divisions will occur, so that they can have their 12 Members present. They are desperate for an excuse for a guillotine on this Bill.

What has the SNP done? It has given the Government their excuse.

Dr. Godman: Two months ago, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), said in Edinburgh that this Bill would not be guillotined in Committee.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, but that was before the SNP handed the hon. Member for Eastwood an excuse on a plate.

The Government will now argue: "We cannot possibly deal with the Bill in Committee, because the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and his friends, and anyone who supports them in the Division, are out to wreck the Bill. We therefore need a guillotine and extended powers for the Chair."

It is important that people realise that this did not suddenly happen this morning: it has been months in planning. It was trailed during the Christmas recess, when the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan leaked information about what the SNP intended to do to Scottish Sunday newspapers. It was trailed in a press release issued yesterday by the hon. Member for Angus, East.

The SNP is in a desperate political situation. With the Government at an all-time low in Scotland, it cannot make any headway, because the Labour party has seen it off. The SNP's true purpose in opposing the motion is not to get at the Tory Government but to get at the major opposition to the Tory Government in Scotland—the Labour party. It seeks to fool the Scottish people that it is fighting the Bill and we are not, when the opposite is the truth.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said that my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) had been cheered to the echo by Tory Members. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan was cheered to the echo by Scottish Office Ministers and Conservative members of the Committee this morning.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan asks: what is the alternative? It is very clear—to get rid of the Tory Government and to establish a Scottish Parliament, and the way to do that is to elect a Labour Government.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby North) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 41.

Division No. 95] **[4.30 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*

Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Harry
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Godsiff, Roger
Goodl[illegible] Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Gunnell, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNamara, Kevin
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sheerman, Barry
Shaldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Tim Wood.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Cohen, Harry
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dafis, Cynog
Davidson, Ian
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*

Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lewis, Terry
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Parry, Robert
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly:—

The House divided: Ayes 491, Noes 10.

Division No. 96] **[4.43 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin-Walker, John
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Andrew F.
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bradley, Keith
Brandreth, Gyles
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chisholm, Malcolm
Churchill, Mr
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Cohen, Harry
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Denham, John
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Sir George
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Griffiths, W'n *(Bridgend)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Gunnell, John
Hague, William
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Henderson, Doug
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy

Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Rathbone, Tim
Raynsford, Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Simpson, Alan
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Sir Keith
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tipping, Paddy
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Turner, Dennis
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watson, Mike
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Parry, Robert
Rooney, Terry
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Welsh and
Mr. Cynog Dafis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Chairman of the First Scottish Standing Committee in respect of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill shall have power to order any Member who is not a member of the Committee to withdraw immediately from the Committee Room; and the Serjeant at Arms shall act on such orders as he may receive from the Chairman in pursuance of this order.

Regulation of Political Funding

4.59 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to regulate the system of funding of political parties; and for connected purposes.

I introduced a similar Bill in the previous Session. Events since then have made such a Bill even more relevant, especially in view of the excellent work being undertaken by the Home Affairs Select Committee. Much of the material on the subject has been brought together in Martin Linton's recent well-publicised pamphlet for the Institute for Public Policy Research, although I must stress that the Bill is not concerned with the state funding of political parties.

The Bill has three main aims. The first is to prohibit donations by foreign nationals who are not normally resident in this country, and by overseas companies and overseas Governments. The second is to ensure the recording and publication of donations above a certain limit; I suggest about £1,000, but I am not too tight on that. The third is to require political parties to publish income and expenditure accounts, in the way in which companies and trade unions do.

Those objectives should commend themselves beyond the Opposition Benches. We know that many Conservatives are becoming increasingly concerned about the lack of accounts and accountability in their own party. Even the Prime Minister does not seem to be fully informed. When I asked him at Question Time on 19 October about Tory party finances, he said:

"There are a great many secret sources and they are all cheese and wine parties up and down the country."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1993; Vol. 230, c. 144.]

There was £440,000 from Asil Nadir and hundreds of thousands, if not millions, from Greek shipowner John Latsis, Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka Shing and fugitive from justice and ex-Nissan boss Octav Botnar. That is a lot of big cheeses, let alone glasses of wine.

Perhaps the Prime Minister thinks that the dinners that he has been persuaded to put on again at No. 10 are just a few chums popping by for a snack. Perhaps his party officers do not tell him how the bite is put on subsequently for party funds. The Bill would help him to know how his party is funded, even if it would not help him to know other matters about his party. After all, his attitude is that we should not ask him because he is only the Prime Minister.

The Bill would also help the Tory party to dispel unjustified accusations about its funding. Tories have been very upset recently by the allegations by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) about Saudi funding. Open disclosure would clear that matter up; my proposed ban on foreign funding would have saved them from the embarrassment in the first place. We would not have to concern ourselves with the rumours which were circulating long before the current story on the Malaysian dam that there were payments into Tory party slush funds from Malaysian arms deals. Everything would be there in the open. We would not have to worry about whether funding had come from right-wing foundations in the United States or from the Government of Brunei. Is not it ridiculous that a major political party in this country should be dependent on money from people who cannot even vote in our elections? That is why the United States, Canada and most European countries ban foreign donations; we should follow their example.

At one of the famous Downing street dinners, almost half those present benefited from foreign domicile tax status, a nice little loophole that costs ordinary taxpayers £1 billion a year. It makes the United Kingdom one of only four western European countries—I say "countries" in inverted commas because the others are the Channel Islands, Luxembourg and Switzerland—which has that status. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), as Financial Secretary, initiated a review of that loophole. The initiative was stopped by the then Chanceller of the Exchequer, the present Prime Minister. I am sure that the recipients were grateful. We would like to know how grateful. How many pounds' worth of gratitude did they express?

For domestic donors, there is the honours system. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) rather pompously claims that honours cannot be sold because of the Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act 1925. However, some unkind person has noticed a rather strong —how can I put it delicately?—statistical correlation between companies' donations to the Tory party and honours to their chairmen and managing directors. If we knew about individual donations, we might be able to make an even better match.

The Tory party might say that we are being unfair: we should let the public know and we should let them draw their own conclusions. It is not only Opposition Members, but the public and Tory party members, who are concerned. I do not refer only to the Charter Group, which has been most prominent in the campaign for proper accounts. After all, the House passed a resolution in 1949 saying that political parties should have proper accounts. Perhaps it is time that we put that into practice. I refer also to individual Tory party members across the country. Membership of the Tory party is collapsing.

When, for example, it was revealed that party funds had been used to pay the legal expenses of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames in his attempts to evict an undesirable tenant, the vice-chairman of the Tory party estimated that the party had lost £500,000 in donations. Why should ordinary Tory party members fund such excesses? Why should they bother even with wine and cheese parties when they believe, probably rightly, that the super rich at home and abroad will bail the party out? That is why the Tories have become increasingly dependent on donations to central party funds—£7·5 million in 1989, £15·8 million in 1991 and a whopping £20·7 million in 1992.

It is also a matter of public concern that the Tories seem to be becoming increasingly cavalier about the few rules that we have. While attention has rightly been focused on the auditor's report on designated sales in Westminster, we should not forget the question marks over the financing of the Tory campaign in Westminster and the money that may have to be paid back on the instructions of the Charity Commission. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) is only too well aware of a similar undercover channelling of money to her opponent's campaign.

I remember the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 being debated because I was a member of the Committee. Conservative Members called for more detailed accounts. In their own affairs, however, it is clear that they claim the right to silence. In the recent debate on the Criminal Justice Bill, Tory spokesmen speaking on the so-called "right to silence" have been fond of the slogan: "Those who have nothing to hide have nothing to fear."

That is why they so strongly oppose these changes and that is why they claim the right to silence. They have a lot to hide.

I hope that the Bill and the Select Committee report will help to lift the corner slightly on the dark, sleazy world of Tory party finance and expose it to some scrutiny and sunlight. Sunlight, in the words of the American Supreme Court of Justice, is, in a democracy, the best disinfectant. We need to clean up political funding in this country; we need the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Spellar, Mrs. Barbara Roche, Mr. Mike O'Brien, Mr. David Winnick, Ms Angela Eagle, Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Mr. Gordon McMaster and Mr. Chris Mullin.

REGULATION OF POLITICAL FUNDING

Mr. John Spellar accordingly presented a Bill to regulate the system of funding of political parties; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 11 March, and to be printed. [Bill 40.]

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill (Allocation of Time)

5.7 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:—

Committee of the Whole House

1.—(1) The Proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

(2) When the Order of the Day is read for the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill, the Speaker shall leave the Chair without putting any Question and the House shall resolve itself into a Committee forthwith whether or not notice of an instruction to the Committee has been given; and Standing Order No. 64 (Committee of whole House on bill) shall not apply.

(3) Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to the proceedings to which this paragraph applies.

Standing Committee

2.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the remainder of the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill not later than 29th March.

(2) Proceedings at a sitting of the Standing Committee on 29th March may continue until Ten o'clock whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion, the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 30th March.

Report and Third Reading

3.—(1) The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the second of those days.

(2) On the first of those days, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall, notwithstanding sub-paragraph (a) of that paragraph, apply to the proceedings on the Bill for only one hour after Ten o'clock.

(3) The proceedings on Third Reading may be proceeded with at the conclusion of the proceedings on consideration, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the interval between stages of a Bill brought in on ways and means resolutions.

Business Committee

4.—(1) For the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on consideration such part of the allotted days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House its Resolution as to the proceedings on consideration of the Bill, and as to the allocation of time between those proceedings and proceedings on Third Reading, not later than 14th April.

(3) Any Resolution of the Business Committee may be varied by a further Report of the Committee under Standing Order No. 80, whether before or after 14th April and whether or not that Resolution has been agreed to by the House.

(4) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which proceedings on consideration are taken, but the Resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in that order.

Procedure in Standing Committee

5.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee, the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a Minister of the

[Mr. Tony Newton]

Crown, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

(3) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which proceedings are to be considered in the Standing Committee, but the Resolutions of the Business Sub-Committee may include alterations in that order.

Report of proceedings in Committee

6. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill, the Chairman shall report such of the Bill's provisions as were committed (or re-committed) to that Committee to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

7. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of proceedings on, the Bill shall be made in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time

8.—(1) On the first of the allotted days mentioned in paragraph 3, any period during which proceedings on the Bill may be proceeded with after Ten o'clock under paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) shall be in addition to the period of one hour mentioned in paragraph 3(2).

(2) If that allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion shall be added to the period of one hour.

Private business

9. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Procedure at time for conclusion of proceedings

10. For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or the Business Sub-Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or the Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, whether before the time so appointed or in pursuance of paragraph (a), the Question that the Clause of Schedule, or the Clause or Schedule as amended, be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper, whether in the name of a Minister of the Crown or not, which is moved or made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a motion so made for a new Clause or new Schedule, the Chairman or the Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

11.—(1) Proceedings under paragraph 10 of this Order shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(2) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(3) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a pe[illegible] equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

12.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order (including anything which might have been the subject of a report of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee) shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

(3) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

13. Nothing in this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order or Resolution applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order or Resolution; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

14.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

15. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee as agreed to by the Standing Committee;

"the Bill" means the Finance Bill;

"Resolution of the Business Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Committee as agreed to by the House.

I make no apology for moving the motion, although I do so with regret. The plain fact, as anyone who followed our proceedings yesterday would acknowledge, is that the tactics that were then pursued made the motion inevitable. Let me put my position in words that would be much approved of and appreciated by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), if he were able to be in his place:

> "I should have preferred that we completed our proceedings on the Finance Bill with no need for a timetable motion. I wish that the two sides of the House could have agreed on sensible arrangements for allocating what is by any standard a generous amount of time for the remaining stages of the Bill. That would have allowed us to complete our consideration of it in a sensible manner. Unfortunately, such an agreement proved to be unobtainable. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary sought such an understanding last week in discussion . . . but could not obtain it."—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1975; Vol. 887, c. 1288.]

My right hon. Friend the Chairman of the Procedure Committee would have appreciated those remarks because he was present when they were uttered. That was almost 20 years ago when the then Mr. Edward Short moved the guillotine motion on the Finance Bill of 1975. The only words that I have left out are the reference to the person with whom the then Chief Secretary had had discussions —my right hon. and learned Friend who is now Lord Howe. With the exception of that reference, if I had substituted the name of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the same words would apply exactly to the position that we have today.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before we continue, I should make it clear that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood).

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Leader of the House admit, that on that occasion when the Finance Bill was guillotined, there had already been 160 hours of debate in Committee? We have had precisely five hours in Committee on this Bill, which is the longest Finance Bill in history, containing 244 clauses and 24 schedules. We were only on the first clause.

Mr. Newton: First, the position then was not one in which the Opposition were declining co-operation of any kind on any matter. Secondly, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) said on Second Reading, against the background of obvious obstruction and delay that we saw yesterday, the case for an early guillotine is strengthened to ensure that this important and lengthy Bill is properly discussed.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does the Leader of the House accept that the motion is an affront to the British people? Does not he recognise that today, and throughout the Bill's passage, we are supposed to debate the largest tax hike in British history, but the Government are ramming the legislation through the House with a guillotine motion? That is an affront. How can he possibly come to House with the guillotine measure today?

Mr. Newton: I do not accept that it is an affront and I do not think that most hon. Members on either side of the House believe that it is. If the hon. Gentleman believes it, I will quote him the words of hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong), who I believe specially assists the Leader of the Opposition. In a debate a couple of years ago, the hon. Lady said that she agreed that

> "our rights"—

those of the Opposition—

> "are critical for democracy and civil rights. However, sitting all the hours available is not the most effective way in which to defend those rights. If the House cannot organise itself effectively, what right do we have to pretend that we can organise the rest of the country?"—[*Official Report*, 2 March 1992; Vol. 205, c. 110.]

That is the problem that I am addressing.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): We can consider the matter rather more coolly this afternoon than we could at 10.30 last night. The Leader of the House talks about obvious obstruction and delay. I sat through some of the debate yesterday afternoon and evening. We were talking about a totally new tax that has not been introduced before and that is a major innovation by the Government. I heard speeches that were not extensive, for example, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who has a great constituency interest in the proposal. My hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), who is here today, spoke for only 10 minutes and his constituency contains Glasgow airport. It was a genuine debate conducted by hon. Members with constituency concerns. Some of my hon. Friends did not even have the opportunity to voice their views on a major new tax. That is not obstruction; it is democracy and debate, which is what we are not getting from the Government.

Mr. Newton: I shall have one or two comments to make about yesterday's debate later.

Let me make it clear, as I did on the last occasion when such a motion proved necessary on a Bill in this Session, that we have not arrived at this position for any want of effort by my right hon. and hon. Friends to achieve agreement on how the Bill should proceed sensibly. As the House knows, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary wrote to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) before Second Reading to suggest arrangements that were very much in line with the conventions of recent years. Those would have provided for two full days in Committee of the whole House to discuss clauses that the Opposition seemed likely to think were appropriate for that forum rather than for a Standing Committee.

The reply that my right hon. Friend received was swift, short and sharp—I can readily record it in full. The letter stated:

> "Dear Michael
>
> Thank you for your letter of 20th January.
>
> As you rightly say the Opposition is not willing to enter into informal discussions this year.
>
> I have passed a copy of your letter to the Chief Whip."

Despite that rebuff, we continued to do everything that we could to act in a reasonable way. We did not seek to use the Opposition's attitude as a pretext for guillotining the Bill at once or for taking all of it in Committee, as we could have sought to do. We took account of the views of those who were prepared to discuss the proposals—the Liberal Democrats—in deciding which clauses to commit to the days on the Floor of the House. My right hon. Friend wrote once again to the hon. Lady to keep her informed of our proposal.

Even then our efforts did not cease; on the contrary, further contacts were made, which I have no reason to doubt were conducted in good faith. They led us to believe that, in practice, the business could be handled in a sensible way and in line with precedent and reasonable expectation, with the debate on clause 28 running until about 7 pm and debate on clause 46 running until about [illegible] pm.

My right hon. and hon. Friends could not have done more to avoid the need for the motion. Unhappily, the only

[Mr. Newton]

return that they had for their endeavours was what we saw yesterday. Anyone looking into the Chamber would have realised that yesterday's events were a transparent exercise in artificially extending debate. It became clear that there was no serious prospect of this important Bill being discussed in the way that most hon. Members would like and those outside the House are entitled to expect.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Has the Leader of the House looked at today's *Hansard* and read the comments and statements made by Opposition Members, which I felt were serious? Five million passengers come into Glasgow airport. We are working to increase that number to 8 million. More than £400 million will be spent locally to make the place vibrant once again after the 14 years of Tory Government. It is important that a new tax receives a full hearing. My constituents demand it. The 15,000 people who work in Glasgow airport—and I am sure the hundreds of thousands who work at other airports—wish to see a full debate in Parliament. Yesterday's three hours of debate were not a lot to offer those folk.

Mr. Newton: There is no doubt that we fully accept that the tax proposal deserved proper debate. It could and should have had proper debate in the time that we had expected to it to take. I understand that, when the Front Bench team had finished their speeches at about 5.30 pm, there were only four Labour Back Benchers in the House and there was widespread doubt as to whether the debate could be kept going until 7 pm. Of those hon. Members who spoke later, many—four, I believe—were among those who had not been present at the outset of the Back Bench debate. Several of them made speeches ranging from lengths of half an hour to, at the extreme, 50 minutes. I am not suggesting that it was unreasonable for hon. Members to make speeches. I am saying that, as a matter of judgment—having been here for part of the time myself, having followed the debate on the screens, and having talked to some of my hon. Friends who were in the Chamber—I know that there could be no doubt in the mind of any reasonable person that the debate was deliberately spun out and delayed.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central) *rose*——

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles) *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who spoke for 50 minutes yesterday.

Mr. Macdonald: I apologised to Madam Speaker in advance for not being able to be present for the beginning of yesterday's debate. I was coming down from my constituency, which the Leader of the House may realise is quite some distance from here. In my speech, I tried to elicit an explanation of why, in his Budget speech, the Chancellor suggested that the Scottish islands would be exempt when detailed scrutiny of the Budget showed that there was no such exemption. We are still waiting for an answer.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair argument about his constituency interest, but as my right hon. and hon. Friends have just said, he has just managed in less than a minute to make the point that took him 50 minutes last night. That tells us something about what was going on.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and then to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm). Then I must make some progress.

Mr. Illsley: Yesterday the Leader of the House referred to an agreement having been reached, and just now he referred to contacts and the possibility of agreement on the progress of the Bill. As the Opposition Treasury Whip, I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that as far as I am concerned there was no contact and no agreement whatever about the handling of the debate last night. There had been no contact with the Whips Office and no agreement.

Mr. Newton: That emerged clearly from the course of events yesterday. Nevertheless, what I have been told by my hon. Friends was told to me in good faith and I have no doubt that such contacts as took place took place in good faith. I am simply stating our perspective on those matters.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is quite common for the Government to timetable business to take place after 10 o'clock at night and also common for hon. Members on both sides of the House to speak for 50 minutes or more? Why does he single out yesterday evening and say that there was something unusual about it? I spoke for only 10 minutes, so I take it that that would be accepted as proof that I was not engaged in any plot. I have no particular constituency interest in the tax, but my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) has a very special constituency interest and it is perfectly understandable that he should have spoken for 50 minutes, and also that he could not be present for the beginning of the debate. Why have the Government overreacted in this way? We know what the answer is, but could we have an explanation from the Government?

Mr. Newton: I have already acknowledged the constituency interest of the hon. Member for Western Isles. I also said that he could have made his point a great deal more crisply—as indeed he has just demonstrated.

In response to the other objections, I make the point that while I have been Leader of the House, among the main pressures exerted on me by many hon. Members on both sides of the House—not, I accept, by all hon. Members—have been requests that I take steps to enable the House more regularly to finish its business at 10 o'clock rather than continuing late into the night.

The motion therefore provides for the orderly completion of discussion of the clauses committed to the whole House by 10 o'clock tonight. That fulfils our commitment to provide two full days on the Floor of the House. Of course, the less time that is taken on the motion, the more time there will be for discussion of the clauses themselves.

The motion goes on to provide for proceedings in the Standing Committee to be concluded by 29 March—the Tuesday before Easter, eight weeks from today—and then to provide for two days, which would of course be after Easter, for Report and Third Reading.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): In view of the obvious obstruction that we saw yesterday in the Chamber—[HON. MEMBERS: "What obstruction?"]—and the declared tactics of the Opposition to continue it, will my right hon. Friend give the House an undertaking that if that obstruction continues in Committee he will introduce a further motion to ensure adequate debate of all clauses in Committee?

Mr. Newton: The motion provides for the establishment of a Business Sub-Committee to do precisely that in Committee, and in due course for a Business Committee when the Bill returns to the Floor of the House.

For both Committee and remaining stages, our proposals are entirely consistent with what has been achieved by other means when the affairs of the House have been conducted more normally and with giving a full and proper opportunity for discussion of the Bill. To underline that fact, I might add that of the past six normal Finance Bills—I exclude the Bill that was debated in the rather special circumstances immediately before the 1992 election—the time taken in Standing Committee was respectively 14 days, 13, days, 11 days, nine days, seven days and 10 days.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Bill is twice as long.

Mr. Newton: If the motion were accepted, and the Standing Committee were to sit on Tuesdays and Thursdays from now to the finishing date that I have set —*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am somewhat tired of repeated sedentary interruptions.

Mr. Newton: The Committee would sit for 16 days, which would be the most days spent on any Finance Bill during that period.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Newton: May I finish this point?

That would provide for about 100 hours to be spent considering the Bill, which compares with 70 hours last year. The provision for remaining stages is precisely the same as that for all six Finance Bills that I have mentioned.

Mr. Illsley: I understood the Leader of the House to say that the Standing Committee on the Finance Bill last year sat for 10 days. I checked with the Library yesterday and the Finance Bill 1993 had three days on the Floor of the House and 17 sittings in Standing Committee. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with that? Does he mean 10 sittings, or what? Last year there were 17 sittings—17 separate days in Committee.

Mr. Newton: The Bill certainly had three days on the Floor of the House, but my information is that it had 10 days in Standing Committee—of course, the number of sittings could embrace more than one sitting in a day. The figure of 10 days for last year compares with 16 days this year, under the motion before the House.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I give way to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Leader of the House tell us which of the previous Finance Bills included totally new taxation, such as the airline tax, the tax on insurance and all the other taxes? This year's Finance Bill is revolutionary in many ways, quite different from the others that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Mr. Newton: There were substantial proposals in all those Bills. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's argument stands up.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and then I shall try to bring my speech to an end.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the Leader of the House accept that the Bill is twice the normal size? It contains 244 clauses, as against—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends tell me that it is 40 per cent. longer. Surely that requires additional time for hon. Members to debate the Bill.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman maintains that yesterday a small number of Members gave long speeches. That is the basis on which he justifies the guillotine motion —[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That is what he told us.

Mr. Foulkes: He said it was a deliberate filibuster.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why does he think that four or five long speeches should prevent another 635 Members of Parliament from reasonably debating a Bill in the House of Commons? Why should that small number dictate to others in the House whether the Bill is properly debated?

Mr. Newton: First, let me make it clear that I rest my case on the combination of factors on which I touched in my speech—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Justifiably, the nature and length of some of the speeches yesterday, and the fact that some were made by hon. Members who, so far as I am aware, had not even attended the beginning of the debate, have been taken into account.

As for the length of the Bill, my information is that this year's Bill is 417 pages long and last year's was 296. My Treasury colleagues, whose instant maths is obviously better than mine, tell me that this year's Bill is 40 per cent. longer. That sounds about right—and there will be 50 per cent. more time in Standing Committee.

As I said at the outset, I moved the motion with regret but without apology. In bringing my remarks to an end, I make a point that is often overlooked on such occasions, but which I believe is important. I accept unequivocally that it is right in arranging the business of the House to have due regard to the rights of the Opposition. Indeed, that is clearly reflected in the efforts that we made to achieve an understanding and in the way in which, even in the absence of any understanding, we have sought to follow precedent in the timetable proposed. However, I do not accept the proposition that sometimes seems implicit in the rhetoric deployed by the Opposition, which is that the rights of the Opposition are the same as the rights of Back Benchers or the rights of the House as a whole.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) made the point tellingly in his intervention last night, when he gave his eye-witness account of yesterday's proceedings and clearly said that he felt that his rights, as a Back Bencher wishing to take part in the debate on clause 46, had been infringed. In his judgment, what occurred was an abuse of the House.

[Mr. Newton]

As Leader of the House, I have a responsibility to Back Benchers on both sides of the House, not merely to the Opposition Front Bench. Above all, I have a responsibility to the House as a whole, to ensure that our business can be conducted in an orderly and sensible way, to fulfil the duty that we all share to those outside the House who will be affected by the measures that we discuss. The motion fulfils those responsibilities, and I commend it to the House.

5.28 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I listened with some amazement to the closing words of the Lord President. I do not understand how he had the gall to stand at the Dispatch Box and talk about his responsibility to the House and to Back Benchers on both sides for the orderly scrutiny of debate. He has abrogated that responsibility utterly by moving this motion.

Some days ago, the Chief Secretary made a speech in which he deplored the cynicism that he perceived as prevalent in Britain today. That observation was received by most of the populace with hilarious incredulity, it being obvious to everyone else that, as far as the Government are concerned, cynicism, like charity, begins at home. Today, we have before us a classic reason why people are cynical.

The subject of this guillotine motion—taking all control of the debate out of the hands of Parliament and putting it in the hands of the Government—is the biggest single tax hike in British history: taxes on travel, taxes on work, taxes on income, taxes on insurance, taxes on home ownership, and taxes on fuel. For a typical family, that is an extra tax bill of £1,330 over the next two years. The taxes are being imposed because of the utter collapse of the Government's economic policy, and to pick up the tab for the Government's failure.

The purpose of the motion is not simply about taking control of the debate; it is about concealment—the Government think that, if they hide debate away, people will not notice the extra taxes they are paying—and cowardice. The Government are trying to run away from a further vote on value added tax on fuel.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Does the right hon. Lady realise that, if the timetable motion is passed and we have some sensible hours and sensible procedure for considering the measure, it is much more likely that interested parties outside will pay close attention to it? What is not likely is that, if we allow debate on the Bill to be extended into the early hours through filibustering, we will get a sensible discussion either in the House or among interested parties outside.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman should not have intervened at that point, because I had just made the case that the reason for the guillotine is not to allow sensible debate; rather, it is to curtail debate and to avoid a vote on VAT on fuel.

Mr. Stern: The right hon. Lady says that the Government are trying to avoid a further vote on VAT on fuel. The fact is that Labour Members have been soundly trounced every time we have voted on that subject. How much more punishment does the right hon. Lady want?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman has just agreed with me. The Government are worried about a debate and vote on VAT on fuel, because they are concerned about the number of times that they can get their Members to support it.

The spectacle of the Lord President trying to defend these guillotines is getting ever more farcical. As I pointed out in the previous guillotine debate, Back Benchers on both sides of the House are here to examine the Government's legislation for mistakes and flaws, and to ensure, so far as we can, that their intentions are exposed and explained. To no legislation does that apply with greater force than legislation on the Budget. To no Budget does it apply with greater force than one that implements the biggest tax hike in British history. Increasingly, the Government are held in contempt, because they consistently treat others with contempt.

This is the fourth guillotine motion in the past four parliamentary weeks. *[Interruption.]* I am about to explain that to hon. Members. The Lord President justified the first guillotine by saying that there was no need to discuss the detail of a measure that had been announced months ago. He justified the second by saying that, although it had just been announced, the measure was beneficial in its net effect—that in itself is a highly dubious, probably untruthful, claim, which certainly deserves scrutiny. He justified the third by saying that it was an uncontroversial measure and that the debate—only a few hours—was taking too long.

The Lord President cannot make any one of those arguments for this guillotine motion. Even he cannot say that there is no need to discuss a Finance Bill of 244 clauses and 23 schedules—the longest Finance Bill in history, because it contains more taxes than almost any other Finance Bill. Even he cannot say that it is beneficial, when it puts up all our taxes—not to finance much-needed investment in Britain's future but to pay for the Government's failure in the past. He certainly cannot say that it is uncontroversial—either that every British family is picking up the bill, or where and how that money is being raised.

The right hon. Gentleman is being ridiculous when he pretends that the Bill has been debated for too long when only part of one parliamentary day has elapsed. All hon. Members know perfectly well that we intended to finish the second debate on insurance with dispatch last night and to deal today with another important issue—the increased income tax we all face, first, because of frozen personal allowances and, secondly, because of cuts in mortgage interest relief. That is a clear breach of the promises in the Government's fraudulent election manifesto.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) pointed out, on the two previous occasions when Finance Bills were guillotined—apart from debates on the Floor—they spent hours in Committee. In Committee, there were 62 hours on a 56-clause Bill and over 110 hours on a 53-clause Bill—the most recent occasion when a guillotine was imposed. That is not a few hours in Committee and on the Floor.

There is no justification for the precedent of a guillotine at this stage of the Finance Bill, or for its substance. While we can easily see that there is no justification, it is just as hard to see a reason for it. Today, the Lord President suggested, as he did last night, that there was undue and unusual delay in the first debate. He knows, and the whole House knows, that that is absolute claptrap.

It is not in the slightest degree unusual for the first debate to take longer than other debates on this or any other Bill. But overall, as the Lord President said, the previous seven or eight Finance Bills have been dealt with efficiently and expeditiously, although some debates have taken a good deal of time and others have taken less time.

Is the Lord President asking us to believe that yesterday evening he was shocked, stunned and dismayed by the perfectly ordinary spectacle of a debate until 10 pm, and that, when he hunted through his pockets, he happened to find about his person a four-page, carefully drafted guillotine motion? No one believes that. Why did the Lord President not say, as television cooks do, "And here's one I prepared earlier"?

All that matters to any Government is that they get their legislation through in reasonable consistency with their overall legislative programme and timetable. This Government had every reason to suppose that they would get this Bill through, consistent with a reasonable timetable and before Easter—the best possible reason, because we proclaimed to the world that we intended to force another vote on VAT on fuel before the proceedings are completed. Even the Government are not so incompetent that they are unaware that no such vote or debate can be held within the rules of the House once the tax is imposed on 1 April.

The Government knew perfectly well that, if we were to have another vote on VAT on fuel, they would have their Bill out of Committee before Easter. Not only did the Government know that that was our proclaimed intention; the clauses on which we intended to vote are on the Order Paper.

That means that, to ensure proper public scrutiny and coverage of this substantial Bill, the Committee might have to work some long hours into the night. But the Government claim that they are not trying to avoid parliamentary scrutiny, so they could have no objection to the Bill being properly dealt with, as long as it was expeditiously dealt with. The fact is—the evidence for this is on our side—that that is what we were trying to do.

The Government are trying to avoid either a full discussion on the scale that both sides of the House normally think is needed for a Bill of this length, or a vote on our amendment about VAT on fuel, or both. It has now become clear that it is a further vote on VAT from which the Government are trying to run away, because the Lord President said that he does not anticipate Report or Third Reading—of course, we want that vote on Report—until after Easter.

Mr. Newton: I want to be absolutely clear, because I have become a little puzzled by the drift of the right hon. Lady's argument. Is the case which she is presenting to the House that the Government have provided too much time for discussion of the Bill?

Mrs. Beckett: We have made it clear that the Bill could have come out of Committee before Easter, and that we would have sought to ensure that there was a reasonable debate within that time in Committee to scrutinise the whole Bill. The Lord President has tried to claim that the evidence of the debate so far in some way suggests that the Opposition are trying to obstruct the passage of the Bill. I am pointing out to him, the House and the country not only that there is no truth in that suggestion, but that he had every reason in the world to know that we intended to scrutinise the Bill properly, and to make sure that we had a vote on VAT before the Bill left the House.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): I am genuinely puzzled by what the right hon. Lady is saying. In what way does the imposition of a guillotine prevent a vote on VAT?

Mrs. Beckett: In my opening remarks, I deliberately used the words that the Government intended to "take control" of the timetable. That is clearly what they intend.

We had anticipated that we would be able to deal with the Bill, and then have a vote on VAT on the Floor of the House. That is a perfectly reasonable procedure, and that is why we are so suspicious about why the Government have tabled the guillotine. They either wish not to allow enough time to scrutinise the Bill reasonably in Committee and to curtail what otherwise might be a lengthy debate, or they want to take control of the timetable so that they can prevent Report taking place before Easter.

If we are being unduly suspicious, and if it is simply due to sheer incompetence that the Government have not appreciated that we wanted a debate on VAT before Easter, even though we said so repeatedly and even though the Order Paper confirms it, let the Lord President get to his feet now and say that he was in error. Let him say that he did not realise that the Opposition wanted to have a vote before Easter, and that he is perfectly prepared to allow Report and a vote on VAT before Easter. There would then be no difficulty.

I am perfectly happy to give way to any Minister who will give the House an explanation. No? Are there no volunteers? The question of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) has just been answered. The Government wish to take control of the timetable because they do not wish to have a vote on VAT and, after all, they are being perfectly consistent.

The Government would not let members of their own party discuss VAT on fuel at all at the Conservative party conference, and they do not want hon. Members to have a chance to vote for our new clause. The reason is quite simple. The clause contains a new and sensible proposal. It proposes that we delay the implementation of VAT on fuel for a year, and there are many Conservative Members who could perfectly well vote for such a clause.

Much has changed since those Conservative Members voted for VAT on fuel in the first place. We know that, in 1992, the Government wrote off nearly twice as much money in uncollected taxes as will be raised by VAT on fuel in the first year. That shows that there is always a choice, and that the Government have a choice whether they need to go ahead with the measure this year. Secondly, we have seen the compensation package which has been promised for the least well-off, and most hon. Members judge it to be wholly inadequate.

Thirdly, we now know that it is only one of a whole gaggle of new taxes. VAT on fuel was presented originally as an alternative to increased taxes on income, and we now know that it is in addition to increased taxes on income.

Fourthly, we have now been told by the Government and by the Financial Secretary that the tax package of which VAT on fuel forms a part—the biggest tax package in British history—could check the recovery which everyone in Britain wants to see.

[Mrs. Beckett]

Those are four good reasons for delaying VAT on fuel for a year, and four good reasons why the Government are afraid to have that vote.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Does the right hon. Lady understand that she is completely and utterly wrong on that point and, as usual, is well behind the times? Does she understand that the reason why Conservative Members are perfectly happy with VAT on fuel is the generous compensation package that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor introduced in the Budget, which satisfied Conservative Members and our constituents?

Mrs. Beckett: It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman say that, and I am sure that his constituents would be even more interested. His remarks do not wholly square with the letters that some of his hon. Friends have been sending.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise to my right hon. Friend for the interruption.

Bearing in mind the exchange that has just taken place, will you give some consideration during the next few minutes to whether you would be prepared to accept from anywhere in the House a manuscript amendment altering the date of Report from 29 March to 15 March? That would give the Government an opportunity to meet the point made by my right hon. Friend, and the Committee stage would then finish early enough for Report to take place before Good Friday. That is clearly a way out which would be acceptable to the Opposition. That would require you to accept a manuscript amendment for that date, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): That would have to be a matter for Madam Speaker herself to decide, not for me as her deputy.

Mrs. Beckett: That is most helpful, Madam Deputy Speaker. My strong advice to my hon. Friend is that he writes that a report should come back to the House before Easter into any motion or amendment which he might move. He would otherwise rely on the good faith of the Government, and I do not think that I need say more about that.

I was most interested that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) said that Conservative Members were delighted with the compensation package, and that they no longer had problems with VAT on fuel. First, may I tell him that we have received substantial petitions from people in his constituency complaining about the impostion of VAT on fuel. I am surprised if he has not also received the petitions.

Mr. Streeter *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Beckett: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's constituents did not think that it was worth while writing to him, and I must admit that I am beginning to see why. The hon. Gentleman's remarks about the happiness of Conservative Members do not square with letters that some of his hon. Friends have been sending to constituents, which some of those constituents are inconsiderately sending on to us.

One letter from a Conservative Member said, for example, that he was worried about VAT on fuel, and that he would have been delighted to vote against it. Owing to the incompetence of the Labour party, however, the hon. Gentleman did not have a chance. The hon. Member who wrote that letter has had one chance since that time, and he has not shown up in the Lobby to vote against it. The Opposition are willing to recognise that it may be difficult for that hon. Member, and we are prepared to give him a second chance. Why will the Government not do the same?

Sir Terence Higgins: I am still genuinely puzzled. If it would have been possible for the right hon. Lady to table an amendment on Report on VAT on fuel, why is she unable to do so in Committee on the Floor of the House?

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman is being disingenuous. We want a further vote on VAT on the Floor of the House with the whole House able to vote. We want the House as a whole, not merely those who serve on the Committee, to have an opportunity to defer it. We can only do that by bringing it back on Report.

Sir Terence Higgins: I genuinely do not understand. If the right hon. Lady were so anxious to have another vote on VAT on fuel, why did not she suggest that we have the vote in Committee on the Floor of the House?

Mrs. Beckett: We are not in that position. We must have a new clause to move this provision, and the means of doing that is to do so on Report. We provided the opportunity to vote on Second Reading, and we now want the opportunity of a new clause.

Sir Terence Higgins *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: I do not wish to continue to debate this subject with the right hon. Gentleman. He will readily acknowledge that what we are suggesting would certainly provide the means for the House to discuss and to reach a decision on the matter. The only thing which could prevent that is if, for some reason——

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: I do not really want to take more time, and I have given way many times. However, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Greenway: I have been listening carefully to what the right hon. Lady has said. The gist of it seems to be that it does not matter any more how much time is available for consideration of the Bill in Standing Committee and all the technical measures to which she has referred, so long as it is out of Committee in time for there to be the Report before Easter. Hon. Members who are concerned about proper debate—whether in Committee on the Floor of the House or Upstairs—want adequate time for discussion, and my right hon. Friend the Lord President has provided adequate time through this motion.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is missing the point completely. We believe that adequate time can be provided in Committee. It will not be easy, but it is possible, and it can be handled expeditiously and in the same way as previous Finance Bills. We do not have the hon. Gentleman's trust in the Government's good faith, however, or believe that that is what they intend to do; and I suspect that we, rather than the hon. Gentleman, will turn out to be correct. We believed and believe—it has been confirmed by this debate—that the Government moved the motion to take control of the Bill so that they can prevent Parliament from having an opportunity to decide on the matter.

It is strange to hear members of the Government talk —in this debate and on other guillotine motions on various measures—as if they were a popular Government, engaged only in carrying out the election pledges that they so recently made, and being unreasonably obstructed by the Opposition somehow misusing the procedures of the House.

In fact, they are a ludicrously incompetent Government —the most unpopular in modern times, and not because they have the courage to take hard decisions, as they claim, but because they did not have the courage to tell the country the truth about those decisions, for which, in any case, they always blame someone else; and because they are breaking all the election pledges they so recently made. Not only did the Government lack the courage and integrity to tell the truth about the state of Britain: they lack the integrity and courage to face the music now.

We are not misusing the procedures of the House, but are using them for the purpose for which they were intended—to hold an elected Government to account on behalf of the people who elected them. We shall continue to do so. They are a Government of weak men, with weak excuses, and a weakening hold on power.

5.51 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I beg to move, in paragraph 1(1), leave out 'Ten o'clock' and insert 'midnight'.

The amendment occurred to us last night, when we had precious little time—as did the rest of the House—to take account of the business statement. The Government have tabled ever more embellished guillotine motions. They could have taken into account—but did not—the fact that a matter of privilege would have to be discussed on the Floor of the House this afternoon. That has eaten into a good hour of the time allocated for consideration of the Finance Bill, although that time was already constrained. For that reason alone, the Leader of the House should be prepared to accept our modest amendment to enable another two hours of debate. It will allow only the amount of time that the Government thought reasonable before we lost time on the question of privilege.

It will seem wholly unreasonable if the Government set their face against this attempt to protect urgent consideration of brand new taxes and issues of fundamental importance in the Finance Bill. Those issues were considered important enough to be debated in a Committee of the whole House. As the House knows, this debate can continue for three hours, and we are likely to have to squeeze the three remaining substantial items into one and a half to two and a half hours of debate, which is totally unreasonable.

Although it is very much the least worst option, I am offering the Government a chance to give the House a more sensible timetable within which to debate the outstanding clauses on the Floor of the House before the Finance Bill goes into Committee. Unless the Leader of the House accepts that offer, I shall not feel able to support the guillotine motion.

We are in an extremely serious situation. I take a slightly different view from that of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). We are getting to the stage where it is not in the House's best interests to deal with matters in such an ad hoc way.

I particularly noted two things that the Leader of the House said. He thought that the timetable motion was inevitable, but I do not believe it was. The precedents that he quoted certainly do not enable him to argue that that is the case. No Finance Bill has ever been guillotined before the Committee stage, and this is a very serious situation. By definition, the Finance Bill is the most important legislation to be considered by the House during a Session. It is unacceptable for the Government to take the draconian step of casually guillotining it before it goes into Committee.

The Finance Bill is yet another measure to be guillotined. I repeat what I said during the last debate on a guillotine motion, because it is true—to date, every Bill that this House has referred to the House of Lords has been subject to a timetable motion.

The Leader of the House said that it was his duty to protect the rights of Members. That is true, but he is not doing so by responding willy-nilly and casually on an ad hoc basis. I understand that he is not in control of the context within which he is taking the action, but candidly it will not do to respond in this piecemeal fashion.

When the Finance Bill is dealt with in this way, the Government are entitled to say that the House is not being treated properly. The Leader of the House should look for a longer-term solution if he cannot get guarantees that the war of attrition that is going on over the heads of myself and my right hon. and hon. Friends will not continue indefinitely.

The House will require something systematic to be done to protect Members' interests. I do not say that lightly, because, if changes are made, they will be made for all time, but we are reaching the stage where such action must be taken. The right hon. Gentleman is not discharging his duties as Leader of the House unless he considers that option seriously. If he has a proposition, right hon. and hon. Members on the Liberal Democrat Benches will listen to him and carefully consider whatever action he feels is necessary.

I have a great deal of respect for the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), because I shadowed her in her social security days and in previous incarnations, but she owes the House more of an explanation about the end that the Opposition are pursuing through the disruption.

I perfectly understand that the Government should be given a hard time. I have said that I am in favour of doing so, within the normal rules and regulations of the House. One does not have to be a parliamentary strategic genius, however, to work out how one can bring this House to a grinding halt, especially if more than 200 Members of Parliament are willing to comply with one's request. One does not have to be clever: it is a very easy thing to do.

The House is teetering on the brink of grinding to a halt. If the official Opposition are intent on doing that, they have a duty to explain why—if they have a plan, they have not vouchsafed it to me. Perhaps there is some great strategic and clever game plan, but all I hear are stories leaked from the office of the Leader of the Opposition to the effect that the disruption will continue until the Euro-elections in June or July.

I hope to heaven that the Opposition know what they are doing, because the Government must get through their business. If that incontrovertible principle is not followed,

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

this place will descend into chaos. Such shenanigans puzzle and perplex people outside: they think that we are not doing the job we are paid to do when such an operation continues and the Government are forced to take action that is not in the short-term interests of the House.

Mrs. Beckett: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, but I am having difficulty following his point. I remind him, first, that the House of Commons is like any other institution or place of work—it works best when people seek to work with a reasonable degree of mutual respect, co-operation and good faith. Secondly, reasonable procedures were abandoned because the Government arbitrarily, without consultation or good reason, chose to impose a guillotine on two consecutive Bills. Nobody—not even the hon. Gentleman in his most charitable mode—can say that, since that date, the Government have not continued to treat the House with contempt.

The Lord President may talk about disruption because our debates take place until 10 o'clock at night, but the hon. Gentleman, at least, knows better than that.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is tit for tat—and where does it get us? The hon. Lady says that the Government acted scandalously. I was present during the debate on the guillotine motion, and I supported her on it. I am simply saying that I understand the analysis, but what is the prescription? What is she asking for? What needs to change so that we can return to what she considers the only sensible way to get the House to work? If the hon. Lady will say what she wants, I will say whether I am in favour of it, and we can get on with real life.

Mrs. Beckett: I am not prepared to tell the hon. Gentleman the acceptable price for a return to more normal relationships, but I am prepared to tell him that it stands out a mile that the Government are behaving unreasonably by continuing to introduce unprecedented guillotines.

Mr. Kirkwood: We must all be careful to measure exactly what we are trying to do. The Government hold all the cards, and we are not in a position to control matters, so if the official Opposition do not clarify their objective and if the Government are hit with a series of changes to the Standing Orders, they will not be easily reversed later.

The Lord President probably goes around with guillotine motions in his inside pocket. I bet that, if he turned out his wallet, it would contain draft changes to Standing Orders that are waiting to be used any minute now. The official Opposition are walking into an open trap if they do not realise that that is coming down the track, and continue this disruption without a specific time scale in mind. They will then deserve all they get.

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Gentleman says that the Leader of the House is walking around with draft amendments to Standing Orders in his pocket. If the Government intend to amend Standing Orders to force their business through the House, is that not another example of their treating the House with contempt?

Mr. Kirkwood: Again, that is tit for tat, but it does not help me. If the hon. Gentleman would say what he wanted, I could have a sensible discussion with him.

Mrs. Beckett: Exactly what does the hon. Gentleman suggest as an alternative? He has thought of a phrase—"tit for tat"—which he hopes will make him look statesmanlike. Does he suggest that we simply give in and say to the Government, "Oh well, never mind. Just carry on"?

Mr. Kirkwood: One of two things must happen: either the right hon. Lady will have to "give in", as she puts it, or she must say what she wants to achieve so that we know when she achieves it. I am trying to make sense of this matter, and simply saying that the House is in danger of grinding to a halt. The hon. Lady is as much to blame as the Government for bringing forward the Standing Orders amendment.

I did not mean to get drawn into such a discussion, but, as I have started, I shall finish it. If the Leader of the House makes changes on a piecemeal basis, such as a timetable motion here or there, with no checks or balances, the House will be worse off than it would be had we had the whole Jopling package. At least the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) gave us some return for the cost of timetable motions.

I happen to be in favour of timetable motions, and the sooner we can get our hands on some sensible amendments to the Jopling package the better. Although some of it is loopy, the vast majority is extremely sensible.

The House of Commons is in danger of spiralling out of control. There will be an unedifying spectacle as Front-Bench Members on both sides of the House blame each other for the ensuing chaos. That is not good enough. It is in the interests of neither the House nor taxpayers.

I apologise for having been drawn into that level of argument. None the less, the Government have proposed this guillotine motion prematurely. There is no rush to bring forward this legislation. When the Budget system changed, the date by which the provisional collection of taxes legislation must be completed was pushed back to 5 May. This is only 1 February, so what is the hurry? There is no need for the motion, which is why the case for this strict timetable motion was found wanting, and we should reject it.

As to whether a clause on VAT could be added, I am perplexed about why the Business Committee cannot meet and make arrangements for the timetable to accommodate that. If the official Opposition have the discipline to do so, they can simply stay ahead of that timetable by two or three days. They can then find the two or three days they need on the Floor of the House and, if they are really that bothered and can keep their troops in order, they will win a couple of days and can have the vote before Good Friday. So what is the problem? I wonder whether the official Opposition know what they are doing.

Nevertheless, unless we have an extra couple of hours' debate this evening, I cannot support the Government in the Lobbies on this guillotine motion.

6.7 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): I have now spoken on some 30 Finance Bills. On about half of those, I spoke as an Opposition Member or a Government Front-Bench Member. However, I have never previously spoken in a debate on a guillotine motion, but am provoked to do so for reasons similar to those of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—I am genuinely worried about how matters are developing.

On the point that I raised in an intervention with the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) about a vote on VAT on fuel, I still do not understand why, if she wants a vote on VAT on fuel, she could not have tabled a new clause for selection for debate on the Floor of the House. There is no reason why she should not have done that. The right hon. Lady may have felt that she could not have negotiated that if a total breakdown in the usual channels had taken place. That is a matter for speculation, but I see no technical reason—I speak with some experience in the matter—why, if the Opposition wish to engineer a debate on VAT on the Floor of the House in Committee, they should not have done so.

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman and I are clearly at cross purposes. We cannot table a new clause at this stage in the proceedings. The Government chose the topic, as they always do, for this stage of the Bill. *[Interruption.]* There are no usual channels at the moment. And even when that is done through the usual channels, the Government choose topics to be discussed on the Floor of the House. We usually try to reach a degree of accommodation, but they have the power.

Sir Terence Higgins: There is no reason why the right hon. Lady should not have tabled a new clause for debate in Committee and there is no reason why that new clause should not have been selected for debate on the Floor of the House. Of course, that requires some negotiation; if she is not prepared to operate the usual channels, it might be difficult and in that sense she is hoist by her own petard. I do not want to generate an antagonistic atmosphere because I am seeking to pour oil on troubled waters.

Mr. Rooker: The right hon. Gentleman has been here longer than I have. Before I came to the House, and when he was here, the entire Finance Bill Committee was taken on the Floor of the House. When the change was made to consider most of it in Standing Committee, it is clear from "Erskine May" that only the part of the Bill which received a Second Reading could be selected for debate by a Committee of the whole House. It is not within the remit of the Opposition or any hon. Member to dream up a new clause for a Committee of the whole House. That can be done only at the end of the Bill's consideration in Standing Committee. That decision was made when the present arrangements were put in place not to take the whole Committee stage on the Floor of the House.

Sir Terence Higgins: I would have to check on that, but I see no reason why it should not have been arranged through the usual channels.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is an argument between the two sides of the House as to whether it would have been possible for the Opposition to table a new clause which, through the usual channels, we could have brought to the Floor of the House during the consideration of the Bill by a Committee of the whole House. I seek your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to whether that would have been possible under the rules of order of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I certainly cannot make a ruling off the cuff now. I need time to ponder.

Sir Terence Higgins: As always, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you show great wisdom in these matters.

Mrs. Beckett: It is not our understanding of the procedure, but if the Financial Secretary is right, I repeat the offer that I made to him earlier. By tabling our new clauses and saying that we want to take them on Report, we are saying that we believe that it is possible to scrutinise the Bill, get the report back before Easter and have a debate and a vote on VAT. If the Financial Secretary has no problems with that, let him ensure that the Government do nothing to impede it. We are quite content with that.

Sir Terence Higgins: We may or may not be making progress, but I certainly hope that we shall.

I follow what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said and I do not consider that the current position is in the interests of the House. None the less, in the present overheated atmosphere I shall support my right hon. Friend's proposals for a guillotine. Otherwise, it is highly unlikely that we shall have any reasonable debate, but instead long debates at the beginning and short debates at the end of considering a massive Bill.

Mr. Macdonald: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I ask you to ponder a further point of order related to the previous one? If it is possible for us to discuss a new clause on the Floor of the House in Committee, does the present guillotine rule out a further day on the Floor of the House in Committee to discuss just such a new clause?

Sir Terence Higgins: I fear that my speech will be longer than I intended and I apologise for that.

Many of our strategic and tactical problems stem from the fact that in his Budget last spring my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) said that we would have a unified Budget the following autumn.

A decade ago, the Procedure Committee on finance, which I chaired, set out the arguments both ways and did not decide in favour of or against a unified Budget, but it was absolutely clear that before embarking on that course one needed massive and widespread consultation, especially on timing. Many of our problems stem directly from the fact that that did not happen. The consequences were that just before Christmas the Government found it necessary to guillotine two Bills because they did not have time to carry them through on schedule. As a result, they incensed the Opposition and created the present unsatisfactory situation.

That having been said, there is a case for reconsidering the whole issue of the unified Budget. The Opposition should have a responsibility—as do the Government, the Liberal Democrat party and all right hon. and hon. Members—for trying to get our annual financial programme back on a sensible basis. Until recently, we had three main occasions: the autumn statement, the public expenditure White Paper debate and the Budget. They have all been concertinad into a short period of time. Perhaps we shall have a couple of days on public expenditure just before the summer recess; none the less, the schedule is out of kilter.

Both sides of the House must have a sensible arrangement for a procedural basis. I am deeply concerned about what is happening at the moment, particularly on the broader question of timing. For example, the deadline for getting the Finance Bill through, which used to be 5 August, has been brought forward to 5 May. In other

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words, it has been brought forward by exactly the same amount as the Budget, but between the Budget and the deadline we have the Christmas recess—the Finance Bill may or may not be published before it—and the Easter recess.

The period for consultation for outside interests and so on is severely curtailed. There is no reason why the Budget and the deadline should have been brought forward to the same extent. There could have been a longer period, as was proposed by the Treasury Committee and the Procedure Committee, so that we could have a more reasonable time. I do not imagine that the Treasury will be on holiday on 5 May, so there is no desperate need to get the Bill through.

The unified Budget is an illusion. It is not a unified Budget in the sense of public expenditure and taxation being considered together. That is not even true in Government. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary takes the view that the effect of unification is to bring home to spending Ministers rather more appreciation of the tax implications of their proposals. That may be so, but we do not need a unified Budget for that purpose.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is still determining what is happening to taxation. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Security cannot say that he would like to spend more on something and so taxes should increase on something else: it is still all in the control of the Chancellor. The House is not in a position, as the Procedure Committee recently suggested, to put forward proposals on whether taxes or public expenditure should be increased. We are still in the traditional position where the House can only reduce them, so the Budget is not a unified Budget in that sense either.

In addition, we are supposed to be debating taxation and public expenditure together. We still have all the old traditional taxation debates, but there is no corresponding stream of debates on public expenditure. We have the Estimates days, which always fulfil a useful function, but there is no serious debate on individual items based on reports from individual Departments on which Select Committees could report and which could lead to a separate stream of debates on public expenditure, which would be sensible if we were really fulfilling our jobs.

This all gives one grave cause for concern against a background of the biggest Finance Bill ever. That is not disputed by anyone; it is the only two-volume Finance Bill ever.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Terence Higgins: No, I have been talking much too long and I shall make only one more major point.

The Select Committee on Procedure, the Treasury Committee and others have strongly advocated splitting the Bill into a taxes management Bill on the one hand, with the more political aspects of it on the other. I still believe that the arguments in favour of that are overwhelming and that the arguments against it, which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House put to the Procedure Committee, do not stand up. There is no great difficulty in splitting the Bill. We can both say which are technical matters and which are not. The reality is that some nasty things are hidden in parts of it—for example, retrospection and whether the Inland Revenue can examine accountants' records even though a mistake was made. The Bill contains a series of difficult items and also a lot of technical stuff.

One of the objections that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made against splitting the Bill was that it would have to have two Second Readings and two Report stages. It is seriously arguable—I have not thought about this until recently—whether one should not have the Budget and the Second Reading of the Finance Bill, split the Bill into two separate Committees, which could then consider the technical aspects as against the political aspects, bring it back for Report and then on to Third Reading. In the light of the timetable motion, I think that it is a bit late to do that, but it is important that we should seek to get the whole of our financial procedures on an even keel.

Mr. Illsley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Terence Higgins: With great respect, I am coming to my concluding remarks.

On balance, we have serious tactical problems, for the reasons that I have mentioned. It is important that we get the usual channels working as soon as possible. That is important not only for the immediate reasons of the Bill, but we must get the fundamental programme for the future consideration of our financial affairs on the right basis, which can happen only through consultation on both sides. The sooner that begins, the better.

6.21 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): This is the first occasion on which I have spoken in a debate on an allocation of time motion since I have been a Member of the House. There have been many opportunities to speak —far too many. I have held back until now because I have wanted to develop the point in my mind before bouncing it off the House of Commons.

What the Government are doing is an affront to parliamentary institutions and fulfils Lord Hailsham's idea about parliamentary dictatorship: one wins a general election, gets the parliamentary arithmetic and pushes through legislation regardless of the views inside or outside the Chamber. Of course, that means bad legislation. It also means that an Opposition can win the the debate but time after time they lose the vote; the Government arrogantly proceed. The guillotine motion is bad for those reasons and shows the arrogance of the Government in their approach to Parliament and democratic institutions. I believe that it is time that every Back-Bench Member of Parliament paused to consider whether we should take away from the Executive the capacity and power to decide what should be parliamentary business.

When I have discussed that concept with one or two of my colleagues, they have looked bewildered, because they have been brought up on the basic British constitution A-level and think that it cannot be done in the Westminster-style constitution. I disagree. It seems to me that we should have, in relation to the Finance Bill and other legislation, a Select Committee of senior Members of the House of Commons with whom the Government would negotiate, every year, "train paths" for legislation. They would not only discuss the amount of parliamentary time that is given to each Bill but also the volume of Bills. In my mind's eye I see a Select Committee, probably chaired by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) or the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen). They would be ideal candidates for the chairmanship of a Select Committee that was distanced from the Executive. Of course, there would be a parliamentary majority on it for the largest party, but nevertheless it would be able to decide how much legislation and at what pace and volume Parliament could and should allow for Government Bills.

That is different from Jopling, because he assumes that the parliamentary timetable of the business would still be dictated by the Government. It is that principle that we should consider breeching. It would make for a much better Parliament and better legislation. It would temper the excesses of Government and give them time and pause to determine whether legislation, in its entirety or in part, was prudent for the country or even their parliamentary fortunes. It is archaic that the business of the House, under the guillotine motion, should be dictated to us by the Lord President of the Council, who acts as judge and jury—he obviously had the Opposition in mind—and decides whether we are being tendentious, are filibustering, or that the quality of our speeches is fair. That is nonsense.

Let us consider the Lord President of the Council. The present incumbent of that office is quite a decent bloke. Contrary to his better judgment, since I have been here, he has been kind and courteous to me. No doubt he is kind to animals, too. Nevertheless, his office is wrong. That point has been brought home this afternoon by the fact that he can and does behave as judge and jury in this place on the quality and relevance of the speeches and the behaviour and performance of Members of Parliament. I would like to see that changed. In parenthesis, the title "Lord President of the Council" is also a nonsense. That grand title sends the wrong signals to people outside about the business of this place.

The other day I tabled a parliamentary question asking whether the right hon. Gentleman would set out in *Hansard* the Privy Council oath. He said no; it was secret. What a peculiar set up. We have a supposed open Government, yet we cannot know what is the Privy Council oath. The Lord President of the Council presides over such humbug and the business of this place. That is wrong. It is time that his office was reviewed and, in my view, swept away.

Reference has been made to yesterday's debate. The truth is that the Conservative party Whips said to their hon. Friends, "For goodness sake, do not get up. Do not come out of your corner fighting. We do not want to give an opportunity to the Opposition to explore the foolishness and consequences of the air passenger duty. Keep quiet." As a consequence, there was the apparent disparity that Opposition Member after Opposition Member spoke, but no Conservative Members came out of their corners to defend the proposal for which they were prepared to vote.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman probably knows that I spoke briefly in yesterday's debate precisely to lend my support to what the Government are doing with the air passenger duty. The fact is that the imbalance came about not because of any reticence on the Government side—we were merely following a disciplined approach—but because Opposition Members were speaking for too long and filibustering.

Mr. Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman has a number of distinguishing features, one of which is that, unlike his colleagues, in parliamentary terms he came out fighting. There was a dearth of hon. Members who were prepared to speak and defend that policy, particularly those whose constituencies are around regional airports or whose work force and the economy of their area are dependent on regional airports or the airline industry. I think that you, Mr. Morris, were in the Chair. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) used the occasion to suggest that the Government——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's memory is failing him.

Mr. Mackinlay: In that case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that you will take my word for it. On another occasion last night, the hon. Member for Torbay suggested that, in place of the tax under discussion, value added tax should be imposed on the package holiday industry. The body language of the Paymaster General suggested that he wanted the ground to swallow him up: he was acutely embarrassed.

Yesterday, Conservative speakers did not give the Government's policies sustained support. The message went out—I except the remarks of mavericks and of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) —that the Conservatives wanted to minimise the opportunity for debate, and to deny the Opposition a chance to explore and expose the foolishness of that tax proposal and others.

As has already been said, the Government fear a further airing of their proposal to impose VAT on domestic fuel, and of all the consequences for the poor and disadvantaged. They fear the political consequences, particularly in view of the approaching municipal and European elections. I am not a very sophisticated man, but let me advance a proposition: all that is required is an opportunity for the House to vote on the proposed imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. Not only Opposition Members but people outside want that. People want to know whether their Members of Parliament were for or against the proposal.

Earlier opportunities have been blurred by parliamentary procedures and the wording of motions. Ultimately, however, we want to know who supports the proposal, who is against it and who—among Conservative Members in particular—had the courage to oppose it, despite the party machine.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Will the hon. Gentleman explain why his party failed to table an amendment to the Budget debate back in December, which would have given hon. Members the opportunity to debate the proposal? Was the reason incompetence or forgetfulness—or both?

Mr. Mackinlay: You will observe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am being advised by my colleagues. I have candidly confessed that I am not a very sophisticated person: all I want is for the House to have an opportunity to decide whether it supports the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel—and, implicit in that, the ability of our constituents to run their fingers down the Division list and find out how their Members of Parliament voted.

There has been dispute about both the wording of motions on the issue of VAT on domestic fuel and the timing and structure of those debates; but we have had no opportunity to debate the issue in black and white. This guillotine motion is frustrating because it is preventing us

[Mr. Mackinlay]

from showing the electorate where we stand on this important matter. I would welcome the opportunity for the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), for instance, to go into the Lobby and vote on the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel: it would enable my hon. Friends and myself to point out to his constituents that he supported it.

I take a fairly ecumenical view of the Liberal Democrats outside the House. I have always said that the defeat of this Tory Government is of paramount importance, and that anyone who joins us in the Lobbies with the aim of defeating them is welcome. Having listened to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), however, I must add that his party must decide whether it seriously wants to frustrate the Government in their implementation of policies designed to disadvantage ordinary working people. More important, are the Liberal Democrats prepared to do all that they can to defeat the Government and bring forward the date of a general election?

In short, the Liberal Democrats must decide whether they are with us or against us. The speech of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire betrayed a confusion of thought. Liberal Democrats are trying to have it both ways. The challenge, or test, lies in whether they are prepared to vote with Labour on this issue and others between now and the general election, thus demonstrating that they oppose the Tory party. I hope that, in areas of the United Kingdom where the Liberal Democrats allegedly hope to maximise their majority over the Conservatives, potential Labour voters and others opposed to the Conservatives will note the ambiguous stance of Liberal Democrats in this debate and others.

The repeated use of the guillotine by the Leader of the House and his colleagues will ultimately prove foolish from the point of view of the Conservatives. They have been in office for so long that they see themselves as almost divine; few Conservative Members can envisage the day on which they might just be sitting over here. Two years from now there will be a Labour Government, and that Government will have an important duty: they will have to get through a bottleneck of legislation in a short time. After 14 years of Conservative government, we shall want to reverse many decisions—legitimately, because we shall have a mandate.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): More spending.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Chief Secretary may interrupt from a sedentary position, but we shall have a mandate. One thing that we have learnt over the past 15 years is the need to stick to the programme and press on. I hope that my hon. Friends will do that. I also hope that—because one of the hallmarks of the Labour party and its traditions is democracy—we will restrain ourselves from giving way to the legitimate temptation to behave as Conservative Members have behaved in recent years.

Mr. Portillo: Will the Labour party's mandate be to spend more, or to spend less?

Mr. Mackinlay: Our mandate will be to support and sustain Britain; to restore essential public services that are much missed by working people; to invest in our manufacturing base, which has haemorrhaged over the past 15 years—and much more.

Our capacity to right the wrongs of 15 years will, however, be limited by problems of parliamentary time. Nurses, teachers, parents, trade unionists and others, both in and out of work, will all be seeking remedies for the excesses of the Thatcher years and the era of the present Prime Minister. We shall be faced with the temptation of using the guillotine. I hope that we shall act with restraint; but Conservative Members might be prudent to reflect for a few moments on the fact that there will soon be a change of Government. Then decisions about parliamentary timetables, the use of the guillotine and appointments to boards and police authorities will be taken by my right hon. Friends. Because we are democrats, we shall refrain from the excesses demonstrated by the Lord President of the Council today, and for a long time before today.

I was not able to make the point when I was interrupted by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, but I say now that we shall review and modernise the United Kingdom's parliamentary institutions and constitutional structure. I may then be able to persuade my right hon. Friends to consider ways and means of ensuring that this legislature —in particular, Back-Bench Members—can influence the volume of legislation and the capacity to facilitate serious debate on legislation.

This Finance Bill is a monstrosity. There is not a stapler capable of going through it. Such is its size that it has had to be produced in two parts. Never before have we had a Finance Bill as thick as this one. When you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, became a Member of Parliament Bills were not printed on A4 paper. If the paper size had not been changed, this Bill would have had to be produced in four or five parts.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Ministers have claimed that the Bill is 40 per cent. longer. That figure is based on numbers of pages. The Finance Bill of 1993 had 69 clauses and 12 schedules, so that there was potential for 81 debates; this year's Bill has 244 clauses and 23 schedules —a total of 267 provisions. In other words, this measure is three times as big, in terms of number of provisions, as last year's. Here we have a further example of the Government's disgraceful conduct.

Mr. Mackinlay: My hon. Friend is right. Very often Members of Parliament are approached by constituents —people who have supported and sustained the Tory party over the years—with complaints about measures that they have discovered are on the statute book even though they have not been properly scrutinised in this House. An example is the Child Support Agency, which we are to debate tomorrow. An enormous number of my constituents——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As the hon. Gentleman has said, this matter is to be debated tomorrow.

Mr. Mackinlay: In the not-too-distant future this House will have to address itself to the effects of the Government's foolish behaviour in relation to the Child Support Agency.

Many constituents have told both Conservative and Labour Members quite openly that, although they voted Conservative at the last and previous general elections, they feel betrayed by the Government. To such people I have to say that Parliament is a peculiar place, that it is not geared up for detailed scrutiny of the plethora of legislation that the Conservative Government are railroading through. I have to admit that this will be a problem for the next Labour Government unless we are prepared for self-denial —as I am sure we shall be. In any case, we shall devolve power, and many matters will be dealt with by assemblies in Edinburgh and elsewhere.

The Lord President of the Council has complained about the behaviour of Opposition Members yesterday and about the content of their speeches. I have a complaint to throw back at the right hon. Gentleman. In the course of my few moments' speech last night on the proposed air passenger duty I challenged the Paymaster General to tell us whether there had been discussions with the Isle of Man Government about the impact of this tax on their affairs. I wanted to make the point that, even if there is no legal requirement, there is a constitutional convention that the Isle of Man Chief Minister and his colleagues are approached at an early stage and given an opportunity to make representations. The right hon. Gentleman was not listening when I tried to make that point.

I referred also to Northern Ireland and expressed regret at the absence of Northern Ireland Members. This measure certainly has an impact in their Province. The Paymaster General, in his winding-up speech, failed to respond to my points. This illustrates how, when we make legitimate points—sometimes in the form of questions—to Members on the Treasury Bench they are ignored.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is disappointed that I did not respond specifically to his points. In fact, I have had talks with the Isle of Man Minister about this tax. The reason for my not responding last night was that I was under very considerable pressure from both sides of the Committee at the end of a very long debate, in which I was speaking for the second time. A good many points—not just those of the hon. Gentleman—were left to be responded to at a later stage.

Mr. Mackinlay: No doubt the Paymaster General will deal with these points in Committee, where there will not be so many Members of Parliament as witnesses and to which the television cameras do not have access. It is not good enough for the right hon. Gentleman to say that he was under pressure. He wanted to get the debate over with the minimum contribution and the minimum defence of the Government's policy on the imposition of this tax.

I shall go into the Division Lobby in opposition to this guillotine motion because I believe, above all else, that the House of Commons is not scrutinising adequately the vast amount of legislation with which it has to deal. This makes a mockery of parliamentary democracy and produces bad legislation.

Mr. Newton: I have been resisting the temptation to get to my feet. Although I am prepared to pay the hon. Gentleman as many compliments as he pays me, I have to say that brevity is not notable among his many qualities. I want to draw attention to the apparent paradox between most of the contents of his speech during the last few minutes and the demand of his right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) that less time be provided for debate on the Bill.

Mr. Mackinlay: Either the Lord President of the Council is on a different planet or he has been listening to a different debate. The Labour party wants an opportunity to debate and expose the Government's proposal to impose value added tax on domestic fuel—a measure that will hit poor and disadvantaged people. We want our constituents to see who supported this decision and who opposed it.

When the Lord President interrupted me I was explaining why I shall oppose the guillotine motion. What the Government are doing makes a mockery of parliamentary democracy, and it is time to demonstrate that they are completely disregarding the people of this country. They are imposing taxes that will have an enormous impact on many individuals and many enterprises. What is being done will have a deleterious effect on manufacturing industry and on our capacity to export. It will be bad for Britain.

I look forward to the day when my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South is Lord President of the Council so that we may have a sensible and fair timetable for all legislation and may take the initiative of reviewing and revising our rather outdated parliamentary institutions and our rather old and inadequate constitutional structures. That day is not far away.

6.48 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I shall endeavour to be very brief. In the interests of allowing the debate to proceed rapidly, I do not intend to give way.

I listened carefully to the rather entertaining speech of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). At least one rather interesting and serious point lay behind much of his rhetoric: the House faces a choice between an approach to the management of our business that rests principally on the usual channels—parliamentary management by party duopoly, which is why the Liberals and nationalists have cause to complain from time to time—or greater control over the allocation of parliamentary time.

I think that, rationally, the Speaker should make more of such decisions. That would be an alternative approach. In other mature democracies, especially the United States, more responsibility for the allocation of time is given to the occupant of the chair. I am not advocating that solution, but there are other ways of proceeding, and perhaps in future the House will conclude that it is necessary to look more widely.

The debate is a bit like Hamlet without the Prince. The evil genius of the situation, whereby civilised conduct has apparently broken down between the two main parties, is the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), who is not in his place tonight but who has much more influence on such matters than even the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), dignified though she may be by the technical title of deputy Leader of the Opposition.

I had much sympathy for the speech of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who spoke much good sense about the timetabling of Government legislation and about the need fairly swiftly to adopt many of the solutions proposed in what is described as the Jopling package. I therefore hope that Ministers will consider that argument carefully to see whether that package can be implemented in agreement with the Opposition.

As the House knows, I took, part in yesterday's debate on the air passenger duty, which has some relevance to

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

what we are discussing. I was happy to support the Government, and I briefly explained why. I wanted to make a five-minute speech yesterday—that is what I had intended—but on checking the record I discovered that it lasted 13 minutes. The reason for that is germane to this debate, because, in what I had intended to be a five-minute speech, I felt it necessary and polite to take five interventions from Labour Members, which lengthened the speech from five minutes. That is but one example of the way in which Opposition Members were doing an operation.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forman: I said that I would not give way, because I want to make progress.

Opposition Members are perfectly entitled to do such an operation, but it is important that the House, the country and anybody listening to the debate realise that Conservative Back Benchers took a disciplined approach to yesterday's debate. I believe that only three Conservative Back Benchers spoke. My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General made two excellent speeches—one in opening the debate, in which he provided much essential information, and the second in winding up, in which he sought, with difficulty and against the clock, to answer some of the points that had been made. I make no criticism of the way in which Ministers performed their duties.

In general terms, it would be much better for the House to timetable its important legislation almost as a matter of course. That would have been sensible for this enormous Finance Bill, to whose length many hon. Members have referred. The arrangements proposed in the motion are, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, very generous. After all, it proposes 16 days and 32 sittings and, with well ordered debates, it should be perfectly possible to give all important aspects of the Bill serious consideration.

I would go further than that. I would support timetabling all Government Bills and it would make good sense to do so at an early stage of a Bill's passage. That would be better than the alternative suggested by the deputy Leader of the Opposition, when she said rather disingenuously that it is better to have waffle, filibuster and endless debate on minor points for hours and days—I have been involved in many such discussions—and to introduce a timetable later. It defies the purpose of a sensible timetable to introduce it later, because time is lost before it is introduced.

It would be much better for the quality of legislation, which concerns interests outside the House, and for the reputation of the House, if we timetabled all Government Bills, as has been proposed many times by Procedure Committees and others. If there is not sufficient political will in the House to do so, let us get back to sensible, grown-up working of the usual channels and see whether we can find ways, even at this late stage, of enabling the House to function more effectively. I hope that experience of recent events will contribute to a return to common sense, and that Opposition Members will grow up.

6.54 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): The Government have staggered on for quite a few months advancing vacuous arguments and offering feeble excuses, but they have reached new heights of feebleness and vacuity in relation to the two subjects that are relevant to this debate—justifying their tax position and this motion.

The Lord President advanced a series of arguments, if I can use that word, for the motion. His first was that the Labour party is deliberately obstructing the passage of the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) dealt adequately with that. We want a vote on the extension of VAT before 1 April, so there is no way in which we shall obstruct the Bill beyond that point. That is perfectly clear to the Government, so they have not a shred of evidence that we intend to obstruct the Bill.

The Lord President went on to deal with the length of speeches last night, and complained about one hon. Member who spoke for 50 minutes. Many Opposition Members spoke for 10 or 15 minutes—I spoke for 10—and my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) was singled out for criticism, but he had good reason to speak for 50 minutes, given the serious concerns of his constituents about the air passenger tax.

There is nothing unusual about hon. Members speaking for 50 minutes. Indeed, I wanted to speak in last Friday's debate on the Bank of England (Amendment) Bill, but was prevented from doing so by two Conservative Back Benchers, who spoke for more than an hour each. I did not make a point of order and say that deliberate filibusters were preventing me from speaking. We know that such things happen all the time, and many Conservative Members have good reasons for making long speeches.

That has long been respected in the House. I am told that, if we go back into history, we shall find that Members used to speak for longer than they do now. It is cant and hypocrisy for the Lord President to complain about one Member speaking for 50 minutes, when most of us were much briefer.

The next reason that the Lord President "advanced" was that it was wholly unreasonable for a debate to go beyond 10 pm. It takes some gall for the right hon. Gentleman to say that, given all the timetables he imposed on Maastricht, when debates went beyond 10 pm and 4 am, and when some even went beyond 10 am the next day. Everybody knows that the Government have timetabled many debates in the House to go beyond 10 o'clock.

It would seem perfectly reasonable for the Opposition to expect the debate to go beyond 10 pm when the usual three days for the Committee stage of the Finance Bill on the Floor of the House had been deliberately reduced to two by the Government. It was perfectly reasonable for the Opposition to expect a debate until 10 pm on the air passenger tax, and a debate thereafter on the insurance premium tax.

The final "argument" of the Lord President was that he is proposing the guillotine to protect the rights of poor, slighted Back Benchers. This was the most vacuous and feeble of his arguments, because what he is really saying is that he wants to allow time mainly for his own Back Benchers to discuss the insurance premium tax, the freezing of allowances and mortgage tax relief.

The motion allows Conservative and Labour Back Benchers and Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen and Ministers two hours to discuss those three matters. How can the right hon. Gentleman possibly expect anyone to take seriously his argument that he is trying to protect the rights of Back Benchers? Everyone knows the reason for that guillotine. The fundamental reason is—as we realise if we also consider the previous two guillotines—that the Government do not want to discuss tax.

It is not surprising that the Government do not want to discuss tax, because whenever they do so they come out with a series of vacuous arguments and feeble excuses. The Government do not want the people of the country to be reminded by the Opposition that they lied at the general election. They do not want people to be reminded that we are debating in the Finance Bill the biggest tax hike in British tax history.

That is a cause of considerable embarrassment to the Government, so the less time that is spent in the House debating those matters, the happier the Government are. They can troop round the television studios, as they have done for the past two weeks, presenting their feeble excuses when the Opposition are not there to point them out, but they do not want to come to the House and present the series of feeble excuses that they have been using during the past two weeks.

There are various versions of those excuses. I think that the Chancellor of the Exchequer started them off, by presenting the idea that somehow those tax increases are the result of economic circumstances—some unfortunate accident that came on the Government, beyond their control. That is so obviously fallacious that it does not even require a reply.

The Prime Minister's excuse is that he did not know what the economic situation was at the time of the election; he could not possibly know that he was going to have that big Budget deficit. Yet *The Sunday Times* made it absolutely clear on Sunday that, if he did not know, he should have known because many experts told him before the 1992 election.

The Chief Secretary prefers to use what one might call the law that, at any time, a Conservative Government will tax less than a Labour Government. That is the type of mantra that the Chief Secretary has propagated. Yet that proposition is unprovable, mainly because it fails to take account of the economic situation at any one time, but also because it fails to take account of the fact that the Labour party would tax in a fairer way, and would change the balance of taxation.

As to the state of the economy, two thirds of the deficit is the result of unemployment—that is what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development says—so the main reason for the high taxes imposed by the Government is the mess to which they have reduced the economy.

The next person in the Treasury Front-Bench team is the Financial Secretary, who, when I saw him interviewed on television, had given up any hope of trying to justify the tax position of the Government. Instead, he resorted to the argument, "Yes, people have to pay more taxation under the Government, but people's incomes have increased a lot since 1979, more than under Labour."

The simple reply to that is that the average increase in income between 1964 and 1979, a period when we had 11 years out of 15 of Labour government, was 10 per cent. greater than the average increase in income during the past 15 years. The other factor is that the income increases have been very uneven and unfair during the past 15 years. The Government's arguments therefore amount to nothing.

The final argument is one that all the Tory Back Benchers in chorus parrot at every Question Time—"But look at the rest of Europe. We are doing so much better than them, so all the Opposition's claims about economic incompetence cannot possibly be true." However, the snapshot view that they are suddenly trying to impose on us is one that they normally reject, for good reasons. It is impossible to consider an economic situation as a snapshot; it has to be considered throughout a period.

Let us take as an example a fairly reasonable period, from 1989—to be fair to the Government—when things were a bit better, to——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I was hoping that the hon. Gentleman was going to relate this to the guillotine motion. May I gently remind him that we are dealing with the guillotine motion?

Mr. Chisholm: I am sorry about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was pointing out that the Government did not want to have to bring their excuses to the House, in debate, where we would have the chance to shoot down their arguments and expose their flaws. However, I will not pursue that route any further. Perhaps, when we debate the substance of the Bill later, I will be able to develop that argument.

It is not surprising that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury does not want to have the television cameras in the House. He does not want the people of the country to hear the arguments and the debate that is taking place here, especially about taxation. As he is unable to remove the television cameras from the House, he wants to remove the debate from the House.

Apart from the fundamental desire to curtail debate in the House, the other reason that has been clearly stated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South and others is that the Government do not want to have another debate and another vote on VAT. An amendment has been tabled by the Labour party, asking for a year's delay, and that could be renewable a year later. That position should be put to the vote, so that the people of the country realise that all the claims and all the false concern of the Conservative party about VAT amount to nothing, and that it is hiding behind the smokescreen and the illusion of the compensation package. I criticised and, I hope, exposed that package on Second Reading last week.

I will therefore vote against the guillotine motion, because it is an attempt by the Government to take control of the Bill, when it should be in the control of the House as a whole.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I refer to you the headline in tonight's *Evening Standard:*

> "For God's sake give London the money: MPs plead for special status",

which purports to be a representation of the report of the Select Committee on the Environment, published this morning, on standard spending assessments. There is no truth whatever in the story, and I am greatly concerned that my Committee's report should be misrepresented by a newspaper in that way. I wonder, therefore, whether I could ask you to rule whether the story in question should be further investigated by the House to find out how it is possible to take action to deal with such gross distortions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret to tell the hon. Gentleman that that is not a matter for the Chair.

7.6 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): This motion for a timetable motion has inevitably attracted a wider debate and entertained the House a great deal. However, I shall return to the core of our consideration, which is a timetable motion about the Budget, and which, because it is about the Budget, is of some sensitivity for the House.

I was encouraged, when listening to the debate, by the growing acceptance of the wider issue of some automatic —albeit liberal—timetable arrangements for most of the legislation which comes before us. The debate revealed an interesting difference of opinion between those who prefer control of the timetabling arrangements to remain in the hands of the usual channels and people who are more radical, such as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and myself, who believe that this should be an opportunity for the control of the timetabling arrangements to rest with a Committee of the House or with some organisation other than the usual channels.

I hope that, out of the reservations and unhappiness about timetabling which were expressed in the debate, those wider considerations are there for a more fruitful use at some future time.

I shall also reply to the remarks of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire about the generally unsatisfactory state of our current affairs, which is characterised by the withdrawal of the usual facilities provided by the usual channels. Those delicate issues—those masonic mysteries—cannot easily be revealed to a wider public. That was shown this afternoon when, for a horrible moment, it looked as though the prospects of an agreed re-run of the debate about value added tax on fuel might be sensibly and reasonably canvassed before Madam Speaker herself. Quickly, the parties concerned adopted the posture of open disagreement, openly arrived at.

That is the unhappy situation in which we find ourselves and it is one in which there can be no prospect of a return to civilised conduct in this place, not for the sake of the convenience of hon. Members—not that that is a consideration to be disparaged—but for the full and effective operation of the House, for the drawing of a balance between Government and Opposition, between Front Bencher and Back Bencher and between the consideration of private Members' Bills and other legislation. All of that is part of the seamless robe that constitutes the usual channels and all of which, for one reason or another, has now fallen in desuetude. I shall say nothing about the factors that have given rise to this situation or, rather, I am not inclined to offer remedies but I should like to think I am speaking for many hon. Members who earnestly hope that something like street politics and rough common sense will break out.

Some believe that there are other motives behind the present situation. I agree that we mostly think of procedural disagreements having procedural change as an objective, but I accept at once that that has not always been the case. When the Labour Government were in office in 1950, the Conservative party engaged in the most vigorous harrying procedural tactics over the tabling of prayers. Folklore has it that it was material in securing the early demise of that Government. Certainly, that Government lasted no more than 18 months or so and their subsequent defeat ushered in 13 glorious years of Conservative rule. However, I have no wish to raise the temperature or perhaps even falsify the accounts of today's situation.

Some people believe that the use of procedural devices can secure political ends, but I very much doubt it. If we go through this rigmarole until after the Euro-elections, Conservative morale may not crack—heaven knows, we can generate enough difficulties of our own without any assistance from the Opposition's strategists—but Parliament will suffer, our procedures will suffer, the quality of our legislation will suffer, and above all, our reputation will suffer and such suffering cannot easily be redeemed.

7.12 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I reacted with astonishment to the disgraceful and reprehensible performance by the Leader of the House in moving to guillotine the Bill last night barely five hours into the Committee stage. As has been said many times, the Bill is not the usual Budget Bill because of its great length and the fact that it covers the first unified Budget. We have not considered such a Bill before. In such circumstances, I should have thought that we would want to ensure that we had the maximum opportunity to scrutinise this complex, technical and very long Bill.

The feeble attempts to justify what I regard as a constitutional outrage and a gross affront to Parliament are even less convincing today than they were at 10 pm yesterday. The guillotine motion is an attempt by the Government to run away from another vote on value added tax. It is worth remembering that "Erskine May" deals specifically with the allocation of time motion, describing it as

> "the most drastic method of curtailing debate known to procedure"

which

> "may be regarded as the extreme limit to which procedure goes in affirming the rights of the majority at the expense of the minorities of the House".

Yet all the legislation that we have discussed this Session has been guillotined—we seem to have a guillotine a week. There have been more guillotined debates on the Floor of the House than there have been debates on the content of legislation—that is the state to which the Leader of the House has brought us. "Erskine May" also states that guillotine motions are

> "capable of being used in such a way as to upset the balance . . . between the claims of business and the rights of debate."

I believe that the Leader of the House's action in seeking to curtail debate after a mere five hours in Committee upsets that balance.

No one doubts that Finance Bills are crucial. They are central to any Government's political and economic programme and are therefore of the greatest political significance. They are at the very heart of the parliamentary battle between Government and Opposition. A Government who failed to get the Finance Bill through the House could not hope to survive without calling a general election. Likewise, only the House has a voice in determining what levies should be placed on the people. It is our duty to do that job.

It was the attempts by unelected Members in another place to disrupt and delay a Government with a popular mandate by denying them their Finance Bill at the turn of the century which led directly to the special arrangements that now operate in this place for the scrutiny of such legislation. Neither the House of Lords nor the Sovereign can have any influence in these matters, which infinitely increases the duties imposed on us to do a proper job as we alone can scrutinise and amend the Bill. That makes the guillotining of a Finance Bill an especially unwelcome event and one which should not be undertaken merely for the greater comfort of the Government's business managers but only as a last resort in dire circumstances. I do not believe that the Leader of the House was in dire circumstances when he acted as he did last night.

The Government cannot argue that their precipitate rush to the guillotine procedure has any validity. To resort to a guillotine motion so quickly is, therefore, unforgivable and it is a complete abuse of the rights of Parliament, which should not be given away easily. In the sudden and disgraceful interruption of last night's proceedings, the Leader of the House quoted three examples of the guillotine being applied to Finance Bills, two under Labour Governments and one under a Conservative Government. The first was in 1967, the second in 1975 and the third in the election year of 1992 when, admittedly, the election was already upon us so it could be argued that there were special circumstances. In other words, the Conservative party had to legislate quickly for their irresponsible pre-election bribe which subsequently knocked the economy off course in time for it to feature in their election campaign which, I seem to recall, it did.

Let us take a closer look at the two Labour precedents claimed by the Leader of the House as justification for his action. In 1968, the Finance Bill had already been discussed in Standing Committee for no fewer than 62 hours prior to the guillotine motion being moved. That Bill contained 56 clauses whereas this Bill contains 244. At that time, Finance Bills were certainly shorter, so in considering the fact that there had been 62 hours of debate in Standing Committee before the guillotine was imposed it is necessary to bear in mind that the average time spent debating Finance Bills in the period 1951 to 1964 was 64 hours—only two hours short of the time already spent in consideration of that Bill. On this occasion, we had spent only five hours considering a much longer Bill in Committee prior to the guillotine motion being moved.

Even so, in 1968 the then Conservative Opposition were so outraged by the guillotine that the then hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds accused the Leader of the House, Lord Peart, of acting like a drawing room storm trooper. The attempt to guillotine the longest Finance Bill in history, which introduces the largest post-war tax hike, after only five hours in Committee and after consideration of only one of its 244 clauses and 23 schedules resembles a blitzkrieg rather than the antics of one paltry storm trooper. The shadow Leader of the House at that time, Edward du Cann, called the guillotine "shocking", "shameful", "deplorable" and "intolerable". He said:

> "It raises a larger amount of taxation than any other Finance Bill."—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1968; Vol. 765, c. 438.]

That is also the case in this Bill. He went on to say that the guillotining of a Finance Bill was

> "a situation which we would never have countenanced . . . We would not betray the trust which people put in the elected representatives of the majority party"—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1968; Vol. 765, c. 439.]

Perhaps he would not, but he is a Tory of the old school —his successors in the present discreditable Cabinet have, it seems, no such qualms. There is no betrayal of the electorate that the Conservative party will not countenance to save their own skins and to close sensible discussion of their appalling Budget betrayals.

The only other precedent for guillotining a Finance Bill, on 4 March 1975, offers even less comfort to the Leader of the House in his vain attempts to defend his indefensible actions of last night. When the guillotine was moved, that Bill had already been considered in Standing Committee for 160 hours, not five hours, and was being deliberately filibustered by the respectable Lord Howe and the Conservative Opposition in an attempt to destroy a proposal to implement the capital transfer tax.

Hon. Members may recall that the capital transfer tax would have raised revenue from those who were already well off and would have affected a small minority of well-off people. Decidedly, it did not affect all taxpayers like the Government's current tax proposals. There was another difference between that tax proposal and the proposals that we were attempting to scrutinise in the Bill. The Labour Government signalled their intention to introduce the capital transfer tax in their 1974 election manifesto and subsequently obtained a mandate from the electorate to do so. In the current case, the Government were elected by conning the people and by claiming that they would cut taxes, not increase them. Nowhere in their manifesto did it say that there would be 12 new tax increases, three completely new taxes and the application of VAT to fuel and power. Indeed, in the election campaign the Prime Minister explicitly rejected all suggestions that he would do that. Tonight's circumstances are therefore different from those which prevailed in 1975.

We attempted to scrutinise the Bill, albeit for five hours only before we were so rudely interrupted last night, because it contained huge tax increases worth £12 a week for the average family. In 1975, the Conservative party deliberately filibustered for 160 hours to destroy a tax on the rich of which the electorate has been told and had approved. How can the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, in his speech to the Thatcherite Conservative "Way Forward" group earlier in the month, deplore

> "the new British disease, the self-destructive sickness of national cynicism"

when his own Government treat Parliament and the electorate with such contempt? Instead of launching juvenile McCarthyite witch hunts about the new enemy within in an early bid for the succession, he should look to his own Government's behaviour for an explanation of the cynicism now abroad towards politicians. I can easily understand why people viewing the Government's disgraceful behaviour and their contempt for the public are turning to cynicism, which threatens our democratic institutions. Those cynical people have been made so by the disgraceful actions of a discredited Government.

We know the real reason behind the guillotine: it is a hidden agenda to prevent further discussion of VAT. The Government have been exposed as deceiving the public about their tax plans at the general election and as not being the party of low taxation. They are now running away from debates in Parliament on tax and closing down our opportunities to debate. That is why they imposed the guillotine. It has been a cynical and disgraceful effort.

Mr. Macdonald: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ms Eagle: I am just finishing. The motion sets a precedent which the Government may live to regret and Labour Members will oppose it for the reasons that I have set out.

7.25 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): My hon. Friends will know of my concern about the incessant use of the guillotine. That concern has been long-stated and I have tried to argue in most such debates—six in recent years—that it seems increasingly to have become an instrument of executive Government to control and manage the House. That is a matter of concern for us all because I recognise that, in the course of my life, it has not only been one-party government. Governments have alternated from side to side across the House. I see no reason why that bold tradition of the British people called democracy will not continue.

The arguments adduced by Conservative Members some 60 times since I have been in the House will, no doubt, be used against me at some later time should the Opposition become the Government.

It was not just the issue of the guillotine that I wanted to address. The motion touches on something to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) also referred—the withdrawal of the usual channels. It was not a seamless garment. At times I have thought of it more as a shroud under which we concealed and buried the vitality of the House. Reasonable people across the House may think that it is so intolerable that we cannot reach arrangements, that whatever the Executive bring forward is better than having no discussion or co-operation.

Any Member of the House can bring proceedings to a halt. We know that. I tried to advocate it during the passage of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. One could have objected to almost every non-debatable motion and brought the business to an end. Wisdom, in the form of my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North, advised me that I may alienate the House and that by frustrating the purposes of House I was not serving my own argument well. In that lies the resolution of such matters, to which the Opposition must address themselves. Do they really want to drive the Government into taking measures that I shall find loathsome, which many hon. Members will find distasteful, and which will so control the debates of the House as to affect the function which we serve? It is tolerance that makes the House work. We are 651 people with passions and beliefs. Why else did we enter into politics? We have an understanding of what we want for our country. If there is no co-operation in the management of business, we shall break the thing that is the only legitimate expression of the wishes and passions of our people, however poor that expression may be in the eyes of the people of country.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is more used to being abused by me. I would like to kick him and I do kick him because this is such a comprehensive motion. Should we give up to the Executive, through the Committee of Selection, the absolute determination of how we manage the House of Commons and the future legislation of this country? That must be wrong and it was not our purpose.

I would like to take issue with the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire on one point. There is a notion that runs around the Benches of the House—it is not one that I share and not one for which I can find a constitutional basis—that the Government must have their business. I have never heard of such a constitutional notion. It never arose in the House before. The only thing that the Government should have is the finance. With that, they can manage the country. That does not mean that I came here to support every jot of nonsense or every original idea and fantasy of a temporary member of the Executive who flitted through the House and perhaps took a job merely as an item on his curriculum vitae for a City position. I want and expect, as do the electorate of Aldridge-Brownhills and of the west midlands, hon. Members to look cautiously at every ambitious engagement of a Minister of the Crown. That is our function. I understand the anger of the Opposition Front-Bench Members at the motions tabled before Christmas. I hope that I expressed the views of many Conservatives about the way in which that business was conducted. Without tolerance and without understanding of the purpose of the House, the feud between Opposition Front-Bench Members and the Government will break that purpose.

Let us have a cheer for what we are. Let us really get together. I cannot believe that it serves the interests of Labour Front-Bench Members—I accept that it is not for me to judge those interests—to conduct matters in this way. The Opposition's attitude was clearly set out by the deputy leader of the Labour party when she was asked what she wanted and what was the point at which we could engage or re-engage in proper business. There was no answer; there is no answer from Opposition Front-Bench Members at the moment. Is it a great political engagement? Is this the means by which they believe that they can bring down the Government? I tell Labour Front-Bench Members this. There is a resolution among Conservative Members which will not permit the Government to be brought down in that way. The Government will be brought down, if they are ever brought down, by the British people voting in an election; that is the way in which it will be done.

I hope that Opposition Front-Bench Members will consider what they are doing in their attempt to break the Government. They will break the House of Commons and they will see, introduced and supported by Conservative Members, measures that cannot be in the interest of themselves, of the Government or of the country at large.

7.30 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): If, as a result of the present impasse, the interregnum and the breaking of the usual channels, there is a revolution in this place, and if we then take a fundamental look at the way in which we act on behalf of our constituents, I for one will say that that is a good day's work. Having switched off co-operation, there must be a legitimate reason to switch it back on. The Government must take that point on board.

I am not party to the discussions, so I do not want to go down the highways and byways, but I have described the political reality. Some of my constituents have said to me in the past couple of weeks, "Haven't you been opposing for the past 15 years, Jeff?" I say, "Yes, within the rules and procedures, archaic though they are, understood by few outside and not understood by everyone in the House."

I have come to the conclusion that our ability to scrutinise and to do a decent day's work on legislation on behalf of our constituents has diminished over the years.

I have been in Committee, both as a Front Bencher and as a Back Bencher, to do a serious job. Sometimes the Opposition have known the date by which they wanted to finish. It may have been part of the game plan to create a logjam later in the summer on matters totally unrelated to the legislation with which we were dealing. We wasted hour after hour. We missed debates on many key points; I do not deny that. We were forced into those circumstances because of the culture of this place, which is passed from one generation to another. No one says, "Stop. Why are we doing things in this way. Why do we have these Standing Orders? Is this the best way in which to promote and to scrutinise legislation?" We have never said, "Let us stop and have a look." If the interregnum provides that opportunity, it will be a good day's work.

The motion shows how quick the Government are to respond in the traditional way. If on the day set aside for Report there happens to be a delay in starting—an emergency debate, for example—there is injury time. However, there is no attempt to table a manuscript amendment to give us injury time of an hour and a half today, although time was legitimately taken up on the privilege motion.

What on earth was the House of Commons doing spending an hour and a half from 3.30 pm debating the archaic rule that the Chairman of a Standing Committee does not have the right to turf out someone who should not be in the Committee? Why did not the Leader of the House say, "Here is the new model Standing Order to stop that nonsense ever again taking up time on the Floor of the House"? That would be sensible, but nobody seems to follow through those issues. We are offered no injury time today even with the privilege motion. The Government could not have known about the privilege motion last night, but they could have made provision for injury time.

The Government's business was known about. There were to be three key debates on insurance, on the freezing of tax allowances—creating 400,000 more low-paid taxpayers—and on mortgage tax relief. I did not come to speak on the guillotine motion; I have not sought over the years to speak on such motions. There are good and bad reasons for guillotines. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) did an admirable job demolishing the Government's case on the 1975 Finance Bill. That Finance Bill did not follow a Budget and it is wrong to use it as an example in the generality of arguments about why this guillotine has had to be introduced. It was not an ordinary Finance Bill. The Budget followed it and there was then a Finance (No. 2) Bill to put into legislation the Chancellor's Budget resolutions and the Ways and Means resolutions.

We are offered three hours to debate the guillotine. This House follows Parkinson's law; if there is time available, it will be filled. The Opposition and the Government have sometimes sought for the convenience of everyone—the business—to say, "This does not need to go until 10 pm; it can be wrapped up earlier." The Whips say, "We can't have that. We have sent them away until 10 pm. They will not be back here to vote." It is beyond belief that we do not have the flexibility in our own procedures to come to a conclusion earlier on an issue. I make no complaint. The Leader of the House knows that the full three hours will be taken on a guillotine motion.

Mr. Newton: The previous guillotine that I moved applied to the Non-Domestic Rating Bill. The full three hours was not taken and, what is more, the Opposition could not fill the time for which the guillotine provided.

Mr. Rooker: That is a point of criticism. We are at fault if we do not fill all three hours. Yet I and my hon. Friends will be criticised if we take the full three hours to complain about the chopping down of debate. We shall be told that we have deprived ourselves of the opportunity to discuss the issues.

I did not originally come here to speak on the guillotine debate. I came because I wanted to make a brief speech on clause 72 and on the amendments. The clause concerns personal allowances and I wanted to make the point, at greater length than was possible on Second Reading, that the Government are creating 615 extra low-paid taxpayers in every constituency. That is the reality. I wanted to make that point at some length.

As I said on Second Reading, 13 Conservative Members have majorities of under 600 and there are 24 with majorities of under 1,200. They have a vested interest in knowing about clause 72. The new taxpayers will make the connection between the rows over the Budget, the rows over the withdrawal of co-operation in running the House and the fact that they are paying tax for the first time. The new taxpayers will be low-paid people because clause 72 will apply only to people earning between £60 and £70 a week. I shall be deprived of the opportunity to develop that point at length because of the guillotine motion.

There are three issues for debate. If we had an hour on each and then a vote—we would need to push the matter to a vote to register our protests effectively—we should have a total of three and three quarter hours. There will be two votes at the end of this debate because we shall also vote on the amendment which proposes that we should be able to debate the Bill until midnight. If that is carried, we shall have the extra two hours. I hope that we shall vote for that.

If I had had the opportunity to do so, I would have referred in complimentary terms to the Leader of the House. Perhaps we should not keep these files, but I dug out some debates from 1977 on the Finance Bill. There were some excellent speeches by the right hon. Gentleman about the need to raise income tax allowances and thresholds to protect people who were on the margin of paying tax. In those days he was an ally of mine and of my hon. Friend who is now the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), and he had some valuable things to say. Time has passed since then, and as the Government have now seen fit to renege on raising tax allowances two Budgets running, I thought that the right hon. Gentleman deserved to be reminded of that time.

The motion will also deprive us of the opportunity to discuss not only the extra tax on the low paid but the reduction in tax relief for the millions of people with mortgages. We shall not reach that debate. Those people will get less tax relief and will have to pay more for their mortgages, but Parliament will not have debated the issue, because of the guillotine motion, which gives no opportunity for hon. Members on either side of the House to deploy the case for or against.

Moreover, the motion gives no opportunity for those of us who argue, as I do, in favour of raising thresholds, to explain where the money might come from. When we argue for what is in effect a tax decrease, it behoves us to

[Mr. Rooker]

discuss where the money might be found to fund it. The Government have to balance the books and meet the £50 billion deficit that they have caused.

Under the rules of the House, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, neither Opposition nor Government Back Benchers can table amendments to raise taxes on individuals. We can table only amendments that would decrease taxes. That is why we need the opportunity of debate, not merely the opportunity to table amendments for the record. We need to be able to say that, although we ask for a tax reduction in one area, on balance there could be a tax increase somewhere else. As I said last week, one example would be an increase in tobacco tax—there is no disagreement between the parties about that. Hon. Members should not be deprived of the opportunity to debate such ideas.

If the draconian guillotine motion had not been introduced I would have wanted the chance to update some figures that I gave at the end of my speech on Second Reading. I was talking about the burden on the lowest fifth of income earners over the past decade, compared with that on the other four fifths of income earners, and I cited what were then the latest figures available—"Social Trends" for 1993, which the Government published a year ago. Since Second Reading the latest, 1994, edition of "Social Trends" has been published.

If I had had the opportunity I would have updated my statistics, although not in great detail, and explained what happened to the figures when the extra year since 1979 was added on. Of course, I cannot do that now, but it shows that by 1990-91, in real terms, the bottom fifth of income earners had had a 3 per cent. reduction in their median real income after housing expenses. Meanwhile, the next fifth of income earners had had a 12 per cent. increase, the middle fifth a 25 per cent. increase, and the next fifth a 34 per cent. increase. Finally, you will be astonished to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, between 1979 and 1990-91 the top fifth of income earners had a 49 per cent. increase in their real median income after housing costs had been taken into account.

I would have used the argument of fairness and said that some of the money to pay for the increase in tax thresholds, to relieve the burden on the low paid, could be found by taking a couple of per cent. off that 49 per cent. increase for the highest-paid one fifth of the population. I make no bones about that. The cake is there and the Government have set the size of it. I cannot make it grow, but I want to be positive rather than negative.

It is outrageous that both Opposition and Conservative Members have been deprived of the opportunity of speaking in those three key debates. We may manage to discuss the insurance premium tax, but, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that will take all the time until 10 o'clock. There can be no argument about that, because it is an important brand-new tax that deserves to be debated in the House.

I do not want to take all the rest of the time available, and there are only a few minutes left for the debate on this squalid guillotine motion. Last week, to the annoyance of Conservative Members, I made a point that I shall make again now, because it cannot be repeated often enough. The Government have a mandate in this place because they have more than half the votes here, but they have no mandate from the British public for such measures. They received the support of only one third of the total electorate in 1992; that is all that they got. With all their promises—their lies, as it turned out—they still managed to secure the support of only one third of the electorate. Translated into a percentage of those who could be bothered to go out and vote, that is still only 42 per cent.

The Government can claim no democratic legitimacy for the biggest tax hike in history. They cannot claim support at the ballot box. They can come to the House and try to shut us up and stop us talking about it, but if there is any justice, if the Leader of the House wanted to hold out an olive branch—it would behove the Government to do that, because they created the conditions for the present impasse, with their two Bills before Christmas—there are things that he could do to ameliorate the situation.

For example, the right hon. Gentleman could put the Opposition on the spot. He could meet the legitimate demands that he has heard for the past three hours to make possible a vote on VAT on fuel on the Floor of the House before 1 April. We would move heaven and earth to create those circumstances. We would not argue about time, or delay whatever business happened to be in front of us. It is not up to me, and I have no idea about the discussions, but if it were up to me I should be willing to give up an Opposition day for the Government to use for that purpose.

The Opposition cannot use Opposition days or Adjournment debates to change the law. People outside the House must understand that. It is not within the power of the Opposition to say, "It is our debate, so we shall decide what to do." Under the rules of the House we cannot do that, but the Government could, with our co-operation. That would earn some brownie points for the Government and I hope that the gesture would be reciprocated, because we are dealing with a key demand.

I believe that my hon. Friends are signalling to me to shut up because I have lost track of how much time is left. I shall gladly walk into the Lobby to vote against this unfair motion. The Government could have taken a more reasonable position, because they knew what the demands of the Opposition were, even though we are not operating through the usual channels. However, it is not too late. It would not be too late, even after the motion were passed, if the Government wanted to bring it back and amend it so that the Bill could be dealt with differently. We would not then come up against the impasse. But the Opposition will have even more reason to pursue our legitimate arguments against the Government if we see that they are not prepared to be reasonable on this matter.

7.47 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I welcome the opportunity to follow the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker).

Let us be clear what the debate is about: it is about a Government running scared, a Government who have broken their promises and who are now attempting to stifle debate. A Government who have lost all the arguments will do anything to avoid losing the vote. A Government who have trodden all over the people of Britain are now treading all over the House of Commons.

The guillotine motion marks a new low even by the Government's standards, because for the first time in history a Government are guillotining a Finance Bill before it has even gone into Standing Committee. For the first time in the history of the House a guillotine has been imposed when only one clause of the Finance Bill has been debated.

We should make no mistake about it: the timetable motion is a carefully planned cynical exercise designed to give the Government absolute control over the debates and the timing of votes on the Bill.

This guillotine has two simple objectives: to prevent the House from having the chance to vote down value added tax on gas and electricity before it comes into force on 1 April, and to close down the debate on tax increases. The Tories are running scared. They are scared of the people; they are scared of debate in this House; and they are scared of some of their own Back Benchers. They are scared of the people of this country because people are angry at the Government for putting up their taxes and at the unfairness of the Tory tax increases. People are angry that the Government have broken all of their promises.

The Government are scared of debate in this House because they have lost all the arguments. They have lost the arguments on taxes; they have lost the arguments on the economy; and they have lost the arguments on public services. They are scared of their own Back Benchers because they know that some fearful Tory Back Benchers have privately promised their constituents that, if only there was an opportunity, of course they would vote against VAT.

Labour has tabled a new clause which would delay the VAT on gas and electricity coming into effect for one year. But the Government's purpose in this timetable motion is to delay any debate on VAT or on our new clause until after 1 April when VAT would already be in force. The Leader of the House shakes his head. I challenge him to intervene in my speech and to put the record straight. He could take this opportunity to deny that if it is not true.

What we are saying to the House and to the country is that this squalid guillotine motion is an attempt by the Government to paper over the cracks in their ranks and to prevent their Back Benchers from having to make a choice on VAT.

Mr. Newton: If it is of any interest to the hon. Lady, may I say that what she has just said is flatly, totally and completely untrue. What is more, there are Labour Members who know that to be the case.

Ms Harman: We seem to be making some progress. Can the Leader of the House say on what occasion we will have the opportunity to discuss the new clause before 1 April?

Mr. Newton: I am not saying that that opportunity will arise. The hon. Lady suggested that the purpose of this motion was as she described it. That is untrue. We went into yesterday's debate in the expectation that some contacts that had taken place would bring about a position in which the Bill would proceed in a different way by agreement. By this time yesterday evening, that expectation had been destroyed by the opposition of Labour Members.

Ms Harman: It is absolutely clear, and the Leader of the House has given us all the evidence we need in his intervention, that the purpose of the guillotine motion is to prevent Tory Back Benchers from having the opportunity to vote against VAT on gas and electricity.

The Government know that they have lost the debate in the country and in their party. They now take the only course left open to them—they seek to control and manipulate the debate in Parliament. They seek to prevent their own Back Benchers from voting on VAT. They seek to spare Tory Members from having to make what they find to be a difficult choice on VAT. The choice should be obvious—honouring the promises that they made to their constituents, or following the orders of their Whips.

We are determined to ensure that Tory Members have the opportunity to make that choice. We want to ensure that they have another chance to join us and delay the imposition of VAT—a chance to honour the promises that they made to their constituents and the pledges that the Prime Minister made to the country on their behalf. Tory Members who tell us that they also want the chance to vote against VAT on gas and electricity should vote against this timetable motion if they want that chance.

This guillotine motion seeks to deprive a Committee of the whole House of the chance to engage in full debate about three Tory tax increases—tax increases which are all clear breaches of election pledges. The new insurance premium tax is a tax on the victims of crime. It hits hardest at ordinary people and their families—those who are already paying the price for the Government's failure on law and order. They must pay it again with this new tax. What is more, as with all Tory taxes, it is unfair. It hits hardest those who can least afford it. People who live in less prosperous areas already pay up to seven times more in insurance premiums to protect their homes than people in better areas. This tax will hit people living in the inner city areas of Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow and London up to seven times harder than those living in more affluent areas.

Both the insurance tax and the airport tax are the thin end of the tax wedge—introduced at a relatively low rate and then jacked up to pay not for new hospitals, schools or railways but the constant bills of unemployment and low growth.

It is a bit disingenuous for the Leader of the House to say that all the Government want is a reasonable debate on the Finance Bill because when the Chief Secretary introduced the Bill he did not even mention the insurance tax and the airport tax. So keen is he to debate the Bill that he could not even get the words "airport tax" and "insurance tax" past his lips. Perhaps he will manage to refer to them tonight and explain how the Government have come to break their promises.

Perhaps the truth is that the hon. Member for Dudley, West (Dr. Blackburn) was more prophetic than he realised when he wrote in his election address to the people of Dudley, West:

> "Tax is the dirtiest word to the Conservative philosophy".

It certainly is such a dirty word now that Tory Ministers who are putting up taxes do not even want to discuss it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr mentioned, the Government are also stifling debate on the freeze on personal allowances. Of course, this is a tax increase which hits hardest at the low paid. In response to questions from my hon. Friend, the Government have been forced to admit that it will drag an extra 400,000 low-paid people into the tax net. No wonder they do not want to discuss it—no wonder they wanted to squeeze the debate. They are also stifling debate on the cuts in mortgage interest tax relief, which amount to the equivalent of nearly

[Ms Harman]

2p on the basic rate of income tax for a typical family with a mortgage. No wonder the Government do not want to discuss it. In their manifesto, they promised the electorate:

> "We will maintain mortgage tax relief."

Of course, it was only after the election that the Chancellor said with a snigger:

> "Luckily we didn't say at what rate".

The promise of tax cuts was made by the Government to the country and by Tory Members to their constituencies. These tax increases break those promises. Faced with their betrayal, the Government try to hide from debate. They try to force these tax increases through with only a one-hour debate. Labour's tax in the face of that contempt for democracy becomes even more important. Not only must the economy be rebuilt and the community and publice services restored. We must rebuild the confidence of the British people in democracy—the confidence that the Tory Government have destroyed.

The Government are in office but not in power. Despite holding the great offices of state, they are powerless. They cannot use the power of their officers to keep their election promises, so they shut down debate. They cannot run the economy, so they shut down debate. The one thing that they have not lacked is money. They have squandered £130 billion in North sea oil revenues and privatisation receipts. Having squandered all that money, they are now dipping into the pay packets of ordinary families. They cannot command the respect of the British people, so they stifle debate.

There is only one thing that the Government are good at any more, and that is guillotine motions. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) was absolutely right: this is the fourth Bill in four parliamentary weeks that the Government have guillotined. Although they can shut down the debate in this House, they cannot shut down the debate in the country. This gagging motion is the last refuge for a Government who have lost every argument and broken every promise. This Tory Government are nothing more than a rabble—a rabble without a cause. We will vote against the guillotine tonight.

7.58 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House began the debate sombrely enough by saying that the Government entered into this guillotine motion with no pleasure and no cheer. During this debate, the genuine concern felt throughout the House at the present state of affairs—the breakdown of normal communications between the two parties—was expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), my right hon. Friends the Members for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman). That concern was also expressed by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and, to a certain degree, by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker).

In seeking some agreement across the House, I begin by agreeing with the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) that this is a big and serious Bill, as the Finance Bill always is. That means that the Bill could only proceed through the House on one of two bases—agreement between the parties, or by guillotine. I would have much preferred that there should be agreement.

It is important that the House considers the Bill in a serious and methodical way, partly because that will enhance the reputation of the House—it is the job of the House so to do—but also because it is important that outside interests are given the reassurance that the matters will be considered seriously. Those outside interests must be given time to make their representations.

I wrote to the hon. Lady the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) to suggest that we reach agreement, and I was rebuffed in the way in which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House described. I struggled to cope with that disappointment, but I wrote again to the hon. Lady to inform her of the way in which we then intended to proceed, both on the Floor of the House in Committee and in Committee upstairs. We proposed that we should take four clauses on the Floor of the House over two days.

There was every expectation that the Opposition might stick to that. Indeed, we began well with the small number of hon. Members who came to the House yesterday afternoon apparently wishing to address issues seriously before the House. However, at about 6 o'clock yesterday afternoon, there was a clear change of mood—I would say a clear change of control—in the Labour party. A new squad of people entered the House who had not been here at the beginning of the debate. That group of people apparently were uninterested at 4 o'clock, but by 6 o'clock they had become interested to the point of verbosity.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) showed in her opening remarks that she was not interested in what I believe the House and the Government are interested in—providing time upstairs for serious consideration of the Bill, and for outside interests to make their points known. The right hon. Lady has become obsessed with getting time on the Floor of the House to consider VAT.

First, the right hon. Lady was offered precisely that in discussions which we thought we were having with the Labour party. We very much hoped that we could reach some agreement, and she said that she wanted to reach an agreement. For all I know, the right hon. Lady did want to reach that agreement. The divisions in the Labour party today are so severe, so arcane and so deep that it is perfectly possible that the right hon. Lady is being sincere.

The right hon. Lady was then in the extraordinary position of having to argue—I think this argument was being made by an Opposition for the first time in history—that the fault of the guillotine motion was that it was giving too much time to the Committee upstairs. Unfortunately, the right hon. Lady failed to tip off the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who went on saying that the problem was that the guillotine gave too little time to consider a Bill that was too long.

The right hon. Lady said that we should have trusted her. How could we possibly have done so? She was not talking to us and, like a petulant teenager who is not talking to his parents, she then complained that we not been able to reach agreement between the channels.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not remember saying any such thing, but I do remember vividly that, on at least four or five occasions during the debate, the Government have been told that the Opposition certainly wanted the timing of the Committee to be controlled. After all, it is a matter of the distribution of time, not just a matter of the number of weeks.

We are nervous about how the Government will seek to control the time. They have had repeated offers to accept that we want Report and a vote on VAT in the House before Easter. That point was put to the Government no fewer than four or five times during the debate. The Chief Secretary can accept it now, as he has singularly failed to do on every occasion when it has been mentioned before.

Mr. Portillo: Another point which was put to the Government was that the Opposition would proceed in a normal way during yesterday's debate, which they did not. Everyone in the House saw what happened at 6 o'clock yesterday.

I remind the right hon. Lady that, despite what she says she said to us, the hon. Member for Peckham said in a press notice on 10 January:

> "Labour will be fighting every step of the way".

The hon. Lady was then quoted in *The Times* on 12 January:

> "Labour will be making no agreements with the Government about the timetabling of the Finance Bill, as part of our policy of non-cooperation."

I remind the House also that the hon. Lady wrote to me on 21 January:

> "As you rightly say, the Opposition is not willing to enter into informal discussions this year."

All that gives the lie to what the right hon. Member for Derby, South has been saying.

The right hon. Lady, when intervened upon by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, let out a lament that there were no usual channels. Whose fault is it but the Labour party's?

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire wanted us to accept his amendment. I am not able to do that, and I say that also to the hon. Member for Perry Barr. It is not the Government's fault that three hours have been devoted to the guillotine today, because that is not what we intended. It has been the choice of the House this afternoon to devote three hours to debating the guillotine.

The Government had allowed 10 to 12 hours for debate on four clauses on the Floor of the House, and that was a perfectly reasonable amount of time. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire went further, and said that a more comprehensive solution was needed to our problems. The attitude of the Government has been that we wish to continue to act in a normal way, and we wish to see normal relations restored across the House.

Nonetheless, I noted with great interest what the hon. Gentleman said, and I know that he meant it in a spirit of co-operation. The hon. Gentleman's concern about the matter is genuine, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will have heard it. Our attitude has always been that we wish to proceed with normal arrangements as much as we possibly can.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North said that he hoped that we could return to street politics and rough common sense, and that those could again break out. I heard the interesting speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills. I repeat that we took no pleasure in tabling the guillotine motion. An arrangement on the Bill was very much to be preferred. We have the independent testimony of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, who has recognised that the situation has been forced upon the Government for the protection of Back Benchers.

It is the duty of the Government to make sure that the Bill is considered in detail. It is our duty to the outside interests to make sure that they have time to make their representations. I believe that it is for the convenience and reputation of the House that this Finance Bill should be considered in an orderly way. We would much prefer to have done otherwise, but, given the situation, the Government have no choice. The Government must protect the House, protect business and protect those people outside who depend upon us, by moving the motion today.

Amendment negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 288.

Division No. 97] **[8.7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl

Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith

Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter

Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary

Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*

Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas

Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:—

Committee of the Whole House

1.—(1) The Proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be completed at this day's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

(2) When the Order of the Day is read for the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill, the Speaker shall leave the Chair without putting any Question and the House shall resolve itself into a Committee forthwith whether or not notice of an instruction to the Committee has been given; and Standing Order No. 64 (Committee of whole House on bill) shall not apply.

(3) Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to the proceedings to which this paragraph applies.

Standing Committee

2.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the remainder of the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill not later than 29th March.

(2) Proceedings at a sitting of the Standing Committee on 29th March may continue until Ten o'clock whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion, the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 30th March.

Report and Third Reading

3.—(1) The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the second of those days.

(2) On the first of those days, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall, notwithstanding sub-paragraph (a) of that paragraph, apply to the proceedings on the Bill for only one hour after Ten o'clock.

(3) The proceedings on Third Reading may be proceeded with at the conclusion of the proceedings on consideration, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the interval between stages of a Bill brought in on ways and means resolutions.

Business Committee

4.—(1) For the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings on consideration such part of the allotted days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House its Resolution as to the proceedings on consideration of the Bill, and as to the allocation of time between those proceedings and proceedings on Third Reading, not later than 14th April.

(3) Any Resolution of the Business Committee may be varied by a further Report of the Committee under Standing Order No. 80, whether before or after 14th April and whether or not that Resolution has been agreed to by the House.

(4) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which proceedings on consideration are taken, but the Resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in that order.

Procedure in Standing Committee

5.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee, the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a Minister of the

Crown, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

(3) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which proceedings are to be considered in the Standing Committee, but the Resolutions of the Business Sub-Committee may include alterations in that order.

Report of proceedings in Committee

6. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill, the Chairman shall report such of the Bill's provisions as were committed (or re-committed) to that Committee to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

7. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of proceedings on, the Bill shall be made in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time

8.—(1) On the first of the allotted days mentioned in paragraph 3, any period during which proceedings on the Bill may be proceeded with after Ten o'clock under paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) shall be in addition to the period of one hour mentioned in paragraph 3(2).

(2) If that allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion shall be added to the period of one hour.

Private business

9. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Procedure at time for conclusion of proceedings

10. For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or the Business Sub-Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or the Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, whether before the time so appointed or in pursuance of paragraph (a), the Question that the Clause of Schedule, or the Clause or Schedule as amended, be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper, whether in the name of a Minister of the Crown or not, which is moved or made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a motion so made for a new Clause or new Schedule, the Chairman or the Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

11.—(1) Proceedings under paragraph 10 of this Order shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(2) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(3) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

12.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order (including anything which might have been the subject of a report of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee) shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

(3) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

13. Nothing in this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order or Resolution applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order or Resolution; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

14.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

15. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee as agreed to by the Standing Committee;

"the Bill" means the Finance Bill;

"Resolution of the Business Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Committee as agreed to by the House.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

(Clauses 28, 46, 72 and 77)

Considered in Committee [Progress, 31 January].

[MR. GEOFFREY LOFTHOUSE *in the Chair*]

Clause 46

INSURANCE PREMIUM TAX

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 32, line 4, after "(1)", insert—

"Subject to subsection (3) below.".

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 5, in page 32, line 7, at end, add—

"(3) This tax shall not be charged until the Government has presented a report to Parliament on its effects on policyholders, the extent of insurance cover and the future of the insurance industry.".

Mr. Darling: I shall now deliver the speech that I would have delivered last night shortly after 10 o'clock had the Government not stopped me doing so. My speech will be of exactly the same length as it would have been last night, which would have enabled the House to consider the clause in the detail and time required, before the Government decided that they wanted to stifle debate on yet another new tax.

The amendments seek to delay the imposition of the tax until a report has set out the effects on not just the industry but the public who will be expected to pay it. On Second Reading last week, the Chief Secretary told us that his instincts were against high taxation, yet this is the second new tax that we are debating in the Bill. It is not surprising that the Government did not want much discussion on it and attempted to stifle debate by using the guillotine. Once again, what they say and what they do are entirely different. The Chief Secretary mentioned in his speech neither this new tax nor the other new taxes.

The insurance tax is a tax on victims and will affect 16·5 million households. It is yet another "double whammy", an expression that the Conservatives will remember from the last election. People will be robbed by a villain in the street and robbed again by the Chancellor in Downing street. The tax is, effectively, VAT on insurance and will be paid by 85 per cent. of all households. In the next financial year, it will raise £295 million; in the following year it will raise £775 million; and, the year after, it will raise a staggering £840 million if people continue to insure their properties properly. I say that because there is a substantial risk that the imposition of this tax will tempt too many people to underinsure their risks or not insure them at all.

The new tax illustrates a philosophic point on which it will be interesting to hear the Government's view. As a matter of public policy, we should encourage people to insure not just their houses and cars but many other risks. The tax is unavoidable. It is socially necessary and economically desirable that one should not be able to get out of insuring one's car, especially for third party liability, or one's house, whether it is for the building or contents. So, once again, the Government tax it.

Given that the average car insurance premium is about £340 and the average house contents premium about £300, most households have an outlay of between £600 and £1,000 a year—sometimes more—depending on the risks that they must insure. That is a substantial and unavoidable commitment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) said in her closing speech in the previous debate, insurance premiums are much higher in the inner city areas of Liverpool, London, Manchester, Glasgow and many other cities than they are elsewhere, and the annual insurance commitment can be as high as £1,500 or even £2,000 a year.

The Government said that the tax would cost 35p a week. As usual, they are wildly out. Many people consider that a minimum of 70p a week will have to be found by people who are already hard pressed because of other taxes imposed by the Government. So the insurance tax will be paid by people who are already stretched. Victims of crime pay more for their insurance and will therefore pay more in tax.

People can do nothing to avoid paying the tax if, through no fault of their own, they live in an area that is particularly prone to crime. In many areas of England and Wales, the crime rate is rising dramatically and the most vulnerable people in society will be hit by a tax which they can do nothing to avoid. Unemployed people must still insure their house, so people with little at their disposal will be hit in a way that income tax would not hit them, because income tax depends on the amount of money that people have, not simply on the fact that they happen to exist.

People are already badly hit by other taxes. They are paying VAT on fuel, increases in income tax, and will be faced with reductions in mortgage tax relief, yet the Government do not want us to discuss any of the new taxes and have only reluctantly allowed enough time to discuss this new insurance tax. People now pay more tax than they ever paid under the last Labour Government, but the crucial point is that they are getting nothing for it because the increased taxes will pay off debts that the Government ran up. A report is necessary to assess the effects on the industry and the people who pay the tax.

The point of principle is whether insurance should be taxed at all. Tax will be paid on general insurance—buildings, vehicles, holidays and so on. Surely we should encourage people to insure themselves when they go on holiday because many countries have no national health service or anything like it. Even in some advanced countries, if one is run over in the street, the first thing that the ambulance driver asks is how one proposes to pay for the treatment. Now, people will be tempted to cut down on holiday insurance because of the tax.

I welcome the fact that no tax will be imposed on long-term contracts, but for how long will long-term contracts of insurance be exempt? Is it only a matter of time, as with the provision for VAT, before the scope of the tax is extended to cover long-term insurance contracts for pensions, life assurance and so on? Will the Government clarify that issue? I suspect not. The 3 per cent. rate will be just the beginning. Having introduced the principle, it will not be long before the Government increase the tax to 4, 5 and 6 per cent. It is no coincidence that the tax will be

[Mr. Darling]

collected by the VAT man and, in time, the Government will be tempted steadily to increase the tax from 3 per cent. to 17·5 per cent., or whatever is the prevailing VAT rate.

The issue of the long-term insurance rate is important. The Government must make their intentions clear on a point of political philosophy. I understand that private health care insurance will be caught by the tax but that, not surprisingly, the industry is already clamouring for an exemption. I want to hear a clear commitment from the Paymaster General that the Government will not give in to the clamour from an industry whose whole future is perilled on the failure of the national health service, and will not give a tax exemption to private health care insurance. In addition, I want a commitment that they will close the loopholes that currently exist within the legislation so that private health care companies cannot get around the insurance tax by changing the way in which they write their policies.

8.30 pm

In the *Financial Times* on 12 January, Mr. Julian Ross, a product development manager with Prime Health, a specialist medical insurer, said:

> "If the whole philosophy and policy of this government is to make people more self-reliant, it seems rather stupid to penalise them for taking out private medical insurance.".

Most people want to be self-reliant, but they do not want to rely on private health insurance. They want to rely on a national health service that is there to meet their needs. That is a fundamental philosophical difference between the Opposition and the Government who have never believed in the NHS. It is clear from the way in which they look after the health service and their general approach to such matters that they are deeply sympathetic to private health insurance which depends for its existence on the NHS being unable to fulfil its obligations. Nobody would go private if they did not have to.

I want the Government to tell us tonight that they will not allow the private health insurance industry to get the tax break it is seeking. We want to hear that, if private health care insurance is caught by the tax, it will remain caught and that the loophole that might be provided by schedule 1 of the Insurance Companies Act 1982 will not be used to allow companies to write their policies in such a way as to bring themselves within its protection. That protection is generally accepted in cases such as that of a company director who insures himself against catastrophic illness; if there were no insurance, there might be disastrous consequences for the individual, the company, and its employees.

The Government must make it clear that they will have no truck with further tax breaks for private health care insurance. Every penny saved by the private health care industry will have to be paid for by those who insure their houses or their cars. If the Government give in to the industry, which has a ready ear in the Treasury, they will pay a heavy political price.

People struggling to pay their insurance premiums, perhaps those who lost their houses and possessions in the recent floods in the south of England, will not understand why they have to pay more in tax while people who take private health care insurance seek and may get a tax break for so doing.

The flooding in the south and other parts of England and in Perthshire last year illustrate an important point about the Government's philosophy. If individuals do not insure against loss through flood and so on, there is all the more obligation on the Government to dip into the public purse to bail out people. Clearly, the Government have a general strategic responsibility when there is a wholesale disaster, but it cannot be in the interests of the public or the Treasury to make it less likely that people will insure against such risks.

The people we saw on the television and read about in the newspapers who suffered from the floods at the beginning of the year will face increased premiums next year. Anyone who has ever taken out an insurance policy will notice that, apart from the fact that the small print is loaded on the side of the companies rather than on the side of those who take out insurance, if a claim of any substance is made, the premium will go up.

One of the growing problems in Britain is vandalism, theft and damage to cars. Car insurance premiums are rising dramatically. If the Government take a percentage on top of that, there will be a disincentive to insure properly, and that cannot be in the public interest.

When we hear the Government preaching self-reliance, as the man from the private health insurers would have us believe, it would be interesting to hear what justification or philosophy drove the Government to the decision to tax what is entirely necessary and laudable thinking.

The Government are sending people a confused message. What are they saying to responsible and prudent people? It seems to me that they are saying, "We will tax you for your responsible attitude and again for your prudent increase in insurance cover". Tax and tax again —that is the story of the Government and people will get nothing for it.

It is not as if the tax will go towards better policing or crime prevention. The Government's record on crime prevention is as dismal as their record on running the economy. People are facing a rising crime rate and the Government appear helpless and are doing nothing except lashing out in all directions when the crime rate continues to rise in most parts of England and Wales.

Insurance premiums are increasing anyway. Lloyd's is facing substantial risks and premiums will have to increase to meet them. There is also the problem of fraudulent claims which are costing insurance companies dear. Those who do not make claims have to pay increased premiums each year.

There are also technical matters, but I shall not go into them in great depth because other hon. Members want to speak in this short debate. However, one or two points ought to be mentioned.

There is the matter of creditor insurance. At a time of recession and difficult economic circumstances, people have wisely taken out insurance to cover that risk, yet that is to be caught. Will the Minister say something about that?

There is the technical issue of commission. Commission is excluded, but, as the Paymaster General will know, there are many different ways of selling insurance policies that do not involve commission and there is understandably a feeling within the industry that those companies with a direct sales force may be adversely affected. We may wish to return to that issue in Committee in the four or five minutes allocated to the clause. At the same time, we shall consider whether the tax should be paid when the premium is received or at some other point.

Perhaps tonight the Minister will let us know the position with regard to the Royal Automobile Club and the Automobile Association. Both consider that on one reading of the Bill their entire fee will be caught by the tax because of the nature of the services they offer. Perhaps the Government will let us know whether that is their understanding and, if it is, whether it was their intention as it does not seem desirable to tax the AA, RAC or any other motoring organisation.

I draw attention to the anti-forestalling measures. I understand that certain steps have to be taken to stop people avoiding any tax. However, there is some strength in the argument that the Government should strike at an abnormal payment rather than circumstances in which it is normal to pay for insurance cover in advance.

Perhaps the Minister will tell us how the consultative process is progressing on the fiscal regime for those companies that make reserves against future losses.

The Paymaster General may recall that during the debate on last year's Finance Bill—which was discussed expeditiously so that every clause was done more than justice, yet did not seem to have the problems visited upon us by the Government after the first few hours of debate —when we were discussing insurance, the point was raised that European insurance companies have a more favourable tax regime which allows them to make provision against future losses. Because we do not have that, it is sometimes difficult for our United Kingdom companies to compete effectively against other insurance companies in the European Union.

This might be an opportune time for the Paymaster General to tell us how the discussion process is progressing as many in the industry would like to know what has happened to it. It was announced last year but did not get far.

Insurance tax is yet another tax. It is another way in which the Chancellor seeks to raise money to avoid blatantly increasing what used to be referred to as the standard rate of income tax. It will not fool anybody. It will hit many prudent and responsible people very hard indeed.

It is ironic that the Government, with all the rhetoric of the 1980s, should be a Government who tax prudence and responsibility. That comes as no surprise to us. What the Government do is quite different from what they say.

People do not trust the Government, not just because of what they have done to the economy or in raising tax despite the fact that at the last election they promised not to increase tax. What they are doing is damaging to people in the country. It goes against the grain and causes offence because it chooses to tax responsibility and prudence. It is for those reasons that we will oppose the clause tonight.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): It may be convenient for the Committee if I speak briefly at this point. I hope to have more time to speak later in the debate, and certainly later in Committee. I had hoped to speak yesterday and earlier today, but I will not take time now rearguing the debate on the timetable motion that we have had for most of today.

The introduction of any new tax is the subject of careful consideration, and that includes the insurance premium tax. Careful thought was given before the Budget to the matters listed in the amendment, and to other matters, before we made the proposals in the Budget that are incorporated in the Bill. Since the announcement was made on Budget day, we have been able to consult much more widely outside the Government with all kinds of other interests affected by it. I want to make it clear to the Committee that those consultations are continuing. In some cases particular points are outstanding. I shall refer to those in a moment.

In common with other financial services, insurance and associated services are exempt from VAT. That exception is expressed in European Community agreements. That is one of the reasons why we have introduced the tax. Similar taxes apply in many other countries within the European Community. It seemed to the Chancellor that this area of consumer expenditure was subject to less indirect taxation than many others. It was therefore appropriate to introduce the tax when we faced the financial problems that the House has endlessly discussed. We must consider the impact of the tax on private individuals and those policy holders who will be affected by it and also the insurance industry and other industries which must pay it.

On the rate and the scope of the tax, it is important to understand that there are exceptions, which are part of the nature of insurance. For example, if we were to tax reinsurance; it would create double taxation. It is important not to do that. The principal exemption is long-term insurance—life insurance, endowment mortgages and pensions. We see those essentially as a form of savings and investment that are quite distinct from the bulk of general insurance, to which the tax is addressed. We have provided for them to be left out of the tax. We have no proposals to change that at any time. I am happy to reassure the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) on that point.

We have been careful in the design of the tax to exempt overseas risks. The British insurance industry insures many risks all over the world, through both reinsurance and direct insurance. It is important not to damage our international earning capacity in that way. Also covered by exemptions are various marine and aviation risks, international trade credit, and so on.

Our approach has been to have an inclusive tax. The tax is intended to apply across a broad base. In so doing, it can be set at a low rate. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central implicitly—almost explicitly—recognised that fact in what he said about private health insurance. As he recognises, we have designed the tax so that it applies to private health insurance. We see that as a form of general insurance. Like other general insurance, it offers an indemnity against costs incurred in a particular eventuality. I do not think that there is any reason to treat it any differently.

That brings me to the point that the hon. Gentleman made about whether we were trying in some way to discourage insurance. To tax something is not necessarily to say that one does not think that it should take place. After all, we tax income. We have taxed many other things that we are not trying to discourage but which nevertheless we think form a proper basis for contributions to the national Exchequer.

8.45 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will the Paymaster General give way?

Sir John Cope: In a moment.

[Sir John Cope]

It is a fact that, in the past, and up to now, insurance has been exempt, for example, from VAT and has not paid much in indirect tax. That is why the Chancellor has looked in this direction.

Mrs. Campbell: Does the Minister agree that a tax on insurance will deter people, particularly those on low incomes who are already subject to high rates of crime in their neighbourhood, from taking out any insurance?

Sir John Cope: I will say something about particular individuals in a moment.

Applying the tax at a relatively low rate of 3 per cent. across such a broad base serves to achieve as fair as possible a distribution of the tax burden. As the hon. Lady suggests, there are inevitably variations in the level of premiums depending on the risk insured. In setting the rate, the Chancellor was able to conclude that it would be unlikely to have a significant impact on the overall cost of insurance and thus on the take-up of insurance. Clearly, the price of insurance is dictated by a range of things.

At 3 per cent., the impact of the tax will not realistically be a major influence, particularly if one reflects, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central did, on the significant premium increases that the market has borne in recent years. The impact of the tax on individual taxpayers will vary considerably according to their particular pattern of insurance in every respect.

Mr. Darling: The Paymaster General seems to be saying that cost does not matter. That must fly in the face of everything that Tory Ministers have been telling the country for years. He is saying that, because costs are going up anyway, it is all right to slap another tax on top from the Government. That surely cannot be right.

Sir John Cope: No, that is not what I said earlier. I said that if one looks at the effect of the way premiums have increased in recent years one can see—or one can try to measure—the effect that cost increases have on the take-up of insurance. That is relevant in considering the potential effect of the introduction of the tax on the take-up of insurance.

The hon. Gentleman pointed out also that the Chancellor had said, and it is a fact, that the average cost of the tax to a household with buildings, contents and motor insurance—some 44 per cent. of households—will be about 35p a week. Obviously, as the hon. Gentleman and everybody else will recognise, that is an average. The average cost of the tax on three quarters of households with some contents insurance will be about 6p a week. Sixty per cent. of households have some motor insurance. The tax for them is expected to average about 18p a week. Overall, the figures reveal that the tax is mildly progressive, because on average richer households pay more on insurance as a proportion of their income than poorer households, and have more valuable possessions of every kind.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): Will the Paymaster General give way?

Sir John Cope: I am not anxious to give way a lot, because many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, after I have finished making this point.

The family expenditure survey shows that the poorest 20 per cent. of households on average spend about £120 a year on taxable insurance. That means that their IPT would come out at about 7p a week. The richest 20 per cent. of households pay about £800 a year. Their IPT will come out at about 47p a week.

Mr. Ainsworth: Will the Paymaster General depart from his prepared script for a moment? He mentioned the progressive nature of the tax. The insurance premiums of the people to whom he referred are low only because they have few possessions; many others have no insurance at all, because the incidence of burglary in their area has made the premiums unaffordable or, indeed, has caused the insurance companies to refuse them cover.

Some inner-city dwellers feel that the Government are already effectively taxing them by not providing a decent standard of law and order, thereby forcing up insurance premiums. To impose a tax on top of that is appalling.

Sir John Cope: The hon. Gentleman must make his own speech, if there is time.

The financial facts, as I said earlier, demonstrate that the effects of the tax will be mildly progressive. A similar picture can be seen in the business sector, in that the tax will have a fairly even impact across industry. On average, insurance represents about 1 per cent. of business costs; the new tax will add about 0·03 per cent. to those costs.

The tax will, of course, have the greatest impact on the insurance industry itself. Although it will be applied to insurance premiums rather than directly to the insurance companies, its introduction will coincide with the current upswing rather than with a downturn in the trading cycle of what is, after all, a very cyclical business.

Naturally, the industry is also concerned about the workings of the tax. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central listed some technical matters, which we will no doubt discuss later; however, we have made it clear from the outset—in the consultations to which I have referred—that we wish to minimise the compliance costs incurred by the industry, and indeed by the Government and Customs and Excise.

I am pleased to say that our dialogue with the industry has been extremely constructive. In response to the invitation extended by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central and to representations from a number of my hon. Friends, some of whom are present now, we are prepared to consider sympathetically the industry's case for being given the option of accounting for the tax on the so-called premium written basis, thus tying in more closely with many of the industry's current accounting arrangements. Such an option would, however, be subject to further examination of its implications with the industry. In my view, those implications include the use of gross premiums as the base of tax, rather than the net premiums that we contemplated originally. Customs and Excise is continuing to discuss the matter with the insurance industry, and we shall of course return to it later in the Committee stage; indeed, the details of all these matters will be discussed by the Standing Committee.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central raised the question of creditor insurance. I must give him the same answer that I gave in regard to private health insurance: we consider that the tax should apply to all general insurance, at a low rate. The hon. Gentleman also asked about the motoring organisations. Perhaps I should declare an interest, in that I belong to the RAC. Subscriptions to the RAC, the AA, National Breakdown and other motoring organisations are divided up from the VAT point of view: they are partly exempt and partly zero rated, in recognition that part of the subscription is in the nature of insurance. It is to that part that the new tax will apply: it is insurance in any ordinary sense of the word, although its mechanics happen to be rather different.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made clear in his Budget statement, we introduced the tax in an effort to raise revenue in a way that is fair to all concerned, with the least possible compliance costs. It is, however, a revenue-raising tax, and it deals with a sector that has hitherto paid little in the way of indirect tax, for reasons that I gave earlier. No doubt we shall return to the details in this and future debates.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): This new tax proposal illustrates the Government's basic lack of principle. Last week, it was said that during the election the Conservative party promised to be the party of low crime; in fact, it is the party of high crime. It also promised to be the party of low taxation—but, as we have seen in recent weeks and will see again following the passage of the Bill, it is the party of high taxation.

To my constituents, those two matters seem closely linked. London Members of Parliament look around them and see a city that has become the crime capital of Europe. There are 60·2 incidents of burglary and car crime per 1,000 members of London's population; there are 45 such incidents in Paris, 32 in Rome and 23 in Madrid. That demonstrates the difficulties experienced by the Metropolitan police. In a recent survey, the Association of London Authorities stated that crime was one of the major concerns of Londoners—and who can blame them, given the doubling in recorded crime in the capital since 1979?

How will the Government respond? My constituents—like those of every other hon. Member—will be hit by a tax on protecting themselves from crime: a tax on household insurance, as well as all the other types of insurance that the Bill will capture. Not only do my constituents have to suffer from the increase in recorded crime that we have seen in Britain and from all its economic consequences, but they will have to pay yet another tax when they insure themselves against crime. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said, insurance premiums are already sky high. The people who have been hit hardest are those who live in the less prosperous areas of the inner cities. They pay up to seven times more than those who live in more affluent areas. Yet the Chancellor indicated in his Budget speech that for the typical family that tax will cost about 35p a week. That figure belies the great differences resulting from the nature of the locations in which people live.

As several of my hon. Friends have said, some people are lucky to get insurance at all. The Consumers Association reported recently that in some high-crime areas insurance companies will not provide cover at all. Researchers anonymously asked 16 insurers for cover for a three-bedroom London house with a record of two theft claims in the last year—by no means unusual, as my constituents and, I am sure, the constituents of other hon. Members could confirm. Only one of the 16 insurance companies would quote a figure. Yet the Paymaster General has the nerve to describe this as a progressive tax—"mildly progressive" are the words that I think he used. Nothing could be further from reality.

9 pm

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) showed last week, the average cost of household contents insurance rose from £66 in 1988 to £114 last year—an increase of more than 70 per cent. Last year insurance claims for home break-ins totalled £2 million a day, or £25 per second. And claims resulting from car crime have doubled in the past two years.

A tax on insurance is an unfair levy on the victims of crime. It is they who are too often forgotten when we discuss this matter. This tax is also likely to mean that some people will simply be unable to afford to insure their homes and cars, even if they are lucky enough to find a company willing to take the risk. Last week one of my constituents wrote to me about the proposed new tax. She said:

> "Not only are premiums ever increasing but now the Government has added a tax surcharge, and twice this month I have received outrageous insurance bills. First, my contents insurance has cost me nearly £220 for £12,000 contents cover and I had to reject higher cover because I could not afford it. If I am now burgled, or my flat burns down, I will not financially be able to recover my possessions."

Can the Paymaster-General tell me what I am supposed to say to that constituent—apart, of course, from "Don't ever vote Conservative again"?

During the Chancellor's Budget speech he justified levying a tax on insurance by saying that it would broaden the tax base. Once again the Government are asking the people of this country to pay for the economic mistakes of the Chancellor and his predecessor. Not only that, but the amount that the Government will raise from this measure—estimated by the Chancellor at more than £750 million a year—is as high as that because of the high premiums resulting from the huge increase in crime that has occurred since the Government came to power. There has been a massive 124 per cent. rise in crime since 1979. The very Government who presided over this increase have the cheek now to tax people who take the precaution of insuring themselves against crime.

The Labour party has consistently pressed the Government on crime prevention—urging them to implement the Morgan report and to abandon their policy of centralising police forces and undermining the very morale of the men and women who so bravely police our streets. We in this country still spend so little on crime prevention—the very thing that we need to stop crime.

The RAC recently launched a poster campaign about car crime with the slogan

> "It isn't the car that's broken down, it's law and order."

That slogan could very well be adopted by the many people in Britain who have had their cars vandalised and their homes violated by burglary after burglary.

What is to be done about this problem? By imposing the levy, the Government are merely taxing the victims. As has been said often and recently, we are getting to the position of having to ask how one can insure oneself against insurance premiums. I should like to end with the words of my constituent when she considered rather despairingly what she and others would be able to do:

> "This is another example of how this Government has created an environment where those who can will, and those who can't won't."

Mr. John Greenway: I begin by declaring an interest, with which hon. Members are familiar: I have worked for more than 20 years in the insurance industry.

It is fair to say that the insurance industry is disappointed by the imposition of the insurance premium tax. I share its view. Anyone who has followed what is happening in the industry across the Community will observe that it is not entirely surprising that the Government have copied what virtually every Community Government have done, recognising that, under directives, VAT cannot be imposed on insurance premiums. The Government have therefore announced insurance premium taxes instead.

Mr. Darling: On a point or order, Mr. Lofthouse. I do not want to stop the hon. Member in mid-flow. He was good enough to declare his interest, having worked in the industry for some years. As I understand it, the rules of the House are more extensive. The hon. Member's entry in the Register is extensive. I understand that it is incumbent on hon. Members to declare all the companies of which they are a director, and those from which they have an employment or office or trade or profession and their clients.

I know that it would take the hon. Member a long time to do so, but given his interest in the matter, the House and those who follow our proceedings should know what his interests are.

The First Deputy Chairman: The House will be fully aware of the hon. Member's interests from the Register of Members' Interests. If the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) feels that he should enlighten the House

Mr. Greenway: I shall enlighten the House further on one or two other points of interest that relate directly to what I shall say. I am sure that no hon. Member thinks that I would deliberately wish to mislead the House or hide my interests.

I said that I have been involved in the insurance industry for more than 20 years. I am an elected member of one of the industry's regulators, and my comments hitherto, far from causing the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) to think that I am entirely in the pocket of the Government, were on the industry's response.

It is a pity that, after 24 hours of hot air and piffle on this Committee stage, some of the serious, important issues on the future of the insurance industry arising from the application of this tax have not been addressed. We have heard the kind of speeches that we heard on Second Reading—and even before that, in the debate on the Budget.

The Government have merely copied what other member states have done, by imposing an insurance premium tax. The idea is not new. I am aware from discussions that the Association of British Insurers was not entirely surprised by the Government's decision. That does not mean that it does not have concerns—as I shall show, it most certainly has—but the argument that taxation on insurance is a new concept in this country is nonsense, because insurance funds are taxed.

If there is one matter on which I agree 100 per cent. with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, it is on the need for the Government to deliver on their promise in the Finance Bill last year that something should be done about the wicked way in which reserving is taxed in the United Kingdom compared with our competitors in the European Community. If we are saying that, by introducing an IPT, we are merely putting ourselves on the same footing as other member states, the tax regime should be the same.

I want to draw attention to one or two of the technical points that concern insurers before dealing with another important but rather different matter. First, I think that the Paymaster General's acknowledgment earlier in the debate of the possibility—I think that "option" was the word he used—of dealing with the tax on a written premium basis rather than a cash received basis will have come as some relief to United Kingdom insurers. Since he has made that announcement, perhaps for this evening we ought to let the matter rest there, except to urge him to pursue the discussions with all due urgency. October 1 sounds a long way off, but companies will have to put systems in place soon if they are to introduce the tax smoothly on 1 October.

I shall not mention the subject of commission, as an insurance broker, except to say that I suspect that the only streamlined and simple way of dealing with the tax will probably be in the end to tax the whole premium, because there are grave difficulties throughout the industry in accounting for commission on a fair basis.

A third problem, to which my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General did not refer but which is of grave concern to United Kingdom insurers, is the fact that the tax will apply only to premiums for a risk that is situated in the United Kingdom. Although, in the great majority of cases, that will not cause a problem, there are a significant number of insurances taken out by multinational groups for which the risk may be situate partly in the United Kingdom and partly elsewhere.

Currently, no mechanism is used for other purposes which would distinguish between the proportion of premium that relates to United Kingdom and non-United Kingdom risks. The practical problems of making such a distinction are considerable, and it is important that they should be solved in a way which provides certainty and administrative simplicity.

That argument leads to two others. First, it is crucial that the imposition of the tax does not drive business away from the London market. That could be possible if there is uncertainty about the basis on which the split between United Kingdom and non-United Kingdom risks will be made, or if there is a significant difference of approach to such a distinction between the United Kingdom and other European jurisdictions which also impose those premium taxes.

Secondly—this worries me—any allocation of premiums between United Kingdom and non-United Kingdom risks that is not formula-based is likely to involve considerable judgment on the part of the insurer. If an element involving considerable subjectivity is to be introduced into the tax, the uncertainty involved is likely to cause considerable apprehension about the basis on which Customs and Excise will audit insurers accounting for the tax.

That is a worry, because, given the proposed penalty arrangements in the Bill for incorrect accounting, there is a general view among insurers—which I share—that the proposed penalty regime could be unduly harsh and could be wholly inappropriate, given the uncertainties and complexities which are likely to be involved.

It could be a mistake to apply such a regime on the introduction of the tax from day one, given those potential uncertainties, and we may need to consider some bedding-in period, during which there could be continuing consultation between the industry and Customs and Excise —in which I am sure my right hon. Friend would want to take an interest—and there should be penalties only where there is clear evidence of an attempt to evade payment of the tax.

I know that my right hon. Friend has encouraged Customs and Excise staff to discuss those matters with the industry, but, as I have said, time is pressing, and I think that the industry feels that those matters need to be concluded perhaps by as early as February, and certainly by Easter, if we are to introduce the tax in time for a starting date of 1 October.

There is another point to be made about the transitional arrangements. The Bill contains provisions to prevent the avoidance of insurance premium tax by the use of insurance contracts commencing before 1 October but ending more than 12 months later. Clearly, that is a measure intended to prevent evasion.

It is consistent with practice in the case of most insurances where the normal contract duration is 12 months but, as my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General will realise, it is common for some types of insurance to last a number of years—mortgage indemnity insurance and extended warranty business are two clear examples. I suggest that extended warranty business should perhaps be exempt altogether, because such warranties are not conventional insurance but part of the overall contract of sale and the acquisition of stronger guarantees for the consumer.

9.15 pm

There are grave misgivings among the major United Kingdom companies and property investors about the intention to apply insurance premium tax to premiums collected by pool re for terrorism insurance. For more than a year, we have been fighting an uphill struggle to persuade more companies to avail themselves of terrorism insurance through the pool re facility. It seems extraordinary to some of us that, in those circumstances, we should want to add the 3 per cent. tax to an already heavy premium which, through the pool re scheme, will of course be substantially more than companies previously paid for terrorist cover.

I declare a further interest in a different sphere. I am the honorary, which means unpaid, adviser to the British Health Care Association. I have written to my right hon. Friend many times in this regard. It would not be unreasonable to say that most of the association's member schemes are affiliated to the trade union movement, and they will not be especially pleased with what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central said when he urged my right hon. Friend not to extend the exemptions for medical insurance. The matter is catered for in the Bill, and the Chancellor said in his Budget speech that insurance premium tax would not apply to permanent health insurance.

I think that it was the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central who mentioned company directors and said that they might insure themselves for when they are sick or in case of a major accident. Many people take out income insurance through permanent health policies, especially if they are self-employed.

The insurance policies provided by the British Health Care Association do not strictly come into that category, as they are not permanent but cancellable, and contribution rates and benefits are varied, usually on a three or four-year basis. The uprating of premiums every year to take account of IPT, especially if the rate varied in future, would cause considerable administrative difficulty.

In general terms, a contributor to one of these schemes purchases units of cover which provide cash benefits during stays in hospital, or which specifically reimburse NHS dental and optical charges. Most contributors have their payments debited from their pay, with the gross amount paid to the member scheme by their employer. That is one reason why there is often trade union involvement in persuading members to take advantage of such facilities.

The schemes aim to provide low-cost health benefits. Although not charitable in their formal structure, they are non-profit-making and return a high percentage of income to contributors during stays in hospital. Any surpluses are used to purchase medical equipment or to make donations to local NHS hospitals or medical charities. Hon. Members may recall that, a few months ago, a donation from one of the BHCA schemes, the Westfield contributory scheme, based in Sheffield, donated £5,000 for the purchase of a minibus for the relief effort in a Bosnian hospital.

Having been associated with the BHCA for some years, it is clear to me that, if insurance premium tax was levied on members' contributions, it could deter contributors and would lead to less generous support of local hospitals by member schemes. Many of the contributors to those schemes are at the lower end of the income scale, and are not able to afford the cost of permanent health insurance. They do, nevertheless, recognise the prudence of having a cash benefit to help cover loss of earnings during a stay in hospital or during maternity. In that respect, while the technical nature of those policies is different to permanent health insurance and therefore cannot be said to be long term, the motivation, the benefit and the effect on the individual are largely the same.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to think again to try to find a way of exempting such cash-benefit health insurance policies. I willingly admit that it does not help our argument that those schemes are not especially different from the sort of private insurance schemes that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central mentioned.

Nevertheless, I remind the hon. Gentleman that there are some 3 million members of the BHCA schemes, who contribute about £158 million in premiums. Therefore, we are considering tax of about £4·7 million. If that money is taken in tax, apart from any potential deterrent effect to people belonging to the schemes or increasing members' benefits, the BHCA will have £4·7 million less to donate to the NHS and medical charities.

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): Like other hon. Members, I had hoped to speak yesterday, and I had hoped to speak to a Liberal Democrat amendment. In the time that I have been here, it has become obvious to me that nothing is certain in this place.

We are happy to support the amendment, because at least it would stop the tax being implemented before it received heavy scrutiny. Each year, the Budget causes a great deal of speculation, and every Chancellor likes to bring a few surprises. Certainly, the Chancellor entered into that spirit with his first Budget. In recent years, the abolition of a tax has been part of that surprise. After years of rhetoric about the Conservatives being the Government of low taxation, it certainly was a surprise to hear the Chancellor proposing not one new tax, but two.

[Mrs. Diana Maddock]

We have already dealt at some length with the Chancellor's new tax on airports. With the second tax, on insurance premiums, I fear that the Chancellor is set to go down in history as the man who really did make a drama out of a crisis. Having sprung IPT on us, he boldly claimed that it was nothing, a mere 3 per cent. He said that everywhere in Europe has such a tax and claimed that this country's was the only finance industry that was not taxed. He further claimed that the tax would mean a 35p increase only for the average household.

Let us examine those claims. The tax will be 3 per cent. only, but, once it is in place, there is no knowing where that tax will be hiked. After all, it cannot be worth the cost of all that bureaucracy for a mere 3 per cent. The Chancellor's claim that our finance industry gets away with it compared to Europe does not entirely stand up either. Since he is such a disciple of indirect taxes, he cannot have missed the VAT paid by insurers and policyholders on costs incurred. That VAT is not recoverable by insurers, as they are VAT-exempt.

As the Association of British Insurers readily points out, insurance companies already bear levies for the Policyholders Protection Board and the Motor Insurers Bureau. United Kingdom insurance companies are, as we have already heard, at a tax disadvantage generally when compared with their overseas competitors. They cannot set up tax-deductible equalisation reserves. As has already been said, although there has been a consultation document on that, there has been no commitment so far to meetings with the Department of Trade and Industry or with the Inland Revenue.

The Chancellor claims that the cost will be only 35p a week on average for each household. The insurers do not agree with that figure. They point out that the Chancellor bases the average figure on the so-called "typical" family with motor, home contents and building cover. That neatly neglects the effects of the new tax on travel policies, warranties on electrical goods, personal liability, accident cover and even membership of motoring organisations.

The greatest sleight of hand comes in referring to the average or the typical. I do not know whether the Conservative party in its heart still subscribes to the idea that there is no such thing as society. When it suits Conservatives, they seem to believe in the average. In reality, the effects will vary greatly depending on where one lives, and on individuals' personal and family circumstances. Other hon. Members have talked about their own constituents.

A family taking out household and contents cover for a three-bedroomed, semi-detached house in Wolverhampton, for example, will pay about £10·50 more on that cover alone. A one-bedroomed flat in an apartment block in Hampstead could cost £18 more a year—the Chancellor's figure of 35p a week—just for the property cover. Whom will the electorate believe—the Government or the insurance companies? It is an indication of the regard in which the Government are held that it will be the insurance companies.

Why are I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues so opposed to this tax? First, there is simply no justification for it at this time. In the 14 years in which the Government have been in power, crime has more than doubled. Directly linked to that, there has been a rapid rise in the cost of insurance. Between 1987 and 1993, household contents insurance rose by more than 60 per cent. in real terms, and car insurance has more than doubled.

The need for insurance has never been greater. In my county of Dorset, between 1979 and 1992, there was a 78 per cent. increase in the number of motor vehicle thefts notified to the police and an alarming 171 per cent. increase in the number of domestic burglaries. The tax will merely add to the misery of the victims of car theft and burglary.

It rubs salt into the wounds of those who have already suffered enough from rising crime during 14 years of this Government. It is a tax on those who most need protection—people like the frightened woman living alone who wrote to me saying that she lives in fear of being the next victim.

The Chancellor may try to pretend, as others have tonight, that the tax is nothing. I know that the electorate are not so easily fooled. To too many of them, it will be yet another increased bill. That is true particularly for those on fixed low and falling incomes.

9.30 pm

The tax will not come in isolation. Under the Government, water bills shot up after privatisation. The boom-bust economy has meant that those living on investment incomes have seen that income plummet as interest rates have fallen. State pensions have not kept up with average earnings, and the Government are now taxing invalidity benefit. Social housing rents have increased, particularly those of housing associations and, most cruelly, VAT is to be imposed on domestic heating and lighting.

Our second big objection to the tax is that it is unfair. We have already heard from other hon. Members that it will affect those in high crime regions, which have the highest insurance premiums. They are often our inner cities. Indeed, parts of our inner cities are in postcode regions where it is impossible to obtain insurance. Our inner cities desperately need regeneration, which means investment in housing, infrastructure and, vitally, in new business. But how will those regions be regenerated if small businesses in particular are not attracted to them because the insurance is either prohibitively expensive or impossible to obtain?

The Government are very fond of arguing that switching from direct to indirect taxation promotes consumer choice. Therein lies the fundamental problem with placing indirect taxes on those goods and services that are, at the very least, difficult, and often impossible, to do without. There is little choice when it comes to necessities.

Why should people who have provided for themselves and paid taxes and national insurance all their lives now be penalised even further? That is what people outside the Chamber are asking. They cannot understand why the Government keep taking from them when those who better off continue to be rewarded. People want taxes to reflect their ability to pay, not their need to live—the tax does not do that.

Our third objection to the tax is that it is inefficient. It is a new tax, and will lead to more paperwork and more bureaucracy for, as we have heard, very little extra revenue. There are 28 clauses in the Finance Bill. Some 40 pages deal with the tax and there will be more details in the secondary legislation that is to come.

As with insurance forms, it is the small print that we need to study. The insurance companies say that millions of pounds of hidden costs will be involved in setting up the system needed to administer the new levy. Norwich Union, which has about 2 million household and motor insurance policyholders, says that it will cost several millions pounds just to set up the new system to collect the tax, and a further £1 million to administer it.

The premium tax could be the final straw for individuals and companies, forcing them to cut their outgoings and to insure themselves inadequately or not at all. In the long run, that will cost us more as a nation.

This bureaucratic and unfair tax will bring in to Government coffers less than £300 million in 1994-95, £775 million in 1995-96 and up to £840 million in 1996-97. Will that really make a big inroad into the £50 billion deficit?

That brings me to the Liberal Democrats' fourth objection to the proposed insurance tax: it is devious. It is simply a back-handed attempt to raise revenue in any way possible, so long as it is not through income tax—although tax thresholds have already been frozen, and that will bring 400,000 more people into tax. National insurance contributions have been raised, sick pay has been hived off from the state to the private sector, and now there is a new tax that the Chancellor tries to pretend is nothing. It is yet another tax that the Government will increase so as to avoid visibly increasing income tax rates.

That does not wash with the electorate any more. I believe that the Government have been found out. If not the opinion polls, election results show that people will not be so easily fooled again. One of my constituents, who did not vote for me in the by-election—there were some of those —but who had watched the Government's behaviour since I was elected, declared, "It will be a cold day in hell before I ever vote Conservative again."

Liberal Democrats wanted a Budget to give us an investment-led recovery. That should have been started long ago, and we have advocated it for some time. We wanted to see fair taxation, based above all on people's ability to pay, not another tax that falls most heavily on those in need and on the most vulnerable, those who have been so badly let down by the Government. Anyone who has been talking to people outside the House will know that the last thing they want is another new tax.

My hon. Friends and I reject the tax. We support the amendment, because it would at least ensure that the measure was not enacted until it had been properly scrutinised. The proposed new tax is unjustifiable, inefficient and devious—but, above all, it is unfair.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): In the time left for the debate I shall make several general observations about the insurance premium tax. Like the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), I want to comment on some of the complexities that might flow if we passed the measure.

I shall start with the speech of the Paymaster General. I was mildly encouraged by the fact that he described the new tax as progressive. That is the first time since I entered the House that I have heard a Conservative Treasury Minister express support for the notion of progressive taxation. I hope that we can look forward to hearing Treasury Ministers espouse the virtues of progressive taxation on future occasions—but I am afraid that I expect to be disappointed.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) talked about the sum that the proposed tax would raise, and we must consider it specifically in those terms. The Government's clear aim in introducing an insurance premium tax is to broaden the tax base. It is simply a money-raising device, with no other merit whatever, and in 1996-97 it will be expected to raise nearly £1 billion—almost the entire budget of the Department of National Heritage. Unlike the hon. Lady, I look upon that as a considerable sum.

Why do the Government propose to tax insurance? As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said, insurance is an inherently good thing, and I believe that it is the role of Government to encourage people to take out proper insurance, to insure themselves against the risk of illness and other eventualities, and especially to take out home contents insurance, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) referred.

There is an ideological problem associated with the tax, because it is targeted at something that is positive and life enhancing. The Minister did not address that problem.

We have been told, as we have been in a number of Budget statements and economic debates, about the Government's policy on indirect taxes. We have been told repeatedly that the Government favour indirect taxes. Indeed, they are such an advocate of indirect taxes that they have invented two totally new taxes. We have the insurance premium tax, which we are debating tonight, and the airport duty tax, which we debated last night. It is worth bearing in mind that these are the first two new indirect taxes in more than 20 years.

Given the attendance certainly on the Tory Benches for most of this debate, it is not surprising that the introduction of this new tax has promoted rampant indifference on the part of the Conservative party. For example, there is no reference to the insurance premium tax in the Government's manifesto. Indeed, it could be argued that this tax goes against the grain of Tory tax policy since 1979.

Insurance is not an optional item of expenditure in many households, so insurance premium tax will not work in the same way as value added tax. It cannot be argued that insurance premiums are an optional extra—that taxpayers can choose whether to spend money on insurance premiums in the same way as they do when they consume normal household goods. The issue is fundamentally different. The insurance premium tax will directly hit basic and essential items in household budgets. It is estimated —accurately, I believe—that 16·5 million households will pay insurance premium tax.

I do not believe that it in any way reduces the strength of the argument that we have deployed against insurance premium tax to argue that the rate of IPT will be only 3 per cent. because we know what the Government have done to the rate of value added tax since 1979. It might start at 3 per cent., then it will be 5 per cent., then 10 per cent. and then 20 per cent. That is exactly the sort of policy approach that the Government have adopted over many years. The Chancellor estimates that the revenue to be raised by IPT will be equivalent to 35p a week. Given the accuracy of his predictons in other areas of the Government's fiscal policy, however, we are entitled to treat that prediction with some caution. The revenue raised is likely to be much higher.

One of the problems—the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) did us all a service by drawing attention to this—is that IPT, and the way in which the tax has been constructed in the Bill, looks to be potentially a wide tax.

[Mr. John Hutton]

Clearly, it will cover insurance policies such as travel insurance, warranties on electrical goods, mortgage indemnities and certainly private medical insurance. The real figure that we can attach to IPT and its impact on household budgets is more likely to be £1 per week.

The hon. Member for Ryedale drew attention to the views of the insurance industry. The best that we can say is that the insurance industry has given the tax a muted response. The Association of British Insurers and other groups have expressed concern that the net effect of IPT will almost certainly be that people will take out inadequate insurance or no insurance cover at all, and that is to be regretted.

I have only one minute left. I prepared wider notes on IPT but clearly I shall not be able to make those remarks tonight. It might be reasonable, therefore, to conclude that IPT will be an unpopular tax. It has been conceived for the wrong reasons and it will impact most heavily on those who should not be asked to get the Government out of their deep financial mess. I am reminded, as I usually am on such occasions, of the comments of Sir Edmund Burke, who wrote in 1775:

> "To tax and to please . . . is not given to men."

That is especially apposite in the context of the insurance premium tax.

Mr. Darling: This has been a short and not altogether satisfactory debate because there has not been nearly enough time to examine some of the general problems of the tax, let alone the specfic ones.

I shall start by making a preliminary point about the speech of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). The reason why I raised the point of order about declaration of interest is important. It is not a personal matter in relation to the hon. Gentleman because I know that, in many debates, he has made speeches about the insurance industry, about which he knows. Indeed, he has made one or two comments that have been helpful to arguments that I have made. Perhaps he made them inadvertently, but he did so.

There is a point in principle here. It is our experience that, as the Bill goes into Committee, a large number of Tory Members raise matters because they are consultants to various people. It is a bad precedent, and it is bad for this Parliament, that industries should get into the habit of thinking that the way to raise matters in Parliament is by buying the services of a consultant. That is wholly inappropriate and it should be deplored. Having said that, the hon. Member for Ryedale raised a number of important matters. The technical matters in the Bill need to be discussed. There are about 28 clauses and there are regulations which we have not yet seen.

I do not think that any hon. Member has said that, during the next few months, the Government will be coming up with hordes of regulations to make the tax work. We should not lose sight of the fact that the industry will have to change its accounting systems to make the tax work.

9.45 pm

In addition to all of the regulatory burdens, the insurance industry will now have to set people in place to administer and to collect the tax. The cost of the new systems and the new employees will add to the premium costs and the public will not just be paying the insurance tax but will be paying the cost of its administration. The cost will not be met by the Government and it will not be defrayed against other expenditure. It will be met by ordinary people.

The technical points made by the hon. Gentleman were important, as was his point concerning the United Kingdom and non-United Kingdom risks. The Government have done many things on which we have touched in other debates that may drive business away from the London market. They must have regard to the consequences of their actions. An insurance tax may be seen to be a light touch or an easy option, and the Government will pray in aid the fact that there are similar taxes on insurance in other parts of the European Union.

However, the tax does not end with the 3 per cent. levy which is currently being imposed. The costs of administration and collection and the regulatory costs must be added to the cost of the insurance industry. Those costs must be paid for either directly by those who pay premiums, or through more redundancies in the industry. Anyone who has been involved in the insurance industry will know that it has had many redundancies, and I fear that there are more to come. I suspect that the tax will add to those redundancies.

The second point of the hon. Member for Ryedale was on private health care. I agree with him that it is entirely to be encouraged that people take out insurance which provides cash cover in the event of illness. We have always sought to encourage that and the Government are right to exempt that type of long-term insurance. Where the distinction falls to be drawn is between that sort of insurance and private health care insurance, which is in effect providing private health care as an alternative to the NHS. That is a difficult distinction to draw in technical terms, but it is one which the Government must draw.

I do not think that the Paymaster General was particularly clear about the distinction and I hope that he will make it clear that private health care insurance will not be exempt from the tax. If it is exempt, the people who must pay increased premiums for insuring their houses or their cars will not understand it.

Let me turn to another important point. The Minister said—whether he likes it or not, I have a note of him saying this—that the costs of the tax are not important because other costs in the industry are going up. It beggars belief that a Treasury Minister would make such a statement, but the fact is that insurance costs are going up dramatically.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) said that the crime rate in London and in our other major cities and towns is escalating. The cost of insurance is becoming prohibitive and many people cannot get insurance of any sort. For a person seeking car insurance, the criterion for having to meet a larger burden of insurance is not so much whether he has had his car damaged or stolen but that he lives in a particular area. That burden is becoming so prohibitive to some people that they will under-insure or not insure at all. It is not in society's interests to get into a situation in which people may be injured by somebody in a car and discover that that car is not insured. That sort of crime is prevalent enough as it is without encouraging it by adding to the costs—not just the insurance tax itself, but the added-on costs which are to be incurred by the industry in administering the tax.

For the Minister to claim that the cost is not important is astounding. I hope that he will have reflected for the past

40 minutes or so on the ill-advised nature of that remark and perhaps he will withdraw it. The Minister also said that the tax is mildly progressive. Again, that is surprising. The Minister cited the example of poor people who are living in small houses. When we were discussing the abolition of domestic rates and the introduction of the poll tax—some Conservative Members may remember that fondly, some not so fondly—we were always being given the example of the poor widow who lived in the big house. Well, the poor widow who lives in a big house may have a larger insurance bill than someone living in a small house, yet the Paymaster General, who I do not remember being a rebel on the poll tax although I may be wrong and perhaps he will refresh our memory if he was—[HON. MEMBERS: "He was a Whip".] Indeed. He probably whipped his right hon. and hon. Friends into the Lobby to vote for the poll tax when those ridiculous arguments were being deployed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) said, many people on low incomes are being hit by high insurance bills and there is nothing that they can do to avoid them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) said, that is why it is important for us to return to the fundamental question—what is the Government's philosophy? They want people to be prudent and responsible, yet they are taxing people for that.

I know that other Ministers on the Treasury Bench are much given to philosophy these days. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who is one of the most precious Ministers in this Government, tells us many things, including the fact that people have become cynical about our great institutions—whether the Conservative party, Parliament or anything else. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who is another candidate for the Cabinet, is also given to philosophical discussions, although he appears to be a more traditional, Disraeli Tory.

Let us hear where the Paymaster General stands in this great moral debate and especially what he has to say about taxing responsibility and prudence. I am sure that he must have had something to say about it in his manifesto.

I am sure that the House would like to hear what the Government's philosophy is. Many of us believe that they are not bothered about philosophy when it comes to a frantic scrabble to raise tax to make ends meet. At the last election the Government told us that they had a deficit of £28 billion and that the recovery would start the day after the election. No doubt Conservative Members remember that. Yet we now have a £50 billion deficit and people are being hit by income tax increases and value added tax on fuel and are finding that their mortgage tax relief is being steadily reduced. Depite the fact that the Government condemned us for allegedly intending to reduce mortgage tax relief to 25 per cent., they will reduce it to 15 per cent. during the next few years.

Despite those tax increases the Government are coming back for more and more. People who cannot afford it are being hit by tax bills that they cannot avoid. That is why insurance is being taxed and why we debated the air tax yesterday. The Government are going for all the soft options, regardless of the consequences.

Perhaps the Paymaster General will be honest and tell us that the Government are not going for those taxes because of any philosophical problems but because they are engaged in a frantic and desperate search for further tax.

Will the Government tell us whether they intend to extend the scope or rate of the insurance tax? The Prime Minister got into difficulty when he said that he would not extend the scope or rate of value added tax.. He was absolutely categorical about it. "Oh no, we are not going to increase it", he said. What is the Paymaster General going to say about the insurance tax? Will the scope or rate be altered in the life of this Parliament? Perhaps we could hear his answer in clear and unambiguous terms.

Sir John Cope: I must start by pointing out that the reason for the tax is that it will raise revenue from a sector which has relatively low indirect tax at the moment. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor concluded at the time and as other hon. Members have said since, such a tax was and is a sensible means of raising revenue—in the context of the Budget as a whole—by broadening the scope of indirect taxation. That is a direct remark of the sort that my right hon. and learned Friend is given to make. It was an honest remark and it explained the origin of the tax extremely clearly—it could not be clearer than that.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) quoted one of my most distinguished predecessors as Paymaster General, although admittedly he held the post at a time when the job was rather different and much more profitable than it is now. My predecessor said something that was extremely true:

> "To tax and to please . . . is not given to men."

It was right and fair that the hon. Gentleman should quote that.

The insurance sector is currently subject to little indirect tax. This tax represents a further contribution to the Government's long-term strategy of shifting the burden of taxation from direct to indirect taxation. It generates what the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) called "very little revenue". I do not see it that way. It generates a significant amount of revenue—approximately £775 million in a full year—and, in doing so, makes a valuable contribution to tackling the Budget deficit.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) asked about the future rate and scope of the tax. The current rate has been chosen after careful consideration of all the factors involved: the impact on taxpayers; the effect on the industry; the other matters that arise out of the amendment; and the yield to which I referred. We believe, and the Chancellor believes, that it is the right rate for this tax. I am not forecasting future Budgets. No Treasury Minister can do so at any stage, and I shall not do so this evening, but that is how we chose the right rate.

At one point in the debate I was complimented on recommending the tax on the ground that it was mildly progressive. At other times I have been attacked for making remarks on a similar basis, as I was even in this short debate. The point that I was making was that, as the family expenditure survey shows, the poorest 20 per cent. of households will pay only about 7p a week. I recognise that that is an average. Hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), described individual cases where expenditure varied from that. That is true of every form of expenditure.

However, the 7p a week for the poorest 20 per cent. of households contrasts with about 47p a week for the richest 20 per cent. of households. It seemed to come as a great insight to some hon. Members that high-income households pay more on insurance than low-income households. But that seems obvious. Indeed, high-income

[Sir John Cope]

households pay more on everything than low-income households, which is why taxes on expenditure tend to be progressive, as this tax is. That is an obvious fact of life.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is the Paymaster General taking account of the fact that a substantial number of low-income households will pay no tax at all simply because they cannot afford the premiums?

Sir John Cope: Yes, but that is the case now, as the hon. Lady rightly says. In introducing the insurance premium tax, we had to take account of average figures. That is not a novel factor that is somehow being introduced as a result of the insurance premium tax, but is the current position.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green spoke about the position in Greater London where, according to the family expenditure survey, people pay an average of some 18 per cent. more for vehicles, building and contents insurance than people elsewhere in the United Kingdom. When that is translated into the 35p a week which 44 per cent. of households pay, there is not a tremendous difference between the overall burden on people in Greater London and the burden on people who live elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I readily accept, and have made no attempt to disguise my acceptance, that those are averages and that some individuals will be in a different position.

There has also been some discussion about the coverage of the tax, particularly in relation to medical health insurance and private health care. I made it clear that we consider it right to extend the tax to all general insurance. That includes private health care and credit insurance. By doing that, we can keep the rate to 3 per cent. and minimise the impact on everyone concerned.

I was asked also by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central about equalisation reserves. I understand that the Association of British Insurers is still in discussion with the DTI and Inland Revenue about a possible scheme for calculating equalisation reserves. Clearly, the outcome will be announced when those discussions have been completed, but I have noted the interest expressed in these matters by hon. Gentlemen during the debate.

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN, *pursuant to the Order this day, put the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 285, Noes 327.

Division No. 98] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric

Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex

Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.

Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr

Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan

Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Michael Brown.

Question accordingly negatived.

THE CHAIRMAN *then put forthwith the other Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at Ten o'clock.*

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Committee divided: Ayes 322, Noes 285.

Division No. 99] [10.16 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*

Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Brown, and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian

McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, M[illegible] Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, G[illegible]on *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

[illegible]Question accordingly agreed to.

[illegible]lause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 72

PERSONAL ALLOWANCE

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 321, Noes, 284.

Division No. 100] **[10.30 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui

Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert

Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David (*Shettleston*)
Marshall, Jim (*Leicester, S*)
Martin, Michael J. (*Springburn*)
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill (*Sheffield Heeley*)
Michie, Mrs Ray (*Argyll Bute*)
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin (*Gt Grimsby*)
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. (*Wy'nshawe*)
Morris, Estelle (*B'ham Yardley*)
Morris, Rt Hon J. (*Aberavon*)
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael (*N W'kshire*)
O'Brien, William (*Normanton*)
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray (*Ogmore*)
Prentice, Ms Bridget (*Lew'm E*)
Prentice, Gordon (*Pendle*)
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick

Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George (*Hamilton*)
Robinson, Geoffrey (*Co'try NW*)
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie (*Dundee W*)
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew (*Oxford E*)
Smith, C. (*Isl'ton S & F'sbury*)
Smith, Rt Hon John (*M'kl'ds E*)
Smith, Llew (*Blaenau Gwent*)
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel (*Dunfermline W*)
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann (*Dewsbury*)
Taylor, Matthew (*Truro*)
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth (*Gower*)
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan (*Sw'n W*)
Williams, Alan W (*Carmarthen*)
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David (*Bolton SE*)

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 77

MORTGAGE INTEREST RELIEF ETC.

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 332, Noes 251.

Division No. 101] **[10.42 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter (*East Surrey*)
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael (*Selby*)
Allason, Rupert (*Torbay*)

Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques (*Gravesham*)

Arnold, Sir Thomas (*Hazel Grv*)
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David (*Bour'mouth E*)
Atkinson, Peter (*Hexham*)
Baker, Rt Hon K. (*Mole Valley*)
Baker, Nicholas (*Dorset North*)
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew (*Southport*)
Banks, Robert (*Harrogate*)
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter (*Eltham*)
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian (*S Dorset*)
Bruce, Malcolm (*Gordon*)
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander (*Montgomry*)
Carlisle, Kenneth (*Lincoln*)
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael (*Rochford*)
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth (*Ruclif*)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony (*Wyre For'st*)
Coombs, Simon (*Swindon*)
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina (*S D'by'ire*)
Curry, David (*Skipton & Ripon*)
Davies, Quentin (*Stamford*)
Davis, David (*Boothferry*)
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold

Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David (*Welwyn Hatfield*)
Evans, Jonathan (*Brecon*)
Evans, Nigel (*Ribble Valley*)
Evans, Roger (*Monmouth*)
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry (*Isle of Wight*)
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael (*Stirling*)
Forsythe, Clifford (*Antrim S*)
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don (*Bath*)
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam (*Woodspring*)
Fox, Sir Marcus (*Shipley*)
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. (*Cambs SW*)
Greenway, Harry (*Ealing N*)
Greenway, John (*Ryedale*)
Griffiths, Peter (*Portsmouth, N*)
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil (*Tatton*)
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James (*Southampton Test*)
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas (*G'tham*)
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan (*Strat'rd-on-A*)
Howell, Rt Hon David (*G'dford*)
Howell, Sir Ralph (*N Norfolk*)
Hughes Robert G. (*Harrow W*)
Hughes, Simon (*Southwark*)
Hunt, Rt Hon David (*Wirral W*)
Hunt, Sir John (*Ravensbourne*)
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert (*Wantage*)
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym (*Cardiff N*)
Jones, Nigel (*Cheltenham*)
Jones, Robert B. (*W Hertfdshr*)
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert

Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Brown and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken

Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Tipping, Paddy
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill (Clauses 28, 46, 72 and 77) reported, without amendment.

Gas Supplies (Wales)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.54 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Although 84 per cent. of homes of Wales are within 100 yards of a gas supply, 173,000 households still have no access to gas. Those who lose out include part of my home village of Resolven known as the Site, which British Gas is refusing to supply despite the fact that the rest of the village has gas installed, and has had so for a number of years. The Dulais valley villages of Seven Sisters, Onllwyn and Banwen and the villages of Cwmllinfell, Rhifawr and lower Brynamman in the Swansea valley do not have a gas supply. Those villages are in my constituency. There are other surrounding villages in the same predicament.

The question is why. First, it is a consequence of privatisation and the Government's failure to implement a regulatory regime to protect outlying areas, including valley villages. Many of these are former coal-mining areas where the cost and difficulty of obtaining coal because of the rundown of the coal industry is a major problem. It is also inconvenient for elderly citizens to rely on coal in the current circumstances.

I cite the case of Mrs. Sally Pascoe, an 87-year-old widow in the village of Seven Sisters. She finds it very difficult to rely on coal, and would like the opportunity to have gas. She lives in the Dulais valley where gas has recently been extended to halfway up the valley as far as Crynant—a few miles away from the village of Seven Sisters, which is denied gas supply.

There are 1,400 homes without gas supply in the Dulais valley in Seven Sisters, Banwen and Onllwyn. In response to a request from me, British Gas has asked for a sum of £910 from each home in the villages to fund the £1 million cost of supplying and installing the pipeline. Such an amount is impossible for residents of those villages who are, by and large, on extremely low incomes.

Among these homes are 400 properties owned by Neath borough council. Recently, the council installed central heating systems at considerable cost. It is impossible for the council to fund £910 for each property under its responsibility. British Gas does not think that customers will take up the opportunity of gas supply at such a high installation charge, which is the only one that it is prepared to make.

In the upper Swansea valley, the villagers of Cwmllinfell are in a similar predicament. Recently they presented me with a petition, which I sent to the Welsh Office and to British Gas. British Gas told me that it would cost some £2 million to lay piping to the residents, and that they would each be charged more than £500. It is impossible for them be bear that cost, given the income and demographic population in the village, which comprises many elderly residents. British Gas also claims that it would need to upgrade the existing network in the surrounding area to cope with the extra volume of supplying villages such as Cwmllinfell, and such upgrading would not be completed for at least two years.

There is an additional problem. A number of the villages were promised natural gas supply and installed liquefied petroleum gasoline systems some seven years ago on the understanding that natural gas would be available in a few years, but privatisation has completed scotched that opportunity and the villages have been saddled with LPG, which costs twice as much as natural gas. I cite the case of Mrs. Laverne West and her husband Brian, who have a bill of £1,600. When value added tax is imposed from April, it will go up a further £2·50 per week, and when the full VAT increase comes in it will be an extra £5·50 a week. That is an incredible heating cost to bear for such a couple.

Then there is the case of Mrs. Margaret Thomas, who has chronic asthma and arthritis. She is paying £25 per week in gas charges because of this expensive LPG scheme, which she expected to be replaced by a natural gas scheme until privatisation came along and killed that hope.

Gas is supplied near to those families to the villages of Gwaun-cae-Gurwen and up to the Gurnos roundabout at Ystalyfera. We are not talking about a major pipeline installation project, but about the demand for gas which is supplied only a few miles away. Yet British Gas says that it is far too expensive. It also claims that, under the Gas (Connection Charges) Regulations 1986, it is not allowed to subsidise access for new customers.

That undermines the principle of essential service, which means universal access for every customer who requires it. Again, that is a direct consequence of the privatisation of British Gas, where the public interest has been relegated below the interests of private shareholders and the imperatives of competition which drive the regulatory regime.

One result of that is direct discrimination in, for example, Lampeter where 800 customers were supplied by British Gas on a spur pipeline. British Gas had to invest £1 million in 1992 to upgrade that spur, or at least a section of it. British Gas told me that it would expect to invest a further £1·5 million in 1995 to upgrade and maintain the remaining section of the pipeline to Lampeter.

British Gas has also stated that it will never recover the capital investment in commercial terms, and that it is doing it only because it has a statutory obligation to supply existing customers. Yet there are similar amounts needed to supply new customers; for example, £1 million in the case of Dulais valley or up to £2 million in the case of the upper Swansea valley. The regulatory system is being pursued by the Government and implemented by British Gas and it is directly discriminating against new customers. Old customers, on the other hand, can be effectively subsidised on commercial criteria in the case of Lampeter. That discrimination is completely indefensible and against the public interest.

It is also, in my view, short sighted. Extending supply could make it more attractive for new industry to come into areas of high unemployment and deprivation, such as the upper Swansea valley and the upper Dulais valley. That could increase the wealth of the community and increase the standards of living of local residents. They would be encouraged to consume more, which would open up new markets. That would be a complete antidote to the short-termism which drives British Gas's policy under the regime put in place by the Government.

The regulatory regime results in cherry picking and social dumping. The cherry picking is a result of British Gas being driven by competitive forces, with new competitors encouraged by the regulator yapping at its heels. Those forces have driven British Gas to supply highly profitable customers—large houses, industrial units, city centres and urban concentrations—rather than outlying areas where it is difficult to make a profit. Those areas thus become the victims of social dumping.

[Mr. Peter Hain]

From British Gas's standpoint, the recent changes which followed the Monopoly and Mergers Commission report mean that there is extra competition. An argument which has been put to me and which is hard to dispute is that British Gas could invest in a new pipeline and then find that a competitor comes in and creams off the market and all the customers. While British Gas would have invested all of the money up front, the benefits would be denied to it.

The villages are being penalised and discriminated against because of the regime that the Government have put in place governing British Gas. From December 1992, British Gas has made sure that consumer contribution to pipeline or outfill projects has gone up by 80 per cent. Every new customer has been required to pay much more to have gas brought to them than has been the case in the past.

That brings me to an alternative solution, given that British Gas seems unable to provide one because of the regulatory regime bearing down on it continuously in a way which makes it difficult to meet the demands. What about the possibility of grant aid? I have taken up that matter with the Welsh Office, and I have had correspondence with the Under-Secretary of State and with the Secretary of State. I am informed that such projects for installing pipelines up the valleys are not eligible for urban aid because they are residential rather than industrial projects.

The alternative is to consider the possibility of a European grant. Again, I am informed that such projects would not be eligible because of privatisation and I cannot dispute that fact. Prior to privatisation, British Gas Wales was eligible to apply for European regional development funding for 30 per cent. of key infrastructure improvements. Indeed, in the seven years prior to privatisation British Gas received more than £15 million from European grants to assist with pipeline improvements, but it has not been eligible since. That is a direct and discriminatory consequence of the Government's policy of privatising British Gas. It is ridiculous because other countries have benefited from European money. For instance, Portugal was given a grant of £78 million to develop a natural gas terminal at Setubal and a pipeline northwards. In correspondence with British Gas, the Secretary of State said that such an option would be denied to Wales because of privatisation and also because Wales and the rest of Britain is not, like Portugal, an objective 1 region in European Community terms, although it should be because Wales is the poorest part of mainland Britain and thus should be eligible for such grants.

The Under-Secretary of State for Wales pointed out in a letter to me today—I am grateful to him for supplying it before this debate—that

> "privatised bodies are required to comply with the 'Solima' criteria"

under European grant terms, which means that domestic customers would be denied such grant aid because it is applicable only to so-called economic and industrial developments in the region. I argue that that is a narrow definition of eligibility. If one upgrades a residential community, industry will be able to invest in those villages, which are industrial as they are former mining villages. Industry would be much more likely to invest if the villages had gas and it had the opportunity to use it.

The Under-Secretary should give us an assurance that the Government will seek a reform of the European development fund criteria. I hope that he can give me that promise so that villages such as mine are not in future denied grant aid from Europe.

The Welsh Office must put considerable pressure on the European Union to assist outlying areas throughout Wales, where so many tens of thousands of villagers are denied gas, which is the cheapest form of energy. It must also put pressure on the Union to ensure that the regulations are reformed, so that grant aid is provided to assist with such installations and British Gas can have a detailed programme, which provides everyone in Wales, and certainly everyone in the valleys, with the gas that they want.

The European question has another dimension. In a recent letter to Mr. David Morris, a Member of the European Parliament, the Regional Commissioner, Mr. Bruce Millan, said:

> "Under the current Community Support Frameworks for the United Kingdom there is no provision for funding gas supply networks. Only on-site infrastructure for industrial and business premises is eligible for funding."

He goes on to say that that could

> "be a matter for discussion"

within the European Community and that if the British Government made any proposals they would be considered. He does not prejudge the outcome, but invites the British Government to propose changes in the European grant criteria, which would enable British Gas to benefit.

I am making a direct request across the Chamber to the Under-Secretary of State and through him to the Government to lobby the European Commission and meet with Mr. Millan and other Commissioners to change the criteria, so that villagers in my constituency and throughout the United Kingdom can benefit from European grant aid for such infrastructure investment. British Gas recognises that there is a strong case for the provision of natural gas to deprived communities—not least because it is comparatively cheaper than other fuels.

In conclusion, as a local Member of Parliament I have become extremely frustrated at the buck-passing between the Welsh Office, the European Community and British Gas. I have been corresponding on the matter for over a year. I do not quarrel about the energy with which the Welsh Office has responded to my pressure and requests, but I complain about the frustration of a local Member of Parliament who finds that everybody is passing the buck up and down the line.

I call on the Government, together with British Gas, to resolve this matter as soon as possible and supply gas up the Dulais and upper Swansea valleys. The sums involved are relatively trivial. Compared with the profits made by British Gas, they are petty cash—a million here and a million there. The Welsh Office should immediately lobby the European Community to change the criteria by which European grant aid is provided. If that is not done, valley villagers and tens of thousands of others throughout Wales and no doubt elsewhere in Britain must conclude that they are the victims of privatisation and Government indifference.

11.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I congratulate the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) on securing this important debate, especially at such a civilised hour.

It may be helpful if I begin by outlining the changes that have occurred within the European structural fund arena, which I hope will clarify the position with regard to utilities and the hon. Gentleman's specific concerns in respect of domestic users.

Current European structural fund support in Wales is implemented through European Commission-approved community support frameworks. These focus on the conversion of regions seriously affected by industrial decline within objective 2 areas, such as industrial south Wales and Clwyd, and the promotion of the development of rural aeas within objective 5b, as in the case of Dyfed, Gwynedd and Powys.

Prior to 1989, not since privatisation as the hon. Gentleman suggested, when community support frameworks were first introduced, the European Commission was responsible for approving numerous single projects to aid the economic development of Wales. These included support for various gas projects to aid industry. However, after a review of the structural funds, which was completed in 1988, the European Council approved Commission proposals for co-ordinating and targeting structural funds on areas most in need. The principles of the review were to concentrate on five priority objectives: to encourage partnership; to introduce consistency, particularly with the member state's economic policies; to improve administration of the funds; a switch from a project-based to a programme-based approach; and, finally, to simplify monitoring. The five priority objectives were agreed for the funds, each of which was allocated a block of resources but with a large proportion of the funds targeted at objective 1 areas, such as Spain, Portugal, Greece and the Republic of Ireland.

Objective 1 designated areas were allocated funds appropriate to promoting the development and structural adjustment of the regions whose development is lagging behind. Their community support frameworks allow for the introduction of natural gas infrastructure. It is important to recognise that both the ethos and the quantum of funds available require different approaches to the problems of different areas, and in particular require a different emphasis in preparing and implementing programmes. In Wales, the community support frameworks approved for objectives 2 and 5b involve promoting the synergy of varying measures to maximise the economic development of the areas concerned with the funds available.

The introduction of more focused structural funds programmes has an important reference for privatised utilities in the United Kingdom. The Commission insisted that applications for investment in infrastructure by privatised bodies should be subject to a strict set of conditions known as the Solima criteria. First, there must be statutory or similar control of the body concerned; secondly, the aid must result in investment to the benefit of consumers or users of the infrastructure; thirdly, aid will be pitched at a level reflecting the extent to which a subsidy is necessary to ensure the investment is undertaken; and, fourthly, retention of infrastructure in public use during its economic life will normally be required.

These criteria address the Commission's concern that European regional development fund grant should not benefit non-eligible users, and that the grant should take into account the probable return on the investment and thus be pitched at a level that is strictly necessary to allow the project to proceed.

Any applications from privatised bodies entail very careful analysis of project proposals and a clear explanation of how any project proposed by a privatised body could meet the Solima criteria.

The ERDF grant is, if necessary, reduced to ensure that no grant is paid to any proportion of the investment estimated not to be for direct benefit to industry, commerce or tourism, and that no grant is paid for any proportion of the investment which could be financed out of future revenue from charges to the user of the infrastructure.

To qualify for ERDF assistance, projects must show a clear link between the project and the industrial and/or economic development of the area concerned and show that it will lead to a genuine improvement of facilities. They must be located within an area covered by an approved community support framework, be acceptable in terms of the relevant CSF, contribute to the objectives and targets of the relevant CSF and be undertaken by a body satisfying the eligibility criteria.

Against that background, I am well aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern about the cost to his constituents of the possible extension of the gas mains system to Seven Sisters in the upper Dulais valley. I have considerable sympathy for his constituents and others he has described this evening. As such, I understand that the hon. Gentleman is well aware before tonight's debate that ERDF resources cannot be devoted to the provision of gas supplies that are either exclusively or primarily for domestic use. That is also the case for support from the strategic development scheme.

Gas supply schemes are eligible for SDS support if they fall as part of local authority sponsored infrastructure projects that will create or safeguard jobs—not if the scheme solely or primarily benefits domestic users.

British Gas is required by law under the Gas (Connection Charges) Regulations 1986 to secure a contribution from potential new customers towards the cost of making natural gas available. The formula takes into account the benefit to British Gas of gas sales which would follow the commissioning of the project, but is also designed to ensure that existing customers do not subsidise new customers.

British Gas maintains that its approach to providing mains extension is consistent throughout the country, and was in existence before privatisation. It is not a consequence of privatisation as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Mr. Hain: I cited the example of Lampeter where it was not a commercial investment; it is an existing customer base. Therefore, British Gas is required to provide a service and we would all expect that. Effectively, places like Seven Sisters are being discriminated against. Will the Minister concede that British Gas was eligible for European funding to the tune of £15 million before privatisation?

Mr. Jones: I have already covered the latter point. That was the position until 1989, after privatisation, but the regulatory regime under which British Gas has to operate now is the Gas (Connection Charges) Regulations 1986

[Mr. Jones]

which require it to treat all customers alike throughout the country and to ensure that existing customers must not subsidise new customers. That has been the practice not just since 1986 but was the practice before. The decision to proceed with such a scheme must therefore be a matter for the commercial judgment of British Gas.

Negotiations with the European Commission have determined the future shape and content of the structural fund. In Wales there will be two programme areas: objective 2 industrial south Wales and objective 5b rural Wales. Structural fund working groups are developing strategies for their respective areas.

Arising from the strategies are the specific future priorities that the partnership—those who are involved in putting together the objectives and applications—feels should receive support under the structural funds from January 1994 onwards. Those plans will have to be submitted to the Commission by the end of April 1994.

The European Commission will draw from those plans when establishing the community support framework for each eligible area and those frameworks will define the activities eligible for support in each area.

Utilities are mentioned in both strategies, although gas is not mentioned in particular. The plans recognise that improvements in the utilities would contribute to making industrial, commercial and tourism development more attractive. However, the fact that limited funds are available will necessitate rigorous selection procedures, and it is likely that any utility seeking funds for projects will be required to demonstrate clearly the benefits to economic development—notwithstanding the need to satisfy the Solima criteria.

Even if such activities are included in the community support frameworks, there is no guarantee that any particular area or project will benefit. Applications for European regional development fund assistance must accord with the priorities for regional economic development included in the community support frameworks, and must undergo appraisal of their economic benefits to ensure that they are in keeping with the ERDF resources that would be deployed.

Although there is a need to ensure that safeguards are in place to avoid the possible distortion of competition through direct state aid—and to ensure that benefits accrue to the community rather than to private individuals—private-sector involvement in structural funds is to be welcomed. In response to what the hon. Gentleman said, I stress that the Government are keen for the private sector to be more involved in the structural funds programmes. The introduction of the new programmes will allow a continuation—indeed, an expansion—of the partnership between the public and private sectors for jointly funded projects, which is encouraging.

Mr. Hain: The Minister has not answered one question. Is he prepared, on behalf of the Government, to take up Commissioner Millan's invitation to look afresh at the funding criteria? Will he promise that that will be done as a direct result of tonight's debate?

Mr. Jones: I have tried to describe the way in which the new plans applications are proceeding, which will involve community support frameworks. The partnership must deposit the plans with the Commission by April this year. It would, however, be wrong for me to promise too much to the hon. Gentleman: the utilities will be included, but not specifically gas. I envisage a continuation of the present arrangements. When we can indentify particular economic benefits in industrial, commercial or tourism categories, there may well be opportunities for utility applications. However, I think that the concepts are now well established, and I can foresee no direct application in, say, industrial south Wales for applications serving only domestic users. I am afraid that I cannot offer the hon. Gentleman that consolation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 2 February 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Madam Speaker: I regret to have to inform the House of the death of Josephine Richardson, Member for Barking, and I desire on behalf of the House to express our sense of the loss that we have sustained and our sympathy with the relatives of the hon. Member.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Middle East

1. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about recent developments in the middle east.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): Since I visited the region at the beginning of the year, negotiations between Israel and the PLO have continued and some progress has been made towards an agreement on Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho. President Clinton and President Assad met on 16 January, and I hope that this will give new impetus to the negotiations on the Syrian and other tracks. It may take some time yet, but I am clear that there is a determination now on all sides to work for, and to achieve, a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Mr. Clappison: Given the encouraging signs of progress in the latest negotiations and the need to underpin the peace process with growth and prosperity, would not now be a good time to tear down unnecessary barriers to trade in the region, beginning with the wholly unjustified Arab boycott of Israel, the scrapping of which is long overdue?

Mr. Hurd: The Arab boycott of Israel is gradually fading and eroding, as recent actions and words in the Gulf have shown. In terms of our own affairs, the rapidly increasing total of our exports to Israel tell their own story. They were up 50 per cent. in the first 11 months of last year.

Mr. Janner: Does the right hon. Gentleman know that the Arab League is due to meet in March to decide on the removal of a number of companies from the boycott list on the basis that they will be doing business in Gaza and Jericho? Will the right hon. Gentleman please ensure that Britain will do everything that it can to ensure that all British companies are removed from that list forthwith?

Mr. Hurd: I agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman and with my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) that any justification for the boycott that there ever may have been—we never accepted that there was one —has now gone. The boycott is eroding fast and we shall do our best to help that process.

Mr. Hicks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that over the years the Palestinians have, on occasion, experienced humiliation when crossing into the occupied territories from Jordan and vice versa? Therefore, does he further agree that, under any arrangement, the Palestinians should have the right to control access to the Jericho territory?

Mr. Hurd: That is one of the points, perhaps the most difficult, that is still being thrashed out and it was argued between Mr. Arafat and Mr. Shimon Peres in Davos a few days ago. The Israelis feel—one must have some sympathy for them—that it is a matter of security for them to be able to exercise some control over people coming into Gaza and Jericho, given that once they are in there, they can go freely into Israel. However, the Palestinians are also sensitive about those areas, and they will feel a sense of indignity if they do not have control of the process. It is a matter of working out in detail procedures that are a compromise between those two views. I think that that end is in sight.

Mr. Maginnis: Does the Secretary of State agree that peace in the middle east depends to a large extent on encouragement by western leaders? Has Mr. Clinton not sent the wrong signal across the world from the United States by pandering to a terrorist-leader such as Gerry Adams?

Mr. Hurd: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his ingenuity. Without following him too far, let me say that I had occasion yesterday, both in public and in private, to express my views on that. The hon. Gentleman will no doubt agree that the test is whether the leader of Sinn Fein is now prepared, at last, to bring violence to a permanent end. He is a failed politician; he is no longer elected as a Member of the House and Sinn Fein has a limited share, as a minority of the minority vote in Northern Ireland. It would be quite wrong if he were given some special treatment simply because he has used the bomb and the bullet to disguise the fact that electorally he has not been successful.

Mr. Dykes: Rather than letting the Arab boycott fade away, is it not time for the United States and the European Union countries to make a major effort to reward Israeli imagination and courage—and Palestinian courage, as trade will also benefit the Palestinians—by dismantling the boycott and suggesting that to the Arab League as soon as possible?

Mr. Hurd: We have done that. However, Israel has some way to go before there is a full and comprehensive peace. Israel still occupies Gaza and Jericho, using methods which certainly do not help forward reconciliation. I agree that the time for the boycott is over and that we must work to bring about its disappearance, but I should not like it to be thought that no effort is required on the other side of the ledger, because it certainly is.

Dr. John Cunningham: Everyone should welcome the meeting between President Clinton and President Assad, and every sensible person wants an end to the Arab boycott, but surely that can come only when the peace process has been fully completed and there is mutual recognition between all the parties to the dispute. As we can proceed with economic reconstruction while the political dialogue is taking place, can the Foreign Secretary tell us whether he has been able to make a positive response to the points that I put to him in December in support of the proposals that he has now received from the Palestinian Council for Economic Reconstruction and Development?

Mr. Hurd: We have given a positive response to the needs of the Palestinians. When I was in Gaza on 5 January, I announced that our aid programme to the occupied territories would amount to £70 million over the next three years. Most of it goes to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, and I was impressed by what it is doing in Gaza. A good share also goes to health, education and training.

Eastern Europe (Embassies)

2. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which newly formed states in eastern Europe he proposes to set up embassies; and what is the budget for this in the next financial year.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): We have no plans at present to open further missions in the region, but this is kept under review. Since the end of the cold war, the Foreign Office has opened 13 new embassies in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe as well as a consultate-general in St. Petersburg. The cost in the next financial year is expected to be about £9·5 million.

Mrs. Gorman: Given the volatile and possibly ephemeral nature of many of the newly emerging states from the former Soviet Union, should not we be using public facilities such as hotels for mounting our diplomatic mission or sharing with our European partners? Is he aware that in Kiev, which I recently visited, we have acquired two large and elaborate buildings, one of which is being equipped to the standards to which I suppose the diplomatic staff are accustomed? When I inquired what the other building was for, I was told that it was to be done up so that, should the Secretary of State pass through, he would have somewhere to stay because he could not possibly use the hotels in Kiev.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is obviously right to urge on the Foreign Office the need to be as cost effective as possible. On the matter of sharing with our European partners, I had not expected that question from my hon. Friend, but the answer is that we do co-locate, for example both in Minsk and Almaty. Neither had I expected my hon. Friend's suggestion about using hotels, but we do use them, for example in Baku. In Kiev, there are two buildings in Desyatinna street, one is No. 9 and the other is No. 12. We acquired No. 12 because No. 9 is held on a very short lease. We shall certainly make the most cost-effective use of No. 12, including co-location with other European countries, if that is what we want, but we shall give serious attention to as and when, depending upon the needs of other posts in the region.

Mr. Rogers: But, seriously, substantial issues are involved. When the Government are thinking of opening diplomatic missions, will they consider changing their diplomatic missions staffing policy? In the past year they have been getting rid of the specialists in trade, industry and technology who were helping to develop our contacts in those countries and replacing them with public relations staff. Why do the Government not encourage British industry to invest in eastern Europe?

Mr. Hogg: You will not be surprised to hear, Madam Speaker, that the hon. Gentleman is simply wrong. We have placed enormous emphasis on the commercial policies of the Foreign Office. One reason for opening diplomatic missions in Almaty, Tashkent and Baku was the commercial opportunities there, and we shall continue to use every method at our disposal to promote British industry in those countries and elsewhere.

European Community (Enlargement)

3. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards the enlargement of the European Community.

Mr. Hurd: The accession negotiations with Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden are going well. Some difficult issues remain, including agriculture and regional policy, but we are committed to the target of March 1994 for completing negotiations.

Mrs. Lait: Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) about the volatility of the states in the old Soviet empire, does my right hon. Friend agree that the sooner the applicants for European Union membership from central Europe join, the better for democracy? Does my right hon. Friend believe that Poland, Hungary and the Czech republics should join before they are economically ready to do so?

Mr. Hurd: It would not be sensible to encourage countries in central and eastern Europe to join before they are economically ready to do so, as that would lead to tears, but there are plenty of things that we can do meanwhile. For example, Britain and Italy have launched a joint initiative to associate those countries with the work of the European Union on the two pillars of security and foreign policy and home affairs. Even more important than that is the need to liberalise trade with them. We are pressing hard and there has been some progress. Imports into the European Union from the Visegrad countries, Poland, Hungary, the Czechs and Slovaks, rose by 44 per cent. between 1990 and 1992, but there are still too many restrictions and there is scope for more liberalisation of our market towards the east even before those countries achieve full membership.

Mr. Jim Marshall: In the light of the Foreign Secretary's reply to the specific point about eastern Europe, as the Western European Union is the defence component of the European Union and the European pillar of NATO, will he give a guarantee that, specifically in the case of the Visegrad countries, the Soviet Union will not be able to exercise a veto over their entry into the European Union as it appears to be doing over their entry into NATO?

Mr. Hurd: There is no Russsian veto in either case.

Subsidiarity

4. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Ministers last discussed subsidiarity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: The Council last discussed subsidiarity on 6 December last year, in preparation for the Brussels summit. The Commission presented a subsidiarity report to the Council which would affect some 25 per cent. of EC legislation. Some laws will be repealed completely, others replaced by simpler measures. The Commission's report also agreed with 17 of the 24 items on the Anglo-French subsidiarity list, including the bathing and drinking water directives and directives regulating professional qualifications. The European Council called for the Commission to bring forward early proposals for the implementation of the report and for swift action. We welcome that.

Mr. Thomason: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the policy of subsidiarity must be pursued with utmost vigour, to ensure that all European Governments are committed to devolving decision making to national level wherever appropriate? Is that not in contrast to the policy of the Opposition, who appear to be committed to ensuring that decision making is passed to European institutions?

Mr. Hurd: I agree. We shall hear more on that theme in the coming months from all my right hon. and hon. Friends. There is plenty of work still to be done, but it is interesting that the number of Commission proposals for new legislation has dropped rapidly, from more than 140 in 1991 to about 70 last year—that is, it halved.

Mr. Shore: Does the right hon. Gentleman recall the statements made by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor after that Brussels summit, to the effect that subsidiarity was to be applied to the expensive directives on bathing water and water quality? Is he aware that since then, a Member of the European Parliament—Mr. Collins—has corresponded with the Chairman of the Commission, and that Mr. Delors stated emphatically that there is no such agreement about the bathing water and water quality directives. Who is right?

Mr. Hurd: It may be that the right hon. Gentleman and others are confused. After the report, the Commission undertook to bring forward proposals to revise existing directives on drinking water, bathing water, surface water quality, fresh water management and ground water. It did not refer to the urban waste water directive, and I do not believe that anyone has claimed that there are plans to replace that. There may be understandable confusion between those different measures in the correspondence to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, much as we may wish a continuing decrease in the intrusiveness of the Commission's decisions in terms of regulations, on occasions—for example, when it opposes protectionism and favours competition—it acts in this country's interests? Is the key not to attack the Commission but to ensure that its competencies are clearly defined, and to keep it out of the hands, and free of the influence, of socialists in the European Parliament?

Mr. Hurd: Exactly—my hon. Friend puts it well. Much Community legislation is the result of pressure from British firms in respect of the single market and from British groups concerned with the environment. That is why subsidiarity is not entirely a straightforward concept. We must continue to winnow it out and to encourage the Commission to dispense with the unnecessary, but with a will to go further down the road that has been started. That will be an issue in the next few months and in the elections.

Committee of the Regions

5. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if a date has yet been set for the inaugural meeting of the European Committee of the Regions.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): No firm date has been agreed for the inaugural meeting of the European Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Jones: I am sure that the Minister is aware how important it is that the representations chosen to serve on that Committee know at an early date when it is likely to meet. That is important in the context of the whole Maastricht treaty. Does the Minister acknowledge that many representations from other European Union member states will be regarded as regional representatives, while those representing the constituent nations of the United Kingdom will be regarded as local representatives? There is always the danger that local authority representatives will not have the same powers, status or authority as those representing regions and regional bodies in Europe. Can the Minister give an assurance that when the Committee is established, United Kingdom representatives will not be regarded as second-class members?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I believe that a provisional date in early March has been set for the first meeting of the Committee. I assure the hon. Gentleman that United Kingdom representatives will have exactly the same powers, responsibilities and duties as any other members of the Committee, as prescribed in the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can my hon. Friend estimate the cost of the Committee's first year of operation, if it ever does start work? Have estimates been made of the potential cost of translating such regional languages as Welsh, Breton and Basque?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To make the Committee of the Regions as cost effective as possible, we are encouraging it to share various facilities, including translation facilities, with the Economic and Social Committee. The figure that has already been budgeted for the Committee of the Regions in 1994 is 12 million ecu.

Sir Russell Johnston: As the Government operate the United Kingdom in a pretty centralised way and are entirely opposed to any domestic devolution, how will they respond if the Committee of the Regions advocates greater powers for regions within Europe?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The powers within the United Kingdom and their distribution is a matter for the House. It would be a denial of the subsidiarity principle, which we discussed in answer to an earlier question, if the European institutions were to try to interfere in the domestic arrangements of member states in that regard.

Ms Quin: I hope that, on reflection, the Government will congratulate the Opposition on our victory in the House during the Maastricht debate, when we ensured that the representatives on the Committee would be elected local councillors. However, is not it regrettable that the Government have failed to follow the advice of the local authority associations on the political balance of representation to the Committee of the Regions from this country, and that the balance does not reflect the strength of the opposition at local level in Scotland, Wales or England? Will the Government now renounce their shabby deals with the nationalist parties and allow the Committee of the Regions to reflect accurately the political balance at local level?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am sorry that the hon. Lady is still squabbling with other members of the Opposition about the composition of the Committee. I can assure the House that the party balance on the Committee is entirely fair and represents the party balance at local authority level. After the next local government elections, no doubt the balance will change back in our favour. I look forward to the next Committee of the Regions having more Conservatives on it.

Growth, Competitiveness and Employment

6. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further discussions he has had with his European counterparts about implementation of the proposals in the Delors White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A progamme of action was agreed at the European Council on 11 December of last year. A discussion on progress is on the agenda for the Foreign Affairs Council on 7 and 8 February, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will attend.

Mr. Miller: I am grateful for that reply, but will the Minister explain why, against the background of the Conservative party's views on the Delors proposals, a company within a country where those proposals are well advanced can raise enough money to bid for the Rover Group? Does his Department agree with the President of the Board of Trade, who said in 1987 that if the Government did not keep some control over those matters, the British motor industry would be up a cul-de-sac?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment has nothing to say about the bid for Rover. That we are a magnet for overseas investment demonstrates the competitiveness of the United Kingdom economy. I look forward to BMW making an even greater success of the Rover Group.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that Mr. Delors' package, far from creating more employment would create more unemployment, far from creating faster economic growth would restrain the rate of economic growth and far from improving the Community's competitiveness would make us less competitive? Does he further agree that one has only to look at Spain, where the policies espoused by Mr. Delors have been pursued, to see the disastrous consequences that they would have?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The White Paper, which is being pursued and turned into an action plan, has been agreed by all member states of the European Council. It turns its attention to the European economy and excessive cost and regulation. One of the agreements coming out of the plan is that, where Community legislation inhibits employment through over-regulation or excessive cost, it will now be dealt with.

Mr. Salmond: Will not the Delors proposals on growth and employment be completely frustrated if European markets are not open? Has the Minister any information about today's action in Roscoff against fish products from Scotland, and is he aware of the threat of a total blockade against such products in the French market after this Friday? Given the vital importance of fish products to many small businesses around the coast, has he made any approaches to the French authorities to ensure that access to the French markets is allowed?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We believe in a single market; we also agree that trade barriers inhibit general wealth creation. If the hon. Gentleman will give me details of the incidents that he has mentioned, I will ensure that they are taken up by the appropriate Department.

Mr. Bellingham: When the Minister next meets Mr. Jacques Delors, will he ask why Britain is securing the overwhelming bulk of inward investment in the European Community? Will he also ask why Black and Decker is closing its plant in Germany and relocating all its operations in Durham? Will he tell Mr. Delors that what Europe needs are the Government's policies, not those of Mr. Delors?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall not ask Mr. Delors those questions, because I think that I know the answers —and I think that my hon. Friend does as well. Having lowered inflation and interest rates and controlled public expenditure, we are now a magnet for overseas investment; that is why we are one of the few European Union countries firmly on the road to economic recovery.

Bosnia

7. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's current policy towards the conflict in Bosnia.

12. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest developments in Bosnia.

Mr. Hurd: With our European Union partners, we continue to support the co-chairmen's efforts to bring the parties to a negotiated settlement. The Bosnian parties met in Geneva on 18 and 19 January and are due to meet again on 10 February. With other UNPROFOR contributors, we are continuing the humanitarian relief effort. On my visit to Bosnia recently, I saw the first-rate contribution that our troops and civilians are making despite the obstacles and dangers that they face. We are committed to maintaining that effort through the winter. We are considering the future of UNPROFOR with others concerned, and I carried that further in New York and Washington yesterday and the day before; but no decisions have been taken.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that in view of the continuing tragedy in Bosnia there can be no justification for allowing the British troops to leave?

Indeed, what the right hon. Gentleman has just said confirms that. Any troops who left would leave Bosnia's civilian population entirely at the mercy of the local warlords.

Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the fact that the international community has so far failed to end the aggression perpetrated by the Serbs and Croats may, unfortunately, encourage others in various unsettled parts of Europe to carry out similar acts of aggression and ethnic cleansing? The tragedy does not affect Bosnia alone.

Mr. Hurd: I think that I am right in believing that the hon. Gentleman has consistently—or at any rate, for a long time—advocated military intervention, or at least air strikes. How does he reconcile that stance with urging us to continue our current military and humanitarian efforts? We must ensure that we have the right balance between the effectiveness of our troops and the effectiveness of the aid effort and find ways of improving both; we need to make a calm judgment on the basis of the latest evidence.

I have encouraged the Secretary-General of the United Nations to report on the new thinking of the new staff whom he has on the ground. On the basis of that report, and in consultation with allies and partners, we shall be able to reach a considered conclusion on the right balance—probably next month.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will my right hon. Friend join me in sending condolences to the family of Paul Goodall, the aid worker who was so brutally murdered last week, together with our sympathy to the families of the two men who were shot? Is my right hon. Friend aware that those aid workers were sent out to Bosnia through the Crown Agents in Sutton in my constituency? Does he recognise that aid workers are largely unsung heroes in Bosnia? Moreover, the message that has come back to me is that they are determined to continue their work, which they consider to be a moral imperative.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is right. I know of her interest in the matter through the Crown Agents in her constituency. It is striking that, despite the tragic murder of Mr. Goodall, his comrades have clearly said that they want to continue. So the Overseas Development Administration has decided, after a temporary suspension of our convoys, to resume its work, which is clearly the wish of the people who drive. I saw for myself that, despite all the obstacles and the dangers that they run, they rightly believe that the aid that they get through contributes substantially to reducing the suffering, the cold and the hunger, of the people whom they help.

Mr. Corbett: While joining in the expression of sympathy to the family of Paul Goodall, may I commend the courage of my constituent, Simon King, who was injured in the same incident and may I thank, through the Foreign Secretary, all those concerned with Mr. King's rescue and care? Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that Mr. King and his colleagues are expected back in the United Kingdom on Saturday and that all proper arrangements have been made for them? In thinking about the future of our part in the humanitarian effort in Bosnia, will the Foreign Secretary pay special regard to the wish of Mr. King, his colleagues and many others that it should continue?

Mr. Hurd: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. We have ensured that the two survivors of that tragedy are properly looked after. We must consider not just whether to continue the humanitarian and military effort but whether it is as well organised as it could be or whether improvements can be made. Three new minds are at work on the problem that the hon. Gentleman raises: Mr. Akashi, whom I saw in Split, acting on behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General did a good job in Cambodia and is looking at the civilian side; General Sir Michael Rose, who everybody knows is an outstanding and thoughtful soldier; and the new French general, General de la Presle. We must consider not just whether we should continue, but, if we and the other troop contributors continue, how we can improve the present balance of effort so that more help reaches the people who need it.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend accept that Bosnia still has a Government in which Croats, Serbs and Muslims serve together? Will he admit that the British Government recognise that as the legitimate Government of Bosnia? In that context, is it not unfair to treat it merely as a warring faction?

Mr. Hurd: We regard the Bosnian Government as one of the parties that need to reach a negotiated settlement. We believe that the Serbs are mainly responsible for the fighting, but the Croats joined in later and are also to blame. All three sides have committed atrocities. But the point that is emerging more and more clearly and on which there is total agreement in Washington is that a negotiated settlement is needed. Yesterday in Washington, I was trying to explore how the United States can be associated more clearly and openly with the negotiations, not in discussing a settlement imposed on the Bosnian Government in Sarajevo but in trying to associate the Americans more completely with the search for an answer that all three parties will freely accept so that it can last and bring the war to an end. It is clear to me that there will be no military victory. If a settlement is to be negotiated, the sooner it is done the better.

Mr. Wareing: We all share the view of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) that it is tragic that an aid worker has been shot and others have been injured. Will the Foreign Secretary inform the House on the progress that has been made in investigating who the murderers were in that case? Is it true that they were probably members of the 7th Muslim Brigade, made up of what are colloquially termed "mujahedin"? If that should prove to be so, will he call for the disbandment of that brigade?

Mr. Hurd: I cannot answer accurately about that matter. We asked the Bosnian authorities at once to investigate the murder, and they did so. It is reported that a number of people have since been shot on Mount Igman. We are asking the Bosnian authorities for particulars of exactly what occurred, and who the people involved were. It has been reported that one of them may have been carrying a United Kingdom passport—a document which may or may not have been genuine. There is much obscurity and murkiness about this episode, but we are trying to have light shed on it. I will let the hon. Gentleman know how we get on with our inquiries.

Sir Michael Marshall: What opportunity has my right hon. Friend had to take stock of the current state of sanctions in Serbia and Croatia? In particular, does he feel that the apparent grinding down of the problems faced in Croatia can play a part in helping to end the tragedy in Bosnia?

Mr. Hurd: I am sure that we must maintain sanctions at full force against Serbia until the authorities there comply with the Security Council resolutions. We have to take very careful account of the way in which Croatia has handled the matter in recent months. There is no doubt that this question will be considered again by the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday.

Dr. John Cunningham: We all join in the expression of condolence to the family of Mr. Goodall. However, is not the inescapable conclusion of the past few months that all the objectives set by the London conference on Bosnia have failed—with the possible exception of the humanitarian aid effort, which itself is now in some difficulty? Is not my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) right when he says that, regrettably, the failure to confront not just Serbian but also Croatian aggression in Bosnia is a clear signal to like-minded people in other areas of instability in eastern Europe? Does that not pose a grave threat to the security of central and western Europe too?

Does the Foreign Secretary recognise that when he vacillates about whether to take the troops out or leave them in, he encourages Serbs and Croats to maintain their aggressive stance in Bosnia? If we are to come out of this terrible tragedy with any credibility at all, should not the international community at the very least maintain, if not improve, the humanitarian aid programme, and is that not impossible without the presence of troops on the ground?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman's last point may prove to be accurate. This is one of the things that we have to change. There is no vacillation here. I do not think that the Opposition or the country wants us to act suddenly or unilaterally, leaving others in the lurch. We have to consult countries such as Canada, whose Foreign Minister I talked to on Monday. We have to work with those who are in a similar position. The situation has to be weighed up. In today's world, we cannot do everything in secret. I have been completely open with the House and with the public as to the stage that we have reached.

I should have thought that that was a reasoned process. It is quite contrary to the way in which the Opposition —the Labour party recently and the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) constantly—have performed. Once again the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has used the word "confront" when talking about how to deal with the Serbs and the Croats. What does he mean? Is he talking of air strikes? There is a case for air support for operations like those to relieve the Canadians in Srebrenica and to open Tuzla airport. However, if the right hon. Gentleman is seriously saying that problems like the siege of Sarajevo and that entire tragedy can be solved permanently by bombing from the air, as he has suggested in the past, he is at odds not only with military opinion here but, as I discovered in Washington yesterday, with a much wider body of opinion. People who advance such arguments in such a vague way need to be pinned down as to what they propose. Otherwise, their advice is less than helpful.

Mr. Elletson: During his recent visit to Bosnia, did my right hon. Friend have an opportunity to calculate the amount of British humanitarian aid that is reaching the people for whom it is intended? Is he aware that many people in this country now believe that humanitarian aid is merely fuelling the warring factions and keeping the war going? Is it not time for us to ask ourselves what on earth Britain is doing in Bosnia?

Mr. Hurd: What we are doing is keeping people alive who would otherwise be dead. What we are doing is providing some assurance of heat and electricity for some hours a day for people in the fearful communist high-rise flats in which many in Bosnia live. What we are doing is providing food that will keep people alive who might otherwise die. My hon. Friend is perfectly right to say that there are obstructions and that not all of the requirements —indeed, much less than we would wish—get through. What we have to judge is whether we can remove the obstructions, bureaucratic and otherwise, and improve our effort or whether it cannot be improved and whether the risks are so great that we should pull out. However, my hon. Friend should be in no doubt about the consequences in humanitarian terms of an abrupt and unconsidered decision to withdraw.

Subsidiarity

8. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met his French counterpart to discuss the principle of subsidiarity.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I last formally discussed subsidiarity with my opposite number at the Anglo-French summit on 26 July last year. Since then, the Government have co-operated closely with the French on implementation of the subsidiarity principle. This was instrumental in ensuring that the Commission's subsidiarity report to the Brussels European Council was a substantial document.

Mr. Cunliffe: When will the Minister and the Government be prepared to come clean about the secret hit list of European Community measures that have been agreed by the British and French Governments? The measures deal mainly with environmental and social policy and, if enforced, will adversely affect the vast majority of the British people. In view of the Government's clandestine methods and tactics, does not their consistent preaching of the gospel of open government to the House and the people smell of hypocrisy and cant?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There is nothing secretive about the process. All member states have let the Commission know their priorities for making a success of the practical implementation of the subsidiarity principle. I well understand that such an exercise may not appeal to the centralising tendencies of Labour Members, who may be prepared to let more issues be decided in Brussels. We not only got it written into the treaty that there should be a subsidiarity test, but we wish to see it carried forward into practical effect. That is why we were pleased that the great majority of our proposals have now been accepted by the Community as a whole.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Does my hon. Friend accept that Conservative Members at any rate are delighted to hear that he makes no apology for the lists submitted by the British and French Governments? Will he give us an update on progress so far in amending or abolishing EC directives and assure us that he and the French Government will take forward the principle in respect of any future unnecessary and intrusive legislation?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The treaty requirement is to apply the subsidiarity test only to future proposals, but, beyond that, it was agreed voluntarily that the Commission and Council should look back at the existing EC statute book. The Commission itself estimates that 25 per cent. of the existing volume of legislation will be amended or repealed in the light of the subsidiarity exercise.

Peru (Death Penalty)

9. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Peruvian Government regarding implementation of the death penalty in that country following the national referendum in October 1993.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have made no representations.

Mr. McFall: The Minister will be aware that a central issue in the report by the parliamentary group for human rights, which I shall present next week, is the death penalty. Is he aware that the death penalty is administered by military judges who have no legal qualifications and who convict more than 95 per cent. of the people who come before them? Will he accept from me that the young people whom I met in the Huallaga valley last September will be the innocent victims of that penalty and that their only crime is to find themselves crushed between Sendero Luminoso and the army? Will he therefore impress on Peru that it is in violation of its international obligations under the American convention and that what is needed is not the death penalty but an independent and untainted judiciary?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Last year, Peru amended its constitution to permit an extension of the death penalty and to apply it to terrorist offences. That constitution was agreed in a referendum and it is up to the people and the Government of Peru to apply their own laws in their own way. I can give the hon. Gentleman one assurance: the new constitution refers to the use of the death penalty being in conformity with the laws and treaties to which Peru subscribes, which may answer the second point that he made.

Mr. Allason: Is my hon. Friend aware that there was a referendum on the death penalty in Bermuda about three years ago, but that did not seem to prevent the Government on that occasion from interfering and recommending that Bermuda should change its mind about the death penalty?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The international status and relationship with this country in the case of Bermuda are rather different to those in the case of Peru, as the hon. Gentleman surely knows.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister accept that we ought to get rid of the death penalty from our own statutes so that we could then campaign around the world to get rid of that barbaric practice in all countries?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Whatever our views about the death penalty, Conservative Members believe that it is up to sovereign states to amend their constitutions in their own way. As I have said, in this case that was done by referendum and we respect that judgment of the Peruvian people.

Middle East

10. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest prospects for a comprehensive peace in the middle east.

14. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to promote peace in the middle east; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Lebanon, Israel and the occupied territories and Jordan from 3 to 6 January. The Prime Minister met Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan in London on 11 January. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary held discussions with the Lebanese Prime Minister in London on 25 and 26 January. I am encouraged by the determination of all the parties to make progress towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Mr. Luff: Against the background of the great courage being shown by Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Syria and Jordan in furthering the peace process, is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the welcome for the Government's decision to extend £50 million of export credit to Lebanon? Can he confirm that that credit will be used in part to build civil defence orders, which will further enhance the security of the region? Against that background, does he not feel that the time has come for the British Government to drop the arms embargo on Israel, an embargo which Britain applies uniquely among European Community nations?

Mr. Hogg: In the case of the arms embargo on Israel, which was imposed following the invasion by Israel of south Lebanon, there is an obligation on Israel under the provisions of UN resolution 425 to leave south Lebanon. I hope that that will happen soon. It will be much easier to relax the arms embargo so far as Israel is concerned when that happens.

Mr. Burden: While welcoming the continued progress being made in peace talks between Israel and the PLO, does the Minister agree that it is rather dangerous that the Israeli Premier has been saying that peace is still some way off, and that that could send out entirely the wrong message? Does he agree that confidence-building measures are vital and that for the Palestinians, who have been under occupation since 1967, a good confidence-building measure which Israel has in its power to institute is the release of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners who remain in Israeli jails?

Mr. Hogg: There has, indeed, been progress by Israel in releasing prisoners and that is very much to be commended. There are people who are still held and we should like there to be further progress in that area.

On the subject of Prime Minister Rabin's comments, it is important that Prime Minister Rabin is realistic, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should like there to be an early agreement on this stage of the talks.

Mr. Batiste: Can my hon. Friend confirm that, as and when the British Government wish to invoke it, they have powers under the Protection of Trading Interests Act 1980 to prevent British companies providing information to the Arab Boycott Office for the purpose of the boycott of Israel, in just the same way as the Government invoked those powers against the United States some years ago?

Mr. Hogg: I do not know whether my hon. Friend is right about the effect of the legislation to which he refers, but I will certainly write to him. I think that persuasion is the best way forward, and I am pleased by the encouraging signs that we see among the Gulf Co-operation Council countries concerning a relaxation of the boycott, especially in its tertiary and secondary phases.

Mr. Worthington: Has the Minister read the speech by Prime Minister Rabin to the Council of Europe on 26 January, which in some respects could have been delivered by Yasser Arafat? Prime Minister Rabin called on Europe to contribute to the transformation of the region through economic development and co-operation, by rehabilitating refugees, developing water and natural resources, overcoming environmental hazards and regulating arms control. Is it not true that Europe has still not measured up to that task, and what does the Minister intend to do about it?

Mr. Hogg: I have not read Prime Minister Rabin's speech, but I shall be happy to do so, and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has brought it to my attention. As for the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made it plain that the United Kingdom is contributing about £70 million over the next three years. Implicit in the question was a suggestion that the United Kingdom Government should increase our own public expenditure in the occupied territories. That sounds awfully like an additional commitment to additional public spending that has not been cleared by what the Opposition amusingly call their Treasury Front Bench.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that ultimately an enduring peace in the middle east will depend on a sense of religious toleration in all countries, which has previously been conspicuous by its absence? In particular, has he seen recent reports by Middle East Watch, Amnesty International and the Jubilee Campaign on the increasing oppression of the Christian minority of 200,000 people in Iran, culminating in the death of Bishop Hovsepian Mehr of the Assemblies of God only 10 days ago? Will my right hon. and learned Friend urge the Iranian Government to allow the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to send in a special rapporteur to examine the position of Christian minorities in that country?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes a sound point. I am afraid that the state of human rights in Iran is a matter for considerable concern. We need to take every opportunity not only to impress upon the Government of Iran our concern about those matters but to expose to international opinion what is going on there.

Bangladesh

11. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with the Government of Bangladesh about human rights issues in the Chittagong hill tracts.

The Parliamentary Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): We regularly remind the Bangladesh Government of our concerns about human rights in the Chittagong hill tracts.

Mrs. Campbell: Will the Minister make further representations to the Government of Bangladesh about the illegal arrests, torture and rape taking place there, as well as the massacre of tribal people that occurred on 17 November 1993? Will he also make representations to the Indian Government to allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other aid agencies access to the refugee camps to which many of the indigenous people have escaped?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I last made representations about the problems in the Chittagong hill tracts to the Bangladeshi Finance Minister less than two weeks ago when he was in London. Our high commissioner made representations to the chairman of the special committee responsible for discussions with representatives from the Chittagong hill tracts, who is a Minister in Bangladesh. So we are continuing to make representations. As for United Nations involvement, that is not the wish of either of the Governments concerned. However, the hon. Lady will be pleased to learn that there are strong signs that refugees in India wish to return to the Chittagong hill tracts. The fact that they are contemplating doing that shows that the situation must be improving.

Brazil

13. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department is doing to promote trade with Brazil.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): Like all Foreign and Commonwealth Office posts, those in Brazil have export promotion as a top priority. They seek out export opportunities, advise British companies on the business to be won in their markets, lobby on their behalf for major contracts and against discrimination, organise visits by Ministers and trade missions with the specific objective of winning business, among other tasks. I am happy to say that our exports to Brazil were up by more than 50 per cent. in 1993 compared with 1992.

Mr. Bates: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Is he aware that that positive answer is endorsed by news that Westland Helicopters has secured a £150 million order to supply nine Superlynx helicopters to the Brazilian navy? Does he agree that that demonstrates not only the strength of the defence industry in Britain, beating off tough competition from the United States and France, but the healthy trade relations that we enjoy with Brazil?

Mr. Goodlad: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As he says, 1994 has got off to an excellent start in our exports to Brazil and I welcome the announcement by Westland of its success in the £150 million order to supply helicopters to the Brazilian navy. Our embassy in Brazil supported the negotiations throughout.

Mr. McAvoy: The Minister has confirmed that there are arms exports to Brazil. Will he clarify whether Britain also gives aid to Brazil? If the answer is affirmative and bearing in mind the fact that the former Secretary of State for Defence, Lord Younger, and the former Malaysian foreign Minister said that there were links between aid and arms to Malaysia, will the Minister give a categorical assurance that such links will not be established with Brazil?

Mr. Goodlad: The aid programme to Brazil is running at about £4 million a year. Its priorities cover forestry, the urban environment, health and help to non-governmental organisations engaged in rural and urban poverty, including those that help street children. Of course there is no connection between the aid programme and arms sales.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have given you and the Secretary of State for Employment notice of the matter that I intend to raise. It arises from the ethyl chloride leak and subsequent flash fire at the Associated Octel company in Ellesmere Port in my constituency.

Have you, Madam Speaker, had any request from the Secretary of State to make a statement on the health and safety implications of that serious incident, which could have had dire effects on my constituents and those of the right hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad)? Had the wind changed, it would also have affected the constituents of the Secretary of State himself and those of the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter).

In raising the point of order, I am sure that the House would want to congratulate the Cheshire fire service on the bravery and skill of the work it did, as well as the efforts of the emergency services and emergency planning team, who carried out splendid work last night.

Madam Speaker: The latter comments of the hon. Gentleman are not a matter for the Chair, nor are they a point of order.

I have not heard from the Secretary of State that he is seeking to make a statement on that matter. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, it has been referred to the Health and Safety Executive. He may like to find other methods of pursuing it in the House.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I draw your attention to the Votes and Proceedings of the House, which are published in the House papers today? On Monday, the Secretary of State for Transport tabled the important Draft Channel Tunnel (Security) Order 1994, only to withdraw it on Tuesday and replace it with another order. I have tried to ascertain from the Department of Transport what were the differences between the orders and what were the errors which, I assume, existed in the first order, and it was unable to tell me. I went to the House of Commons Library to see whether any communication had been made, and still found no explanation of the alterations.

Do you have any capacity to require the Secretary of State to withdraw the second order and get it right? Even the second order is altered manuscript, and it seems indicative of the sloppy nature of the way in which the Secretary of State is handling the channel tunnel business. He should be given 5 minus for effort. I hope that the matter can be taken away and looked at again.

Madam Speaker: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman realises, that is not a matter for the Chair. Had he pursued his inquiries a little further, he would have found that the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments exists to look into such matters.

BILL PRESENTED

PROFESSIONS SUPPLEMENTARY TO MEDICINE (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Alfred Morris, supported by Sir John Hannam, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Dr. Lewis Moonie, Sir Trevor Skeet, Ms Liz Lynne, Sir James Kilfedder, Mr. Barry Sheerman, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Ms Angela Eagle, Sir Richard Body and Mr. Ken Livingstone, presented a Bill to amend the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960 for the purpose of permitting the title of podiatrist to be used as an alternative to that of state registered chiropodist under the terms of that Act: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 4 February, and to be printed. [Bill 41.]

Registration of Small Children's Homes

3.30pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the registration of a children's home where accommodation is provided for one or more children, and for connected purposes.

At the moment, private children's homes that accommodate four or more children are required to register with local authorities under the Children Act 1989 and are subject to regular inspection by the local independent inspection unit. Where minimum standards are not being met, registration can be withdrawn so that no children can be placed in the unit in question. Where three or fewer children are accommodated in an establishment, it cannot be registered under the Children Act. Moreover, the fostering regulations do not apply because staff are employed on a rotational basis.

Although the Arrangement for the Placement of Children Regulations and the Review of Children's Cases Regulations apply, providing placement, representation and review procedures, children placed in such homes do not enjoy the additional protection that registration and regular inspection provide.

My involvement in the issue arises from a constituency problem brought to my attention by Dr. and Mrs. Lloyd, who had sublet their house and who found out, after thousands of pounds' worth of vandalism and damage had been done, that it had been used as a small children's home by an organisation called Parallel Parents. Some excellent investigative journalism by the local paper, the *Stockport Express,* and an in-depth documentary on BBC Manchester's "Close Up North" programme uncovered serious causes for concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and I saw the Minister at the time, and expressed our concern. A study by the social service inspectorate was requested by the then Under-Secretary of State in March 1993. The conclusions of that report were placed in the Library earlier this month.

The report looked at 17 authorities in the north-west, of which only six used unregistered children's homes. Those undertaking the study had difficulty in identifying the number of homes in existence; there is no way of knowing how many of those homes are in existence or of monitoring their standards of care or quality, because there is no requirement to register.

Given the recommendation of the Warner report that there should be a national directorate of children's homes with a national code of practice laying down minimum standards, it is incredible that a loophole in the law allows small children's homes to operate with no means of enforcing a consistent minimum standard of care—something demanded of larger homes.

The SSI study said that there was cause for concern about unregistered homes run by organisations such as Parallel Parents. It made the point that children placed in such homes were very difficult children and young people, who had failed to respond in local authority establishments: children with extensive criminal records: children with personality disorders; disturbed children; abused and abusing children; and children with drug and alcohol problems.

Asked on "Close Up North" about his child care approach, Sean Fitzpatrick, the proprietor of Parallel Parents, said:

"We say, 'Tell us your dreams, and we'll make your dreams come true.'"

What on earth does that mean?

As for what it means in practice, the SSI study stated tellingly that, in small homes, the most difficult and vulnerable young people were receiving care from staff with the least experience, the least skill and the least training. It expressed concern about young untrained staff undertaking therapy with very difficult children, and about the fact that those staff received little supervision, support or training.

Staff turnover was high and recruitment haphazard. Poor material standards were identified in some of the homes. There was evidence that proprietors were operating with fewer than four children to evade the stringencies of registration, particularly in relation to fire safety. For example, inspectors were appalled to find young people living in a unit that had been refused registration for six children because of a substantial fire risk.

The agencies concerned had clearly moved into providing services in unregistered homes because it had been simpler to set them up than to go through the process of registration. Some agencies were operating satellite unregistered homes in addition to a registered home, and children were being moved from home to home without the local authority being notified. I am sure that the House will agree that that is an unacceptable form of subcontracting.

It is little wonder that there have been concerns about children left unsupervised, and about control being absent, with children allowed to get up when they like and do what they like, and with disturbed childern being a risk to themselves and to others. Children have been placed in homes where the proprietor's expressed philosophy constitutes a total abdication of responsibility for care and control.

Nor can local authorities escape their responsibilities in this matter. The SSI report said that difficult-to-place children, in crisis at the time of the placement, were placed in unregistered homes—an "any port in a storm" approach—at a cost of £500 to £1,500 per week.

The report said that many authorities had taken the publicity of the providing agency at face value and had been disinclined to question providers closely about the details of the provision on offer. Very few asked for information about the outcome.

That damning study concludes that there is a need to ensure that the Arrangements for the Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991 and the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 are applied as required.

Since then, a circular has been issued to local authorities with notes of guidance on the standards that are appropriate. That guidance reminds local authorities that inquiries into standards should treat the placement as if it were in a larger home. It clearly states that the Department of Health does not intend the standard of care to be lower than in a larger home. In that case, why not regulate for registration, and in so doing provide for regular independent inspection to ensure that those minimal standards are adhered to?

The study was confined to the north-west, but the problem is not restricted to that region, as my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), a co-sponsor of the Bill, made clear in his excellent speech in an Adjournment

[Ms Ann Coffey]

debate on 20 January 1994, in which he raised concerns about children's homes in his constituency. This is a national problem and a national scandal.

The Bill seeks to make all children's homes subject to registration and independent inspection, which ensures basic standards and an independent assessment of those standards in all homes.

All inquiries into children's deaths have clearly shown that checks have to be made in the placement of children. Those checks do not apply in the placement of children in small children's homes. Only compulsory registration will ensure that, and ensure inspection other than that of the placing social worker.

It is insane to allow the situation to continue. From April this year, small homes for adults will be required to register. Why should not children's homes be required to do so?

Some proprietors provide poorer standards of care than are acceptable, yet local authorities place children in those situations. The House has an obligation to protect vulnerable children from those who would exploit them and from those who do not care enough adequately to protect them.

Only by making registration of all children's homes compulsory can our duty of care to desperate, disturbed young people begin to be fulfilled. Only the House has the power to achieve that. I ask that that power be exercised. I commend the Bill to the House.

3.41 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Superficially, the Bill purports to give children who are already in care some additional protection. At first glance, it would appear that there is a national scandal, with widespread abuse of the existing law. Curiously, however, the only evidence that the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) has been able to produce is a single landlord who has complained that his house was damaged. Apart from the civil remedy that is available in that example, she has not alleged that any of the children in that establishment suffered any damage, which, of course, would be contrary to existing law.

There is a knee-jerk reaction and a socialist tendency to regulate, inspect and, where possible, to provide and extend to NALGO a monopoly in the care of children. I should like to draw attention to the work of several small children's homes in my constituency, where dedicated teams of professionals, who have all the qualifications, provide care on an emergency and respite basis to a small group of disturbed young children. Incidentally, those children are invariably already the subject of care orders, so if they are not being visited regularly by social workers, and if the premises in which they are accommodated are not regularly inspected, local authorities are already abandoning their responsibilities.

Emergency and respite care provides one-to-one security not just for children but for the public, who often need protection from such youngsters, who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime. I accept that, if there were a dramatic loophole, and if there had been a catalogue of cases of abuse, the House would be anxious to intervene immediately. But the proposal to extend the control of all those establishments to local authorities and to the muesli-munching, open-toed sandal brigade of social services in those errant county councils would be a very great mistake.

The hon. Lady failed to mention that the problem of providing accommodation certainly for those who have been in conflict with the criminal law is already provided for in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. Later this year, secure training orders will be introduced, and satisfactory accommodation will be provided for those youngsters to ensure that they do not continue to reoffend.

The existing law is perfectly adequate to deal with any complaint. As the hon. Lady mentioned, the Children Act 1989 is in force, and any single case of abuse would be a breach of the existing law. There is no possible reason for extending registration to smaller units that provide an extremely important service.

Some of the homes in my constituency that provide such a service come into conflict with the local authority, which of course is always keen to extend—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members sneer and jibe, as though there is something wrong with providing care for those youngsters, who are often young offenders from very difficult backgrounds. I challenge Opposition Members to find better care anywhere else in the country. Torbay has a long and fine tradition of providing such care for very difficult youngsters.

To change the law on the basis of a single complaint from a single landlord would be a waste of the time of the House, and I certainly urge the House to oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No.19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business)——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is a convention of the House that, when hon. Members oppose a ten-minute Bill, their voices are followed by their vote. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), who opposed the Bill in a five-minute, rather squalid, speech, never opened his mouth to express opposition to the vote. That is against the conventions of the House, and I hope that you deprecate it, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) acted quite correctly. He opposed by saying, "No." *[Interruption.]* Order. I heard the hon. Gentleman say, "No." He does not have to cause a Division, he has only to signify no, and the House understands that. Therefore, I am able to declare that the Ayes have it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. You are a bit nearer to the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason). There is not much in it, but you are a shade nearer than we are. I know that the hon. Gentleman has different names. He goes under the name of Rupert Allason, and sometimes under the name of Nigel West. When the Tory Whips could not find him, he had another name, and he now turns out to be a ventriloquist.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has cheered me up on a very gloomy day.

Question agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Ann Coffey, Mr. Keith Hill, Miss Joan Lestor, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Alun Michael, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mrs. Bridget Prentice, Mr. Kevin Hughes, Mr. Alan Milburn, Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and Mr. Neil Gerrard.

REGISTRATION OF SMALL CHILDREN'S HOMES

Ms Ann Coffey accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the registration of a children's home where accommodation is provided for one or more children, and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 4 March, and to be printed. [Bill 42.]

Scientific Research

3.48 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): I beg to move,

> That the draft Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss at the same time the following motions:

> That the draft Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.
>
> That the draft Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

Mr. Waldegrave: The draft orders declare three new bodies to be research councils for the purposes of the Science and Technology Act 1965. The orders were laid before the House on 17 December.

I am delighted that the House has this opportunity to focus on the Government's policy for science, engineering and technology, and in particular on the restructuring of the research councils system. Science is central to our culture and heritage, and the foundation for our future success as an advanced manufacturing and trading nation.

Today is something of a science day for Britain. First, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been underlining at the annual lunch of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee the fundamental importance of science and engineering for the wealth and well being of the country. As my right hon. Friend said in Japan in September:

> "perhaps we have undervalued science and the application of science in the United Kingdom over the last 20 or 30 years . . . it's my determination to make sure that British science remains first class".

Today the Prime Minister repeated that commitment, urging that we must root out what he described as the traditional bias against science which persists in some parts of our culture, and emphasising that, even against the absolute necessity of restraining public science, science will remain in future a high priority.

Secondly, the debate is being held in prime parliamentary time. I understand that that is a result of the usual co-operative arrangements between the usual channels at the present time. Thirdly, the BBC, *The Daily Telegraph* and my office have launched an excellent joint initiative to encourage participation in and enthusiasm for science called "Megalab UK", which, among other things, offers the prospect of being able to use my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), as an object for experimentation, a role for which he volunteered after a relatively small number of hours of persuasion.

When I took this job as the first Minister in charge of the new Office of Science and Technology and Britain's first Cabinet Minister for Science since the noble Lord Hailsham, it seemed to me that we needed a shift in thinking. We needed to close the gap between science and technology—between academically driven research and the wealth-creating sector of the United Kingdom economy.

That was the fundamental issue that the Government addresed in our May 1993 White Paper, "Realising our Potential: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology". It was about how to maintain the

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independence of our researchers and the excellence of British science while at the same time creating a real partnership and common sense of purpose among all the funders, purveyors, beneficiaries and users of research in Government, the universities, commerce and industry. In other words, it was about how to harness our excellence in science and engineering more systemically to the creation of wealth throughout the United Kingdom.

The White Paper set out a strategy to bring this partnership about. It was widely welcomed by industry, academia and commentators. Good progress is being made with this implementation, and these orders represent one part of the story. I shall briefly recap the rest of the new policy framework. We intend to publish a new "Forward Look" on Government-funded science and technology, and that will appear for the first time in April. It will be a clear and up-to-date statement of strategy throughout Government, with a five to 10 year perspective.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What is the hitch in appointing a chief executive for the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is the new council. I shall be entirely frank, because it is always wise to be so with the hon. Gentleman: we have not yet found anyone good enough for the role. After discussion with my senior officials, I have asked that we should go out and find more candidates for the post, because, although distinguished people applied for it, we have not yet found anyone with whom we feel entirely comfortable. As the hon. Gentleman above all hon. Members will understand, it is a crucial job.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I know that my right hon. Friend accepts that the formation of the new Engineering and Physical Sciences Research council has been warmly welcomed. That is because of the emphasis that will be placed on wealth creation. Will he ensure that the new chief executive has not only high-quality experience of research but experience of wealth creation and industry as well?

Mr. Waldegrave: The person appointed must carry the confidence of the engineering and physics communities and the chemical communities. Ideally, he will also have experience in industry, but we are begining to describe a paragon. We need somebody who will carry some weight, and, although we have had some distinguished candidates, we have not yet found someone entirely right.

However, the new part-time chairman, Mr. Alan Rudge, a distinguished man, is already working hard with the new council and the existing committees, so there is no problem in waiting a little longer.

To continue, the strategy we shall set out in "Forward Look", to be well-founded, will need some foresight. That is why we announced for the first time in the White Paper a British technology foresight programme. Preparations for this are going well, and I shall announce the shape of the programme at the end of the month. The programme will take markets as well as technology fully into account.

Our strategy must be based on innovation in all sectors of the economy. The industry departments are working to promote best practice by industry in research and development and industry's awareness of and access to science and technology.

The strategy must address issues of education and training, and must increase the general public's awareness and understanding of science. Young people are obviously the most crucial target. I launched the Government's new campaign to promote the public understanding of science on 11 January.

Preparations for the first ever National Week of Science, engineering and technology set[7], which begins on 18 March, are well in hand and more than 1,000 events have been organised around the country through the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

On a nationwide level, I have already mentioned the launch of Megalab UK, the result of collaboration between the Office of Science and Technology, *The Daily Telegraph* and the BBC in the shape of Radio 1 and "Tomorrow's World". It was launched today in *The Daily Telegraph* and on Radio 1.

All the themes—strategy, quality, partnership, foresight innovation, education and training and understanding—bear directly on the key roles of our research councils. The research council system is the essential vehicle for channelling much of the United Kingdom's support for high-quality scientific research and post-graduate training. I intend, however, to remodel that vehicle from 1 April this year, while building on the undoubted solidity of the existing design. That is what the orders are all about.

In some respects, change is already well under way. The research councils are now under the general direction of Sir John Cadogan, former director of research at BP, who took up the new post of Director General of the Research Councils within the Office of Science and Technology at the beginning of January. He is now helping me in my task of ensuring that the research council system works to its full potential, developing new mechanisms for creating partnerships between the science and engineering base and industry and commerce.

I am delighted to report to the House that he has thrown himself with characteristic vigour—a number of hon. Members know him—into the task ahead of him. His role is to work with the councils so that their output, be it research findings or highly trained people, is excellent and also useful. The two are not mutually exclusive, and we shall have achieved our purposes when both objectives are seen as valuable and complementary.

In the short time that he has been in post, Sir John has been working with the chief executives of the research councils to ensure that the best possible use is made of the enhanced science budget that I was able to announce in November. As a result, I am pleased to report to the House that he has been able to double the funds available for distribution among the six new research councils in the coming financial year.

He has persuaded each council to contribute resources to a central fund by means of efficiency savings, which can now be devoted to front-line science and postgraduate training. It is critical that resources for science should fund top-class research and training to the greatest possible extent.

The fact that such a redistribution proved possible so early in the tenure of the new DGRC augurs well for the new system of setting clear priorities and the increased efficiency that we are looking for.

I invited the director general to come forward with a strategy for use of the resultant £15·5 million, about half of which comes from new money and about half from efficiency gains, but all of which is new money for front-line science. I am, as a result, able to announce today the launch of some significant new intiatives, and the expansion of relevant existing programmes, which demonstrably put into practice our White Paper commitment to reorientate our research and postgraduate training effort so that it supports wealth creation and the quality of life. I hope that I will be able to show that those innovations demonstrate that there is no contradiction at all between doing that and supporting good, curiosity-driven research.

I shall be giving details of the allocations to the research councils and other bodies from the science budget in a written statement to the House, and I have deposited further details of the new programmes in the Library. But I want briefly to sketch out the major elements of the new and expanded activities.

First, I plan to launch a new competitive scheme to encourage researchers to collaborate with industry, making available grants that are complementary to the funding provided by industry for strategic research. That will be a pilot scheme—£3·5 million for the academic half year which falls in 1994-95—involving the Medical Research Council, the new Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. I propose to name the awards made under the scheme ROPAs after the White Paper "Realising our Potential".

The funds will allow researchers to work on a topic related to the work for which industry is paying, but of the researchers' own choosing. Unlike existing joint funding schemes, such as LINK, the topic should not be part of the programme supported by the industrial funding, but should be related research in which the aim should be to carry it forward to the stage at which it becomes accessible for exploitation.

The unique feature of that approach is that the conventional peer review system will not be used. Instead, we shall take industry's recognition of the researcher as an indicator of his or her quality and commitment, although, of course, the researcher's proposals will need to be properly refereed, monitored and evaluated.

In a parallel move on the postgraduate training front, I plan to drive some of the collaborative awards in science and engineering—the CASE awards—from the industrial end, so that the studentships are available to firms that have demonstrated their ability to provide the right environment for postgraduate training. There will be at least 100 additional awards to industry, giving industry the opportunity to select its own academic partner and topic. That is an important innovation. We see the need for training to respond to the needs of all potential employers.

Continuing the theme of interaction with industry, an additional £2 million is being provided to complement funds already set aside by the new Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council to launch an innovative manufacturing programme which will also engage the research community of the Economic and Social Research Council. I expect to expand that programme next year to the biotechnology sector through the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, and perhaps later to other councils.

Priority in the distribution of research funds is being given to areas identified by industry as being of strategic importance. For example, I shall be putting extra funds into the human and animal genome programmes and immunology, £3·4 million, and chemistry, £4·5 million. In all cases, the selection of general research areas will take careful account of the long-term interests of the users.

Mr. Dalyell: I think that members of the Civil Service attended the recent conference in Cambridge on rare breeds of cattle and biodiversity. Is the Minister's Department involved in that important work, because not only the human genome project is important, but the animal genome and the botanical genome projects are potentially important?

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall consult the chief scientific adviser, whose own field lies in this area, about that. I am sure that the Department is in touch with that. I hope that I shall not offend any of the other powerful centres around the country if I say that Cambridge is becoming not only a European but a world centre in that work.

I have said before that people are the single most important element in our research effort. I am therefore delighted to announce funds for some 40 additional Royal Society research fellowships. Those are prestigious five-year research fellowships, at a generous stipend, aimed at giving security to our best researchers.

I have also allocated funds to expand the Royal Academy of Engineering programme of visiting industrial professorships to boost the design component of engineering undergraduate courses, and to make a start to their new professional development scheme based on modular part-time courses.

Those new initiatives represent an important start to the process of re-orientating the research councils towards the aims and policies set out in the White Paper. Over the next six months or so, the director general will be examining the research council programme in great depth, including the arrangements that will need to be put in place to take forward the emerging results of our technology foresight programme.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): What are the total funds involved in those initiatives? Will that be new money, or will it come from the existing science budget?

Mr. Waldegrave: I said that, of the total of about £15·5 million, about half has been found by the director general through efficiency savings, and about half is new, additional money to the science base. All of it is new money for science.

The White Paper "Realising our Potential" also announced our intention to undertake a scrutiny of public sector research establishments to review their future status, sector by sector—looking in depth at privatisation, rationalisation and different options for ownership.

As I informed the House in a written answer on 16 June 1993, that scrutiny is being conducted by a team from the efficiency unit of the Office of Public Service and Science. Members are drawn from other Government Departments and the private sector. The team started work on 13 December and will make recommendations to Sir Peter Levene, the Prime Minister's efficiency adviser, by the end of April 1994. Sir Peter will submit a report to me. It is normal for efficiency unit reports to be published.

The team's terms of reference are to examine research establishments sector by sector, to identify those where privatisation is feasible and desirable. Where that is not the case, it will identify and make recommendations on the potential for rationalisation of facilities and capabilities.

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The scrutiny will also examine current ownership and financing arrangements, and will recommend alternative models where that would lead to more effective operation of the customer-contractor principle and better value for money.

It is essential that Britain does not waste resources on out-of-date structures, when it is vital for our future that our output of good science is increased. I look forward to receiving the scrutiny report.

This debate heralds a new chapter in a genuine and enduring British success story. I do not want to look back in time, but rather to focus on a key element of the Government's approach to the challenge that lies before us, as this country strives to compete ever more effectively in the high-tech world in which we live. I want briefly to set in its historical context the reasoning behind the changes the Government are making to the research council system.

The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research —the DSIR—and the University Grants Committee were established in 1915 and 1919 respectively, as a way of channelling Government funds into important activities that the Government had no wish directly to control. As the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) may recall, the University Grants Committee was established primarily to stop Lloyd-George diverting all the funds to the University College of Wales.

That arm's-length principle was also embodied in the Haldane recommendations of 1918, which represent the real foundation of our science research system. Haldane's recommendations set out the principles that governed the operation of our first research councils—the Medical Research Council, founded in 1920, and the original Agricultural Research Council, founded in 1931. Both councils, Haldane's principles and the research system that stemmed from them are all alive and well today. Government, then as now, held the purse strings—but those with central policy responsibilities, then as now, do not tell scientists which projects to undertake.

The same governing principles continued to apply when, following the Trend report of 1963, three more research councils came into being as a result of the Science and Technology Act 1965. The DSIR ceased to exist and the two historic councils—the ARC and MRC—joined three new councils in a new structure, reporting then to the Secretary of State for Education and Science rather than to Privy Council committees. That five-council system has also generally served us well, for the best part of 30 years.

If there is a criticism of the reform of the research council system that occurred in the 1960s, it is that it entailed too much administrative tidying up, and too little strategic direction. Science was joined with education in an academic camp, and technology was given its own separate Ministry. Overall strategic thinking arguably moved the wrong way.

The unfortunate result was a widening of the gap between science and technology, when the opposite was needed. The strategies set out in the Government's 1993 White Paper shifted the direction, to minimise that gap.

In correcting that imbalance, however, the Government have taken care not to overthrow a research council system that has functioned well for many years. To make a clean break with such a distinguished past would have been an unnecessary gamble. Rather, the Government are set on a path of evolution, building on past successes, in the light of a clear emphasis on the economic and technological partnership between industry and academia, without threatening the excellence of the research itself.

Today, the Government seek the House's approval for draft Orders in Council which declare three new bodies to be research councils for the purposes of the Science and Technology Act 1965. They are: the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council—BBSRC; the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council—EPSRC; and the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council—PPARC.

The White Paper announced the intention to create the three new councils from 1 April this year. The orders would, from 1 April, bring the new Councils within the scope of the primary legislation that governs the United Kingdom's research councils; most importantly, the orders will give me power to fund the new councils.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I am very much encouraged by what my right hon. Friend has been saying. I think that this is good for the research councils, but I hope that the boundaries are not fixed for ever. I hope that the overlap will be considered realistically, bearing in mind the fact that biotechnology and chemistry could be subdivided into two or three parts. That would not be healthy for either industry.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend has made an extremely good point. Part of the purpose of appointing a director general for research councils is to go some way towards the recommendation of the Morris committee and the House of Lords Select Committee, which argued for a single research council, to avoid the problem of having boundaries.

I came to the conclusion that such a huge structure would end up being more bureaucratic than the single-tier research councils. However, with a director general specifically charged to oversee the boundaries and to ensure that anything that may lie across them or outside the current categories does not escape, we shall address the extremely important problem that my hon. Friend rightly raises.

The new councils were incorporated by royal charter on 16 December. The object of each charter makes explicit the obligations on each council to work to meet the needs of the users of its research and training outputs, and to contribute to the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom and—this is new—the work for the public understanding of science, in line with the mission statements set out in the White Paper.

It is fair that, in cases in which there are large research grants—not in every case—there should be some obligation on those who are receiving public money to demonstrate if possible the importance of what they are doing to the wider community who are paying for it.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington):As my right hon. Friend knows, I have a long-standing interest in the pharmaceutical industry. It is perhaps an industry which, more than any other, through such co-operation can be got across to the public, because of the eventual outcome of new medicines and new lifesaving devices. From what my right hon. Friend has said today, it seems that, although the research council has worked well in the past, there is a better opportunity for further co-operation in that respect.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's long-standing interest and expertise in these matters. I believe that the strong support that we have received from what is, after all, one of Britain's most powerful and successful industries is a sign that we are on the right lines. We have received support and detailed co-operation from the pharmaceutical and chemical industries in this country in the work that we have been doing and are continuing to do.

The clearly defined objects, which are set out in the mission statements which lie before the House and which are reproduced in the schedule to each draft order, give us, for the first time, a clear yardstick against which to measure the overall performance of the research councils, and the degree to which they have introduced appropriate structures and mechanisms to deliver what we are asking of them. That is not empty managerial jargon. The objects articulate clear national purposes.

The councils also throw out a challenge to industry. A partnership clearly needs wholehearted commitment from all the partners; the recent excellent report of the House of Lords Select Committee—which welcomed the broad thrust of what we have done—made the fair point that it is now up to industry to respond if the system is to work properly.

Dr. Bray: The right hon. Gentleman has emphasised that the objectives identified in the schedules represent operational guidance for the research councils. Why do they differ from the mission statements in the White Paper?

Mr. Waldegrave: They differ because we have engaged in further consultation, which I would expect the hon. Gentleman to welcome. The principle on which I have been operating is that, unless we work broadly with the grain of what the scientific and engineering communities want, we will not achieve the success that we want.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House would probably agree that we need more from industry than the warm words with which it has greeted the White Paper and the direction of our policy. I am gratified by the piles of responses from leading industrialists and academics, from which I am able to quote; but if the potential is to be genuinely achieved, we need investment, partnership and a more long-term view. The achievements of the chemical and pharmaceutical industries must be matched with those of a wider section of industrial life.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Is the right hon. Gentleman as concerned as I was to learn that the British Technology Group—which handles one third of the patents resulting from university research—receives 85 per cent. of its income from licences from foreign companies? It says that the British industry is doing nothing to take this up voluntarily. What is the right hon. Gentleman doing to make industry take that step more formally? At present it is just a wish, which currently seems to be failing.

Mr. Waldegrave: The statistic that the hon. Gentleman quoted is rather a good indicator of the direction in which we must move. I do not think that the present position is cause for congratulation. The whole thrust of our policy is to build a partnership which we hope will improve that position.

It is because this is very much more than a wish that we are building new partnerships, and—after only a few weeks—beginning to redirect the research councils' priorities towards forming close working partnerships with industry. It is easy for us to blame industry, but the fault is not all on one side; it also lies with the classic British separation of academia and wealth creation.

The other day, a distinguished scientist told me that there was nowadays not much point in talking about C. P. Snow's "two cultures", arts and sciences. The real cultural division is now between the academic sciences and the sciences connected with manufacture and wealth creation. We now need to reverse what I have described as the division between science and technology, which was somewhat widened by the instutitional structures established in the 1960s. That is an all-party point; I am not being party political.

We used to talk of technology transfer as though it were a linear process, but it is not like that: progress and co-operation must be much more intimately linked, and that is what we are endeavouring to achieve. Along with my colleagues in other Departments, I find that our partners in industry are co-operating wholeheartedly to make the partnerships real; and the new initiatives that I announced earlier are a concrete step towards that end.

There is, however, another side to the coin. Industry does not want Government-funded research to gear itself up simply to meet short-term needs. One of the best ways of protecting long-term research is to gain support from the best and most far-sighted industries. We must sustain our traditional excellence and innovativeness in the core disciplines of biology, chemistry, mathematics and physics. One of the additional amounts that Sir John Cadogan has managed to find is intended to finance the not immediately applied subject of stochastic mathematics.

I should make it clear that the objects of all the councils also reflect the White Paper mission statements in requiring each council to support basic as well as strategic and applied research, with a strong emphasis on quality. I make no apology for stressing that emphasis again. We must have top-quality research; supporting second-rate research is completely wasteful. In this area above all, we must have the courage to close things down when they lose their quality, and to shift money back to excellence.

Mr. Dalyell: On the topic of closing down, may I ask the Chancellor about JET? What is happening in the dispute between personnel paid United Kingdom rates and those paid EC rates?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is the responsibility not of my Department but of the European Community, which has been negotiating with the staff on those matters. My Department has not been directly involved. It is for the Commissioner and JET to negotiate directly.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): Will the Chancellor comment on the future of the Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton laboratories? I am worried that Daresbury, the leader in the world of nuclear physics, will close down, and I hope that the Chancellor will reassure me this afternoon that that excellent facility in my constituency has a future under the new arrangements that he has announced to the House today.

Mr. Waldegrave: Because of the change in the structure of SERC, the Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton laboratories need new structures, which are now being considered. In the meantime, those laboratories are being managed as a unity, which is sensible. An option for the

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future is that they become a unified research facility, which could be at the service of research universities and the country as a whole. Some universities are interested in managing them. A number of options are being considered.

The hon. Gentleman, who is assiduous on behalf of his constituents and the nation concerning that important facility, will know that decisions must be taken in due course about new facilities for synchrotron radiation at Daresbury. Those decisions have not yet been made but the important facilities that remain at Daresbury will be approaching the end of their life in the next decade, and we must decide what will follow.

Under the Research Council restructuring, two of the five existing councils—the Agricultural and Food Research Council and the Science and Engineering Research Council—will cease to exist in their present form from 1 April. There are pragmatic as well as strategic reasons for that. In its present form, SERC receives about half of the total funds allocated under the science budget and simply has too great a span of research.

The majority of SERC's portfolio will therefore be divided between the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. That split builds on the logic of SERC's own recent reorganisation of its internal board structure.

The EPSRC will support research in chemistry, mathematics, physics and engineering, and will develop close links with the industries underpinned by the physical sciences and engineering. That council will have an especially prominent role in developing partnerships between scientists and engineers, and industrial and commercial users of research, building on the good work already done by SERC in that area. I pay a warm tribute to the work undertaken by Sir Mark Richmond, the last head of SERC in its old form.

The PPARC will fund research and post-graduate training in particle physics and astronomy. That council will, almost exclusively, support basic research, although it too will have a responsibility to consider its potential contribution to wealth creation, particularly in high quality engineering. The quality of the engineering in many of those great facilities is extremely high.

Important developments are taking place in those sciences. Since the American abdication from the superconducting collider, the European Particle Physics Laboratory, CERN, now stands as the pre-eminent world resource in that area. Decisions must soon be taken about the next generation of particle accelerator, known as the large hadron collider. The creation of PPARC within the research council system will provide a clear focus for consideration of the United Kingdom's approach to such large programmes.

A new council is being created to recognise the increasing importance of research in the life sciences. That council is the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. The BBSRC will, to a significant extent, combine the current work in biology and biotechnology of the AFRC and the SERC. It will also develop close links with biologically based industries, in line with its mission statement.

The creation of a dedicated council for these areas of research will make sure that we have the capacity to respond quickly to the many opportunities arising in the life sciences. It will help us to build on the considerable achievements of United Kingdom researchers in these fields—supporting, for example, the development of disease-resistant crops, or the formulation of new pharmaceutical products.

The three new councils will join the Medical Research Council, the Natural Environment Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council, all of which now have revised charters conforming in all respects to the model of the new councils.

Sir Trevor Skeet: This is a technical and complex arrangement. What are the special responsibilities of the Director General of the Research Councils, and how do they fit in with those of the chief scientific adviser?

Mr. Waldegrave: The director general advises me on the distribution of money to the research councils and on the matter—one that my hon. Friend and I discussed in the Chamber earlier today—of keeping an eye on the boundaries and ensuring proper flexibility and co-operation in the work of the councils. The chief scientific adviser has much wider responsibilities, running across the whole of government. He is, of course, the Prime Minister's chief adviser—not mine, although he works in my Department.

The troika of senior people at the head of my Department—the permanent secretary, Mr. Richard Mottram, the chief scientific adviser and the director general—work together to co-ordinate and provide a sense of direction in the Government's entire science and technology effort.

The revised charters conform to the new model, in a system where each council has a clear focus to meet the needs of the users of its research—a system that will continue to support basic as well as strategic and applied research but will help to ensure that relevance to the country's needs, alongside excellence, is a clear criterion in selecting research proposals for support; and a system committing the councils to promotion of and support for related post-graduate training.

There will be some other significant adjustments in the new system. The Natural Environment Research Council will take over from SERC responsibility for research in earth observation, atmospheric chemistry and science-based archaeology. The Economic and Social Research Council will take the lead in setting up and running a joint committee on the management of innovation, which will have the active participation of all the other councils. In making these changes, I have followed the advice, above all, of Sir David Phillips, the retiring chiarman of ABRC and one of the finest of our post-war public servants in the administration of science.

From 1 April, all councils will have a part-time chairman, selected with a view to securing representation for research users and to bringing in relevant industrial or commercial experience. I am pleased to say that we have very good people for these roles.

Sir David Plastow of Inchcape plc will continue as chairman of the Medical Research Council, and Sir Alistair Grant of the Argyll group, who is the current chairman of AFRC, will become the BBSRC's first part-time chairman. Mr. Robert Malpas of the Cookson group took up the chairmanship of the Natural Environment Research Council last year. AT EPSRC we shall have British

Telecom's Dr. Alan Rudge, and at PPARC Dr. Peter Williams of Oxford Instruments. I shall announce the part-time chairman of ESRC shortly.

It is very encouraging for the future of science and engineering in this country that such a strong team of top-flight people from industry and commerce is in place and that our leading science-based firms have shown themselves willing to support the new system in this most important respect.

We are also assembling a very powerful team of chief executives. Sir Dai Rees FRS carries on at MRC. Professor Tom Blundell FRS will move from AFRC to BBSRC. Vacant posts are being filled through open competition. Professor John Krebs FRS will be chief executive of NERC from 1 April, and in the case of PPARC we have Professor Ken Pounds FRS.

The White Paper on science and technology has been widely welcomed in the scientific and industrial communities. At lunch time today we heard from Lord Flowers a generous tribute to that document. We took a strategic look at what scientific research and post-graduate training should be funded, and we have resolved to build on existing strengths to create a closer and more systematic partnership between the science and engineering base and industry and commerce.

The creation of the new research councils is a key step in that process. Accordingly, I commend to the House the draft orders, which enable the next building blocks of our strategy to be put in place.

4.29 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I begin with the admission that prior to the debate I had not heard of Megalab UK, but I had the good fortune to be given the Cabinet Office handout. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who never knowingly understates his exploits, described it in a byline as "the biggest experiment in the world". Underneath were the words, "The search for the mass experiment". Unfortunately, in the course of his long speech, he did not tell us what it was and the mind boggles as to what he was thinking of. Perhaps it is a lie detector for the Scott inquiry, perhaps the manufacture of a bullet-proof vest for the Prime Minister, which would certainly come in useful, or even the discovery of a definition of "back to basics". Perhaps what the right hon. Gentleman really had in mind when he used the words "mass experiment" is something that we all want—a general election as soon as possible.

I can at least share the right hon. Gentleman's surprise that we are debating three relatively non-controversial orders on the Floor of the House at peak time for three and a half hours. I agree that there are apparently no limits to the perversities of business management in this place. However, we have the unaccustomed opportunity to debate what we all agree is a key issue for the future of this country but which is rarely given the political attention that it deserves. I refer, of course, to the role of research in Britain's science base. In that context, let me say immediately that we would not wish to dispute the principle of the establishment of the three research councils, but some questions still need to be answered. Although I listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman, I do not think that he answered them.

First, the Science and Engineering Research Council has been split into the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and PPARC, or the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council because, in the past, currency fluctuations affecting foreign commitments of the latter side, such as those involving CERN or the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire, have severely squeezed the budget of the former side. Now that the split has been made, how will the PPARC budget be guaranteed against excessive fluctuations in sterling? Two years ago, Ministers had a ready answer and said that the problem would be cured by the exchange rate mechanism, but that fell apart.

Secondly, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council is to replace the Agriculture and Food Research Council. The new emphasis on biotechnology, genetics and other abstract theories sounds fine but the AFRC has historically had a mission to support farming efficiency and food safety. How can we be sure that those important roles will be protected in the priorities of the new organisation?

Thirdly, there is what I may perhaps refer to as the missing research council, the dog that did not bark in the night, or the one that the Government are not creating—the humanities research council. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that there is some support for that view from Conservative Members. Why has the right hon. Gentleman ignored the advice of the Economic and Social Research Council and the British Academy which conducted a joint study of the problem, chaired by Sir Brian Follett who is the vice-chancellor of Warwick university? As the House knows, the study concluded that a group was needed to protect research in humanities in British universities. I think that I am right in saying that the academy has been forced to establish its own pretend group, so why has the right hon. Gentleman omitted to set up one? Is it perhaps because it does not fit in with the Government's well-known economic market prejudices? If there is some other reason, we should like to know.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet), who has left the Chamber, mentioned the important subject of the role and accountability of the Director General of the Research Councils, Sir John Cadogan. He has been in post for a month only. It is still not clear what right he has to tell organisations with their own royal charters what to do. What will be his relationship with the heads of the research councils and with the chief scientific adviser at the Office of Science and Technology? The right hon. Gentleman was asked that question. He gave a smooth answer which, I think, conceals a problem of considerable overlap and potential tension, but we shall see what happens.

We know that Sir John Cadogan will not be the accounting officer for the science budget. He will not be the line manager for the heads of the research councils, but he will have, as was said, direct access to the right hon. Gentleman and he will not have to pass his advice on the science budget through the chief scientific adviser. Even so, the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology was worried that he still might not be able to command sufficient authority; the right hon. Gentleman did not mention that. It suggested, therefore, that he should be given the right to publish his advice to the right hon. Gentleman—I wonder what he feels about that—and the right himself to dispose of a slice of the science budget, perhaps 1 or 2 per cent. or something of that order, and

> "to touch the tiller of the science base in ways which could make an important difference over a number of years"

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

—to use the Committee's phrase. That is an important proposal and we should like to know the Government's response to it.

In contrast, the Opposition argue that to entrench the director general's authority in that way could risk vesting too much control in OST or the Office of Public Service and Science when at the same time there was not enough control over other Departments' research and development. That is already a sector in which the discrepancy produces perverse effects on the overall output of Government research.

The right hon. Gentleman likes to tell us—he did so again today—that OST spending on the research councils is to be maintained, and in some ways increased, during the next two years. What he does not tell us is that the spending on research by other Departments will decrease for the second year in succession. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for example, has already announced a 6 per cent. cut in its research budget and other Departments are announcing reductions. If we consider the situation overall during the next three years, the Government will cut their spending on science by more than £400 million.

According to the latest issue of their "Annual Review of Government-funded Research and Development" in 1993, the Government spent £5·6 billion on science in 1991. By 1995, that will have decreased to £5·2 billion. Contrary to the right hon. Gentleman's assurances, or in addition to those assurances about protecting his own research council budgets, it is one of the great tragedies of the recession that Government Departments have responded to the general call for spending cuts by targeting their research budgets. In spite of all the fine words in the White Paper, the Government, when it comes to the economic pinch, do not believe in investing in research.

The annual review also shows that, of the G7 leading industrial countries, only Britain and Germany cut their research in 1991. As a percentage of gross domestic product, Britain spent 2·19 per cent. on research in 1990 and only 2·08 per cent. in 1991, which is the latest year for which we have the figures.

I am fully aware that the Government argue that they spend on R and D an amount that is comparable with the amounts spent by other members of the G7 overall, but that is because the United Kingdom's figure is inflated by unduly high military R and D expenditure. If one combines the comparison to civil research and development—that is basically what we are discussing today—Britain spends little more than half what Germany and France spend. That telling statistic is mapped clearly in that excellent report.

As for civil R and D—I am now referring to the dual support system—Britain's research council budgets have to be substantially supplemented by the higher education funding councils, and it is precisely there that the resource switch into teaching caused by the pressures of student numbers and cuts in Government funding has put the greatest squeeze on research budgets. That is the development that has had the sharpest impact on university research. Moreover, the Government also plan to shed thousands of scientific staff over the next few years. By 1995 the number of people employed by the Government in research is forecast to fall by about 6,000—16 per cent.

That is not the only source of insecurity among the scientific community. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned again today that the future of up to 30 research council institutes was being sketched out by a panel of so-called efficiency experts who had been sent around the country looking for candidates for privatisation—or, as we learnt today, if not privatisation, then contractorisation or some other model. The right hon. Gentleman asked: can we afford to have the wrong structures? I ask: can we afford to have the constant undermining of professional morale involved in uprooting the institutes for such purposes?

There is also a real fear in the scientific community that long-term research, and research that is not commercially profitable, will gradually be phased out. I know that that is a sensitive area and that the Government deny the possibility, but one must ask what is meant by a switch towards wealth creation. What exactly are the Government trying to achieve? Fears are generated by such language. One might conclude that that atmosphere is hardly likely to be conducive to the right hon. Gentleman's admirable desire for a partnership, which we would endorse, between science, the Government and industry.

Indeed, that whole idea was roundly attacked by the House of Lords Select Committee. The right hon. Gentleman was somewhat selective in his references to its report. Yes, much of the White Paper is applauded in it, but there is much criticism, too. In this case, the ground was that Britain's traditional scientific strengths could be undermined. Those are not my words but those of the House of Lords Select Committee, which said that the right hon. Gentleman's "predilection for wealth creation"——

Mr. Waldegrave: The words that the hon. Gentleman has quoted are not those of the Select Committee but come from the account in the *New Scientist*. I had a word with Lord Flowers at lunch, and he authorised me to say that the account in *Nature* is much more accurate in that matter than the account in the *New Scientist*.

Mr. Meacher: I am glad to hear that, but I am not entirely satisfied. We would still like to know exactly what is meant by the right hon. Gentleman's predilection for wealth creation. In what precise ways does he expect to change the direction and funding of research budgets? Exactly how will that affect what happens on the ground? There is a certain mysticism about the idea, and that is a source of considerable concern.

The Lords Select Committee says that if universities and research councils are forced to spend more of their scarce funds on research for industry, in the long term that would be bad for science, and bad for industry too. The Committee insists, rightly, that the needs of user communities should be interpreted in the broadest fashion. The whole idea should not be confined to the short-term need for answers to specific questions. If companies want that, they can perfectly well get it for themselves, from their own laboratories, or they can pay for it if they need to use the science base.

The Select Committee continues—I quote this passage because I agree with it—*[Laughter.]* Let me put that another way. The passage expresses a view which I share, which I am glad to see strongly and eloquently expressed by the Lords Select Committee:

> "The priorities for the Science Base ought to be longer-term needs".

It is precisely that feeling that causes ripples of uncertainty when we hear phrases such as "wealth creation". Is that really a longer-term need, or will it be translated in a very different way? The report says that the priorities should be

> "longer-term needs, for a resource of fundamental knowledge and a source of researchers trained to international standards."

That is absolutely right.

Indeed, there must be real concern about whether basic and fundamental research in mathematics, physics and chemistry is being put at risk by the shift towards wealth creation. Such research is also threatened by another change that the Government are making, to which the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North referred—the abolition of the Science and Engineering Research Council. One of that body's predecessor's functions was to fund research that fell in the gaps between other councils. That responsibility will cease to exist when SERC is wound up in April. Some researchers can then expect to find that no council will fund their worthwhile research. That is the risk.

The Minister's view is that the director general will be concerned with flexibility and with filling gaps. We shall have to see, but there certainly is a problem. I suppose that the Minister may reply that if such work falls outside the new overview—I believe that he prefers that terminology to the word "strategy"—it has no place in his national framework. However, any suggestion of a top-down approach is widely seen as running counter to the essence of scientific research, which depends heavily on the enthusiasm and inspiration of individuals.

The Lords Select Committee was well aware of that, saying:

> "If the Government's new strategy for the Science Base is so directive that it leaves no space for a keen young scientist with a new idea, then it will defeat its own object, by starving the Science Base at its roots."

The right hon. Gentleman seems to be nodding; how far is he really aware of that danger? How far does he intend to press the strategic emphasis on wealth creation? That is probably the single most important question that we want answered in the debate.

The uncertainty, and the reason why we are so concerned about it, is illustrated by the technology foresight programme. The Minister is right to say that the OST may see that as a long-term affair, with programmes looking up to 15 years ahead, and only loosely connected with current spending plans. However, the Department of Trade and Industry sees it in a different light, as directing funding for research in the near future. That is a serious problem, because the right hon. Gentleman has failed to win over his ministerial colleagues to an agreed Government strategy. He continues to influence science only via OST funding, with no remit whatever over other departmental expenditure. The Department of Trade and Industry has just announced that it is to scrap the post of chief scientist, without the chief scientific adviser in the OST being given any authority over the science spending plans of other Departments, such as the DTI. So much for the Government's commitment to science. The interdepartmental confusion of objectives is a major serious flaw in their strategy.

There is at least one good thing to be said for the right hon. Gentleman's latest plans—I am sure that he will be relieved to hear me say that. At least he is now backing away from his daft idea of reducing the number of PhDs, by insisting that all postgraduate students must take a master's degree first. He should be far more concerned about the lack of a proper academic career structure, because nearly half of the United Kingdom academic research scientists are now on short-term contracts running for less than three years. When those contracts run out, often they cannot get further jobs, and they leave research altogether.

The science base of the country is, as we all agree, an absolutely key national resource. It is also one which, sadly, has declined and has not been nurtured to the extent that it deserves. I think that I am right in saying that, in the 1950s, King's college, Cambridge displayed more Nobel prize winners than the whole of France.

Mr. Waldegrave: It was not King's college.

Mr. Meacher: It may have been King's or it may have been another university. I readily accept that the right hon. Gentleman has more knowledge than me on that matter. One Cambridge college had more Nobel prize winners than the whole country of one of our major industrial competitors. Virtually no Nobel prizes have been awarded to British scientists working in Britain since 1978. That is a clear mark of our decline and it is matched by the plummeting of the United Kingdom in the science citation index in the 1980s.

The orders may well set out a new structure for the research councils, but I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Waldegrave: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I suppose so.

Mr. Waldegrave: Have not we plummeted from second place to second place in the citation index?

Mr. Meacher: It is well below second place, but I shall check on that. Whereas we were only just behind the United States, we have now fallen a long way behind. I believe that we have been overtaken by other countries. The right hon. Gentleman is far from producing a convincing strategy which will reverse that sharp decline and, until that science base is strengthened, the future of our manufacturing industry and the standard of living of our people will not be securely underpinned.

4.51 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I welcome the motions, although I am rather saddened that there is not a larger attendance to debate matters affecting science, technology, innovation and the entire creative output of British industry. I am saddened even further that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster now departs. There are six members of the Select Committee on Science and Technology present and I shall therefore be brief in the hope that all of them will be able to present their views.

I welcome the creation of the new research councils. I also welcome what the Chancellor said about funding. Even if the decisions taken in November implied that there might be a modest increase in funding for science, the announcement is virtually in line with inflation and maintains the status quo. That is not unreasonable in such difficult times.

I suggest to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary that it is a little sad that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor saw fit not to publish the distribution of the money between the research councils before the debate or to make them known during the debate. If he had done so, that would have allowed us to discuss how the distribution of the

[Sir Giles Shaw]

funding would affect the three councils that we are discussing and the others in the group. However, that is a matter of small import against the long-term importance of what is being debated today.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) raised a number of queries as to whether the council will have a significant long-term and stable interest in the science sector and the innovative technology that must be drawn out of the science base. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will know that it is essential in financing, whether of the councils or of the science base as a whole, that we arrange to have a stable cash flow. That cash may increase, but if we are to maintain the necessary rhythm of science development in each of the sectors covered by the councils, to begin decreasing the expenditure that is fed to those councils in their new form would cause difficulties.

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council is the core issue on which I wish to spend most of my time. As Sir William Barlow of the Royal Academy of Engineering says:

> "Of the new councils the ESPRC, as reflected in its mission statement, probably has the most important role."

I endorse that because we have been looking for a way to isolate such research from our major competitors and from those from whom it currently requires a transfusion of scientific endeavour, but also at least to give the council a remit that is related to the basic requirements of manufacturing. In that case, the Royal Academy of Engineering is right to regard it as the most important council and that is no doubt why Sir William Barlow also says:

> "We warmly welcome the establishment of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. We hope that this will reinforce the importance of engineering in industrial wealth creation."

That is one of the themes that has engaged the Select Committee on Science and Technology during its current research. There should be a requirement to ensure that in Britain there is not only a deep and clear commitment to scientific endeavour that has the possibility of lifting our industrial base and of lifting the industrial culture but a recognition of engineering and the development of engineering as crucial elements that affect out competitiveness and success as an economic nation and the success of our academic institutions as a source of excellence. In that cause, I believe that the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council will play an important role and I hope that we see that developed soon.

One of the objects of the council, set out in the order, is that it has

> "to provide advice, disseminate knowledge, and promote public understanding in the fields of engineering and the physical sciences."

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the Director General of the Research Councils, when he is fully acquanted with his new remit, will consider the dissemination of knowledge among British industry as a crucial issue. That was patently exposed when examining witnesses in Committee. It contrasts massively with the knowledge, integration and acceptance of innovation in the other economies against which we are able to meassure ourselves, albeit in a peripheral sense.

In Germany, right down to small and medium-size enterprises, the knowledge of, the need for, and the ability to inform and develop, innovation is widespread. It is equally true in Japan, although our own research did not show many such enterprises there. However, we know that all Japanese industry is widely aware of what technology means and how to get it, to use it and to profit by it.

In Britain there is a growing gap. If we are to improve the importance of our manufacturing and our manufacturing base, and if the objects of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council are to be fully met, we must find ways in which to stimulate the spread of information on technology and innovation among small companies. Our economy will return to growth through the seedcorn of small companies—such as those in the science parks of Cambridge—that are willing to innovate and, in many cases, have ideas how they can achieve it, but perhaps lack contact with the engineering that would enable them to succeed, and through funding. We should not rely on massive investments made by the GECs of this world.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the main problems that our small and medium-sized enterprises face, especially those in Cambridge, is not so much their contact with the science base, but their difficulty in getting funds for their research and development efforts?

Sir Giles Shaw: The hon. Lady is quite right, that was the case. To rely on the clearing banks in their wisdom is insufficient to ensure that many smaller companies succeed in the competitive world in which they endeavour.

The establishment of the councils is a potent part of the new look that the Office of Science and Technology is giving to the arrangements within which science and, one hopes, innovation and technology can flourish. I welcome the fact that we shall shortly be having the first forward look—as I understand it, in April. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be persuaded by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy that another debate should be held on that issue. That will allow us to have the next phase of our discussion on the development of the new OST plans as they unfold.

We must consider the question of efficiency and the success of the councils in fulfilling the roles that we all hope that they will fulfil. I believe that the efficiency and success of those councils and others will depend on how clearly they are targeted to the national interest. I do not share the concern of the hon. Member for Oldham, West about the importance of defining what they do at this stage, although the hon. Gentleman will certainly have a point if we later find that there is overlap and confusion rather than serious targeting of national effort and resources. We are focusing important national resources in the three separate directions for national ends.

I trust that—through either the mechanism of the Director General of the Research Councils or the influence of the chief scientific adviser or the Chancellor himself—we can have a clear and long-term range of vision statements that will lead to a proper sense of national priorities. It is that above all that distinguishes the post of Minister for Science in other Governments from the arrangements that we have here. As my right hon. Friend knows, I hope that, in due course, we shall have a fully fledged Minister for Science with the kind of national priorities established—through forward look, technological foresight or whatever—to enable a real relationship to be established and between research councils and central Government. We need to identify those priorities and the role of the OST must be such that they can develop.

I note that paragraph 3.28 at page 33 of the White Paper "Realising our Potential" lists among the director general's responsibilities

> "ensuring that Councils work together to achieve a common approach and take advantage of the possibilities for improved efficiency through joint working".

I welcome that. I hope that it will mean that the difficulties of overlap and the problems of establishing a co-ordinated and clear set of priorities can be overcome, to enable the councils to be efficient rather than riven with academic bickering or scientific confusion—both of which we can do without with the new look of science and endeavour that my right hon. Friend is introducing.

It is essential that our research and technological policies should be fashioned by consent—between Government and industry, the main consumers of scientific endeavour; between Government and the academic and scientific establishments; and between the OST and other Departments such as the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence. The hon. Member for Oldham, West was perfectly right to point to the fact that that is an important missing element in the OST's current remit. I hope that it will not be too long before that omission is rectified and before co-ordinated scientific policy and priorities are assumed right across the board —wherever publicly funded national scientific endeavour is taking place.

The largest potential problems and the largest potential benefits are to be found in research for military purposes. I must acknowledge that much MOD research has massive spin-off into civilian applications and wider applications in British industry. We must also recognise, however, the large number of smaller firms and contractors and sub-contractors within the defence industry, which tend to bear the brunt of reductions when changes in defence planning or substantial reductions in defence needs occur. We must ensure that those high-tech smaller companies have access to civilian opportunities and assistance if necessary to establish themselves in other markets. We must also consider the wider implication of the transfer of technology and research, especially from defence to civil uses. That should be one of the OST's priorities in due course.

The research councils are essential vehicles for the creation of new wealth, although I accept that they must not be seen as in hock to industrial need. Let us say that wealth creation is essential for economic growth and then say that the councils should become the engines of economic growth. They should provide centres of excellence and quality and should ensure—if they are adequately funded and correctly targeted—that their contribution as a whole improves the lives of all our fellow citizens. The three new councils are now in place. I am sure that the House will wish them well in the new order of things in which research and technology, inspired by the OST's development and by the Government, will surely be one of the main objectives of public policy for many years ahead.

5.5 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Those called early in the debate have a duty to be succinct.

First, I want to ask a question on the subject on which I interrupted the Minister: what is the hitch about the appointment of the chief executive of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council? Why is that bill so difficult to fill? I understand that a number of distinguished academics have been interviewed, but that the result of the interviews was not satisfactory. So who exactly are the Government looking for? Is it someone different from the kind of heavyweight academic who most of us thought would fill the position of chief executive? There may be a perfectly satisfactory answer to that question, but I put it none the less.

Secondly, on the subject of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, may I air a problem that greatly concerns my colleagues on the Biological Sciences Advisory Committee of the University of Edinburgh? I refer to the sticky question of work on animals. Twenty or 30 years ago, it was taken as axiomatic that there would be work on animals in school and undergraduate classes. Now there is a different attitude —that the work can be done using computers. At its recent world meeting in Glasgow—my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) was there—the Institute of Physiologists made it very clear that work on instrumentation, however sophisticated, is really no substitute for practice on animals. Are there Government guidelines on that, or is everything so difficult in view of the animal rights lobbies and the general climate of opinion in which we are now operating? I do not know the answer to that question, but it is a nettle that will have to be grasped.

Finally, on the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, I should like to ask two questions.

First, what is the attitude to the funding of CERN, the European nuclear research centre? I hope that there will be no drawing back from our international obligations. The closure decisions in California and elsewhere have greatly hurt distinguished American scientists. Some of us hope sincerely that the opportunity will be seized—on terms of dignity and in no way berating them—to say to the Americans, "At this moment the western world has a real opportunity to co-operate on super-colliders. Act with us on an equal basis. That does not refect on science programmes in the United States. Can we not do this important work on particle physics together?" What are the Government saying to the United States Government? Is the matter being urgently tackled?

I should like to return to the issue of the JET project, on which I interrupted the Minister. There are many responsibilities for JET, but he said, "Well, it was not our Department." In that case, whose Department is it? I should like to put on the record the contents of a letter sent to me by the Prime Minister, dated 1 February 1994. It states:

> "Thank you for your letter of 14 December, in which you asked about the handling of any decision to extend JET after 1996.
>
> The JET Project is technically a Joint Undertaking under the Euratom treaty. Any extension would require an amendment to the terms of the JET Statutes, and would need to be agreed by the Council of Ministers, probably by qualified majority. This was the procedure followed under previous extensions.

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

> There has been informal discussion within Europe of the idea of a further extension, but no formal proposal has yet been tabled."

Do they have a formal proposal in mind? The letter continues:

> "Some people beleive that closure of JET in 1996 would be premature, given that it could continue to do good scientific work on the unresolved problems relating to the operation of JET-style fusion machines, and hence of the ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) project. Others believe that JET should close in 1996 as planned, so that funding can be made available to other projects. (JET accounts for roughly half of the Commission's current annual spending of about 200 mecu on fusion.)
>
> So far as the substance of this issue is concerned, we have an open mind on extension, and we are prepared to look at the question on its merits. In considering any proposal, we shall be concerned to ensure that its scientific value is commensurate with the costs involved."

I passionately believe that JET should continue. I have been to Culham and have been involved in the project ever since, as a Member of the European Parliament, my colleagues and I nagged Guido Bruner, who was then European Commissioner, to send JET to Culham rather than to Ispra or to the Munich region.

I argue that the prize is high. If fusion can be developed, it will provide energy without undesirable environmental consequences.

The chances of achieving success are zero if the money is cut off now. The chances are low if funding continues at the present level. There is an argument for extended funding of JET. To combine with the United States Tokamak project, and thereby devote more skills to a common end, is a sensible policy.

I promised to be brief. Those were the questions that I wanted to put to the House.

5.12 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I begin by picking up on the remarks that were made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) about Culham. Although I do not represent Culham, which is on the other side of the river from my constituency, I represent many of the scientists who work on the JET project.

The Government should realise that, when JET was set up, a grave injustice was done to British employees. I must say, without wishing to make a party political point, that the Minister responsible for that decision was the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn).

That injustice has been long standing and it is coming to a head in a combination of industrial action, protests and court cases brought by employees of JET and pressure being applied by the European Parliament through its Budgets Committee. I have had extensive correspondence with Ministers who have responsibility for energy in the Department of Trade and Industry, the lead Ministry. The Government will have to recognise that this problem needs to be sorted out and canot be a pass-the-parcel operation between AEA Technology, the Department of Trade and Industry's energy department, the European Commission and the European Parliament. I gently suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that the Office of Public Service and Science, with its overall remit for science, has a responsibility in this matter. I hope that it will assume that responsibility.

I welcome the orders and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on reaching this important stage in the implementation of his vision for science policy. I would like to join him in the thanks that he has extended to Sir David Phillips, who is retiring from Government service and who has acted as the midwife for the new research councils. That is only the last act in a long and distinguished career in the service of Government science. Sir David Phillips is a distinguished scientist and all hon. Members will wish him well as he returns to his academic work.

I welcome Sir John Cadogan, Sir David Phillips' successor, to his new role as Director General for the Research Councils. He has a hard act to follow after Sir David Phillips' distinguished chairmanship of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils.

I welcome the new structure for the research councils, but I join the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), the Opposition spokesman, in regretting the absence of an order to establish a new research council for the humanities. The proposal for such a research council, which was supported by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and, indeed, by me at the OPSS, was not given the serious attention and consideration that it merited by the Department for Education, not least in the light of the strength and weight of the support that the proposal received from the British Academy and from universities. Sir Brian Follett, who comes from outside the humanities community, made a particularly notable contribution to thinking through the proposal for a new humanities research council.

I know that Ministers in the Department for Education have attempted to make up, in some small measure, for their mistaken rejection of the proposal and I hope that the new arrangements that they have negotiated with the British Academy will help to deal with at least a few of the problems that a humanities research council would have addressed. There are serious implications for good scholars in the humanities in some of the universities, where overall research performance is relatively less impressive and which are losing research funding from the higher education funding councils.

The moral of this story, as of so many in government, is that Ministers must take the trouble to listen to what is being said to them by serious and informed people who know what they are talking about. It should be obvious to Conservative Ministers that having the power and the right to decide is not always the same thing as knowing best.

I do not include my right hon. Friend the Minister in my strictures. His remarks today about the arm's-length principle showed that he has a proper sense of these matters. Today, he announced some welcome initiatives and he has explained clearly his philosophy of promoting a greater convergence between academic science and technological applications. All the same, I know that he will not take it amiss if I underline his point that there is value in the decentralised, pluralistic approach that is embodied in the research council tradition, which goes back to the establishment of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research just after the first world war.

The Science and Technology Act 1965 empowers the Minister to

> "specify the objects, or principal objects"

of a research council. That power has now been expanded into a ministerial promulgation of mission statements for research councils. At the same time, the independent

Advisory Board for the Research Councils, which stood between the Minister and research councils, has been abolished and replaced by a ministerial adviser. I hope that those changes will bring about improvements, but my right hon. Friend knows that, for better or for worse, they represent a considerable shift of power to Ministers and officials. Not only the hon. Member for Oldham, West but all hon. Members will look with close interest at the first results of the technology foresight arrangements as they are brought to bear on the exercise of the new powers.

The Government must remember that a wisdom underlies the limits that the 1965 Act sets on ministerial powers and that it could be at risk in the hands of a less careful and less scrupulous Minister. That wisdom recognises that knowledge is best expanded and increased in conditions of academic self-government and intellectual autonomy.

There are intrinsic features of academic inquiry connected with the inherent unpredictability of its outcomes which make it peculiarly unsuitable for the close attentions of politicians and planners. Perhaps my right hon. Friend would like to ask the new Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council to carry out some research into how it is possible, by excessive and inappropriate attentions, to kill the geese which lay the golden eggs.

A crucial aspect of the future of the research councils, which is not dealt with by the orders, concerns the application to them of the currently fashionable Whitehall doctrine—I will not for the moment call it a dogma—which insists on the separation, in as many areas of government work as possible, of purchasers from providers. On the whole, that is a sound doctrine, but, like all doctrines of government, it must always be pursued with discretion and with close attention to consequences.

One possible consequence of regarding the research councils as purchasers of research, detached from the provision of research—it would be very serious if it came to pass—was explored in the recent House of Lords report on priorities for the science base. Paragraph 4.73 of the report states:

> "The SERC is already funding work conducted in the institutes of other Councils; its successors are now obliged, in Sir Mark's view, to receive applications from Government research laboratories, and other laboratories of a public nature including privatised ones, though probably not from the out-and-out private sector. The DTI favours this development. Sir Mark accepts the consequence that, overall, the universities are bound to get less."

The conclusion of the House of Lords report, at paragraph 4.86, states:

> "In this climate, it would be the final straw if the Science Base were forced to share the Science Budget with the private or semi-private sector . . . It might be possible to 'buy' research more cheaply from institutions without the university overheads relating to teaching and research training; but this would be an altogether false economy, and would further undermine the capacity of the Science Base".

I agree with the House of Lords report on that point, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science, will make clear the Government's position on it.

I should like to say a few words about the Rutherford Appleton laboratory, which is an important constituency interest for me and a vital national and international scientific resource. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I know how thoroughly the National Audit Office and the Comptroller and Auditor General do their work, which is why I am delighted to have the National Audit Office's positive report which it has just published on the Rutherford Appleton laboratory. Paragraph 11, one of its overall conclusions, states:

> "The very positive response to the National Audit Office survey demonstrates that to a great extent the facilities and services provided by the Laboratory meet the needs of their users, and that they are highly valued by most users."

I have come to know the Rutherford Appleton laboratory very well over the past 10 years as its Member of Parliament, and indeed over the previous four years as its Member in the European Parliament. It offers wide coverage of science and engineering matters, such as materials science, earth observation, information technology, energy research, astronomy and particle physics, and supercomputing. According to the Frascati definitions, 30 per cent. of its work is classified as basic, 50 per cent. is applied strategic work and 20 per cent. is applied specific work.

The laboratory operates world-class facilities supporting university research; it supports about 8,500 users, the majority being researchers from British universities; its staff have won many prizes; and it has close links with the academic community. In 1992, it also had contracts or agreements with 100 industrial companies, most of them involving technology transfer. It is a very significant operation.

I know that my right hon. Friend is fully alive to the importance of the Rutherford Appleton laboratory and that he is determined to safeguard its future. He showed that in response to an intervention by the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall). At the moment, the future of the Rutherford Appleton laboratory is slightly uncertain —I put it no higher than that—as a consequence of the abolition of its owner and sponsoring organisation, SERC. As has been said, a wide range of options are being considered for the future of the Rutherford Appleton laboratory, and they are all premised on an acknowledgement of its excellence and its value for money.

At this stage, I do not wish to press any particular option, but I shall mention three considerations which the Government should bear in mind. First, the Rutherford Appleton laboratory is big enough and strong enough to stand on its own as a supplier of research services to a wide range of users, so I hope that it will be accorded substantial self-management as a unified entity.

Secondly, the importance of the Rutherford Appleton laboratory as a national and international scientific asset should be reflected in the way in which its users and customers relate to it. The Government have a role to ensure that that occurs. One of the great problems of the purchaser-provider split is that purchasers might turn out to be extremely piecemeal and short term in their thinking. There is evidence that Departments are often in that mode. The Government must address that problem right across the board in relation to the purchaser-provider split.

The long-term future of the Rutherford Appleton laboratory as a centre of scientific excellence—like that of many other great institutions that are caught up in the new purchaser-provider philosophy—must be safeguarded by the purchasing decisions of its principal users. In that connection, I am not at all impressed by the recent decision of the expiring SERC on the location, not at the Rutherford Appleton laboratory but elsewhere, of important new computer facilities.

Thirdly, I hope that the Government will take the opportunity of the abolition of the SERC and the

[Mr. Robert Jackson]

emergence of a stand-alone Rutherford Appleton laboratory to involve leading research universities more closely in the overall direction of the laboratory. Such arrangements work very well in the United States in relation to significant research laboratories. They would help to ensure that the customers for Rutherford Appleton laboratory, most of them necessarily in universities, are kept closely in touch with the effects of their purchasing decisions on the Rutherford Appleton laboratory as a research provider. There would also be a spin-off benefit of providing a focus for the close collaboration of our leading research universities, which must work hard to strengthen their voice and influence in today's difficult research policy environment.

The orders set up a range of new bodies whose work might be somewhat esoteric by parliamentary standards —perhaps that is reflected in hon. Members' attendance —but which is crucial for the future well-being of Britain. I am sure that the whole House will wish them and their new members and officials all success in the important and difficult tasks that they face.

5.27 pm

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I declare an interest in ICL computers.

The Liberal Democrats support the draft orders, although we share the concerns—we would like answers to them—that were expressed clearly by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). For almost 15 years, we have had a Government who, according to *Nature* of 30 September 1993, have

> "dealt insensitively, even foolishly, with British science, substituting for what previously have been unfounded optimism a general demoralisation."

One of the reasons I am a Member of this House is that, after spending more than 20 years in the information technology industry, I could see the way in which other countries were catching up with and overtaking Britain in their standards of living.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): As the hon. Member is a regular reader of *Nature* and has quoted its September edition, he will be aware that, more recently, in the January edition, it comments:

> "The Government's White Paper on science and technology proved . . . to be a turning point in the country's approach to the organisation of science. It was seen as an exclusive acknowledgement of the practical importance of research in a competitive global economy."

The Government are possibly doing a little better than the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Jones: I have read that article as well as the one from which I quoted. I hope that the White Paper is a turning point in this country's treatment of science.

As I explained, I am in the House because I was aware that other countries were overtaking Britain. They did that by investing not short term but long term, researching and developing products that would produce tangible results not immediately but in five, 10 or 15 years or even further ahead. If Britain is to survive as a modern industrial nation whose people enjoy a high standard of living, we too must invest, and the research councils have a role in making sure that the research is well targeted.

Whole swathes of our industry are contracting. The nation must identify some potential winners and invest in them now for the wealth that they will create in future. I welcome the orders, because reorganising the research councils along the lines that have been suggested should help to give a sharper focus on areas of potential wealth creation.

I welcome the Minister's efforts to listen positively to the wishes of people in science. I also welcome the serious way in which he approached this important subject without the usual party bickering that brings us into such disrepute with people outside. The Minister has a monumental task, because his colleagues do not seem to take science and research and development, and especially their funding, as seriously as they should.

It cannot be stressed often enough that, for the future wealth of the nation, science policy must be high on the Government's agenda. Without properly funded research, even more time will be spent in the House debating—or, perhaps, because of guillotine motions, not debating—further cuts in the social programmes on health, education, the police and social services.

I do not dispute the objectives of the research councils as outlined in the orders. Who could argue against the promotion and support of high quality basic research, the advancement of knowledge and technology and the promotion of public understanding of science? Such objectives must be right, but I fear that they may turn out to be daydreams in terms of reality and the amount of money that the Government are prepared to commit to the research councils.

I am also concerned about the Government's overriding emphasis on wealth creation. It is intrinsically right as a goal that scientists should be aware that, without wealth creation, there would be no funds for their work. However, I question the White Paper's overriding statement that research grants should be linked to wealth creation. Are those members of the research community who fail to demonstrate a potential for wealth creation in their field in 1994 to be automatically starved of all resources in 1995? That would not be sensible.

Will research grant applications be tied to the rigid goals of wealth creation? Is it not the nature of such an area that basic research often needs to be done without a specified profit margin? To back that argument, I call upon a notable scientist, no less a person than the noble Baroness Thatcher, who once said:

> "Transistors were not discovered by the entertainment industry seeking new ways of marketing pop music, but rather by people working on wave mechanics and solid-state physics".

I fear that the Government may put short-term financial issues before the long-term goal of providing for Britain an adequate research base to maintain and improve our quality of life.

One of the problems is a lack of understanding by Ministers about the nature of research. Research is necessary not just to produce a more sophisticated television set, which is a wealth-creating achievement: it is also vital to learn about problem solving itself. Many of the skills that are learned in research are those of identifying and better understanding problems—providing basic knowledge to be used in the future. Further, a potential wealth-creating area may be identified, but will there be the resources to make anything of it?

One key area, regarded by some as likely to have bigger world market potential than information technology and communications combined, is biotechnology. Some hon. Members may have seen Dr. Chris Evans of Chiroscience in "The Money Programme" on BBC2 last Sunday bemoaning the fact that Britain was likely to miss the biotechnology revolution because research and venture capital were so difficult to get. I welcome the new research council that will be devoted to biotechnology, and I hope that it will be successful.

Hon. Members in all parts of the House are seriously concerned about advances in genetic engineering. That is why it is vital for the Government to realise that scientific research is not carried out for its own sake. Once proven, and in certain areas approved by Parliament, it should permeate beyond the remit of the Minister to the Departments of Trade and Industry and of Health, and the Ministry of Agriculture.

When he commented on the White Paper, my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) pinpointed the problem when he said:

> "We have seen no clear leadership; rather it has been a matter of laissez faire, in the sense of 'by default'".

As all hon. Members know, the reality is that funding could be limitless.

I am sure that between them the new research councils will find projects worthy of investment that will far outstrip the budget of any of the parties in the House. But there is a shortfall now, and it is damaging Britain's future. That is why, in our autumn Budget submission, the Liberal Democrats proposed an immediate injection of £400 million into science policy and a return to spending of 0·35 per cent. of GDP on the science base, a percentage that the Government sadly let lapse to 0·28 per cent. between 1979 and 1991. We are committed to raising investment over five years to 0·4 per cent. of GDP, which is in line with the percentage invested by Britain's major competitors.

The Minister announced additional support of £15·5 million. That is welcome, but it is not enough. Although broadly welcoming the White Paper "Realising our Potential", the science community is fed up with Government indecision and time wasting.

The president of the Royal Academy of Engineering, Sir William Barlow, about whom we have heard and who was present at the lunch today at which the Prime Minister spoke about science, sent a letter to hon. Members this week. In it, he particularly welcomes the establishment of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. However, Sir William states:

> "It is vital that after its separation from Astronomy and Particle Physics and from Biology and Biotechnology it does not simply remain the rump of the SERC. The Council has a new mission and this must be widely recognised and respected".

Sir William is right, and his letter also states:

> "Following the reorganisation of the Research Councils and the redistribution of responsibilities there should follow a period where they are able to pursue their missions without excessive interference or change".

As an example of ill-thought-out interference by the Government, I cite the example of physics degrees. David Ko, a lecturer in the department of physics at Oxford university, says that undergraduate degrees do not allow for critical analysis of problems, that that is achieved at postgraduate level. What is the Government's overall strategy for encouraging higher levels of research? Academia is faced with indecision and changing decisions by the Government.

For a physics degree, a three-year course does not allow a student to develop in-depth skills of research. That means that British graduates are not competitive in Europe where the standard degree is to masters level. There is still considerable confusion and uncertainty in our universities about what will happen to physics degrees to bridge that gap. A four-year degree was accepted by the Department of Education, but the White Paper suggests a "three plus one" system.

It is ludicrous that universities are unable to specify in their prospectuses how long a student is likely to remain at university. It appears that the fourth year is to be funded by the research councils rather than by local authorities. Where will the money come from?

A report issued in November by the National Commission on Education stated that, since the Government do not intend to provide any more money for the revised research degrees, the number of students taking doctoral courses will inevitably fall. The orders are a help, a step forward, but we must value our scientists in the same way as scientists are valued in Germany, France, Japan, the United States and, increasingly, the Pacific basin.

I hope that, when the Minister replies to the debate, he will provide answers to some of the questions that have been raised. I wish him well in the task of persuading his colleagues of the importance of research in Britain. If, as I suspect, he is unable to persuade them to invest more now, it will become just another example of why Britain needs a fresh start, under a new Government.

5.39 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): I welcome the opportunity for the House to debate science, as science debates do not occur as often as many of us would like. Although we are debating the relative narrowness of orders setting up the new research councils, the debate gives some of us the chance to raise wider issues in the House.

I join my right hon. Friend in welcoming the fact that we are meeting to discuss science today on the same day as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister came to the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee's annual lunch. I am delighted to see the Chairman of the Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan), in his place for this important debate. He will know the great importance that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister attaches to science and the need for the Government to play a positive part in the stimulation of scientific endeavour in Britain.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister emphasised the key bases for our scientific programme for the future: excellence, recognition of the contribution of science to the quality of life in Britain and the development of the prosperity of all this country's people. The framework for all this was created last year in the White Paper "Realising our Potential", and today we are putting another of the building blocks in place in creating the new research councils.

Hon. Members will be aware that five of the six research councils that will come into effect on 1 April are headquartered in my constituency in Swindon. I am therefore delighted to have the opportunity to make one or two points in the debate on behalf of many of my constituents in the scientific community. They, together with Sir John Cadogan, the new Director General of the Research Councils, whom I warmly welcome as a new arrival to this part of the scientific scene, will play the most vital role in the development of our scientific effort over the next few years.

[Mr. Simon Coombs]

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) who said that the Government are failing in their long-term vision for science. Everything I have read on the subject in recent weeks and months suggests that, for the first time, the Government are trying to take a long-term view of the importance of science in Britain, and they should be commended for that.

I have four points to make on particular matters of concern to the scientific community within the research councils in my constituency. The first one may be a small point, but it is important to my constituents. It concerns the uncertainty that remains about the future pension arrangements for staff of the research councils.

I appreciate that the matter is very much under consideration, but I am sure that the Minister will understand that, as long as there is uncertainty, there is also some fear. I urge him, if he can, to give us some assurance at the end of the debate or, if he cannot, to ensure that staff are made aware of their future pension arrangements at the earliest possible opportunity. I am optimistic that the Minister will be able to say that there will be no detriment and no cause for concern among the staff, but the concern remains, and I hope that he will be able to address himself briefly to it before the end of the debate.

Secondly, I must mention the point raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). We are all concerned that, as yet, there is no appointment of a chief executive for the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. I would not in any way suggest anything less than the paragon that the Secretary of State said he was looking for, if such a person is to be found, but I would stress that Dr. Alan Rudge, whose appointment I warmly welcome, is not expected to take up his position fully until August this year.

There is therefore a distinct possibility that, for the first four months of the new research council, there will be neither a part-time chairman nor a full-time chief executive in post. That raises some doubt about the confidence with which the new council can establish its direction and identity. I therefore ask my hon. Friend to give his best endeavours to an early resolution of that important issue.

Thirdly, I want to comment on the advantages that spring from the reorganisation. I warmly welcome the creation of the new Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. It is well placed to develop existing programmes, collaboration with industry, the CASE studentships, the teaching company scheme, innovative manufacturing and others. I have no doubt that the new council will carry forward the work of the Science and Engineering Research Council in those and other ways, and that that will be only to the benefit of industry and the scientific community.

Equally, I recognise the logic of the Natural Environment Research Council taking over responsibility for earth observation from space atmospheric chemistry and science-based archaeology, or carbon dating.

I am less sure about the prospects for the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. I am concerned that it may find difficulty in sustaining its flexibility of approach to various programmes in the face of certain future difficulties with currency fluctuations as they relate to the subscriptions to CERN and ESA. Those subscriptions are £55 million to CERN and £30 million to the European Space Agency. The new research council, taken out of the body of SERC, has a total budget of £180 million, compared with £600 million for SERC.

While accepting the logic of the case made by my right hon. Friend that SERC had too wide a responsibility for research, I envisage the opposite problem occurring when more than half the budget of the PPARC will be dominated by those two subscriptions over which it has no control, in terms of its ability to achieve efficiencies of scale or any other method of controlling the costs.

If the Minister says that I am wrong in making that point, I will be delighted to hear him say so, but I fear that he will promise only to double and redouble his efforts with the Treasury in future and ensure that any fluctuations will not be prejudice other programmes under the remit of the PPARC.

My final point is in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson). There is some uncertainty about the future of the laboratories at Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton. Neither needs support from right hon. and hon. Members in terms of the quality and excellence of their contribution to scientific effort in Britain, but they need us to speak up on their behalf in urging my right hon. Friend to ensure that whatever decisions are taken about their future are made soon.

There is uncertainty and concern among the staff of those two laboratories. If the Government introduce independent status, the staff will want to know that their jobs will be secure, their future will be bright and that the commitment to excellence that has always been achieved in those laboratories in the past will continue.

I welcome the clear mission statements for each of the research councils—three of which are covered by the orders that we are debating this afternoon—coupled with careful scrutiny of the systems and structures that have been put in place by the research councils until now. I have no doubt that that work will continue.

I welcome the maintenance of the present staff complement during this period of change. The publication of the White Paper brought further uncertainty. The Minister will remember that, when the White Paper was presented to the House last year, my first question concerned its implications for staff who are my constituents.

On that occasion, I was given an assurance that there would be no serious implications for staff, and I am delighted to be able to report to the House that that has been the case, and that staff are now aware to which research council they will be moving on 1 April and what their responsibilities will be. I welcome the honouring of that pledge made to me last year.

The new system of appointing part-time chairmen and full-time chief executives will be helpful. It is quite common in British industry, and it is an experiment well worth trying in the case of the research councils. Subject to the appointment of all those chairmen and chief executives —a point to which I have already referred—I have no doubt that the system will be successful in the future.

I particularly emphasise the need to preserve the commitment to basic science. I welcome the industry-based procedures that have been outlined today and in the White Paper, but I hope that we will never lose sight of the need for people to be able to mess around in a laboratory and do something that no one else thought possible. That is what I understand by basic science, and I hope that it will always have a part to play in Britain's scientific effort. In that respect, I particularly welcome my right hon. Friend's earlier remarks.

I appreciate that questions are raining in on the Minister from every direction during this debate, so he might find it necessary to answer them in some other forum than the House this afternoon, but I would find it helpful to know how he sees the future involvement of the research councils in the technology foresight exercise, which is of considerable importance to our future scientific effort and in which I hope that the research councils will be able to play the fullest part.

I have not yet said anything about the establishment of the new Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) hopes to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to speak on that matter on which he is an expert, so I shall simply say that I welcome the sensible combination of the Agricultural and Food Research Council and those elements of SERC involved with biotechnology and biological sciences to produce synergies which must be extremely valuable in future.

In that respect, I agree with the hon. Member for Cheltenham that it is right for us to find by every means possible the way forward to promote greater investment in biotechnology in Britain. This could be the latest hovercraft—Britain's latest missed opportunity, if we are not careful. I hope that, as a result of the setting up of the new research council, we shall not miss such opportunities in the future.

This debate has not involved any particular mention of the Natural Environment Research Council or the Economic and Social Research Council, to whose work in the past 25 years I pay tribute.

In particular, I want to say thank you to Professor Howard Newby, who has been at the head of the Economic and Social Research Council for the past few years and who will be leaving to become vice chancellor of Southampton university later this year. I declare an interest as one of the first to receive a grant from what was then the Social Sciences Research Council 25 years ago. I have therefore taken an interest in the work of the council ever since, and I wish it and Professor Newby well in the future.

Lastly, I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement this afternoon of the new resources which have been made available for a variety of programmes within the scientific sphere and which come partly from efficiency savings. The fact that half the money is from new resources is also to be welcomed. It is important that the emphasis on new programmes should be on industry-led initiatives.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his stewardship of science in the past 21 months. We have made substantial progress in that direction under his leadership, and I have no doubt that, with the establishment of the new research councils on 1 April, that good work will continue in future.

5.54 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The stark problem that faces us in Britain is our position vis-a-vis that of other countries. In the most recent year, Japanese industry registered 350,000 patents, one third of the world total, and the United Kingdom only one seventh; yet we know that we are a country of inventive genius because this century we have won 61 Nobel prizes, while Japan has scored just four.

The international situation in biotechnology has been described by the President of the Board of Trade as sobering, but many feel that it is desperate. The prizes are there. Biotechnology is relatively new and on the verge of an enormous expansion. Since 1980, 54 biotechnology companies have sprouted and they already employ a significant number of people—5,000. It is forecast that, by the year 2000, the world market for biotechnology will be worth between £30 billion and £60 billion a year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) raised one of the most serious problems ahead of us—the perception of the mass of the public. Unfortunately, many people see the spectre of mutant organisms stalking the countryside, a fear which has a good basis, although much of it is irrational. There already exists the mouse which has been specially bred to be sensitive to cancer and the pig, produced in the United States, which was meant to be larger than normal but which suffered from blindness, ulcers and arthritis. Such monsters, which many people consider to be similar to Frankenstein's monster, do exist. We must guard against possible great advances for humankind being held back by that perception.

My hon. Friend also referred to objections to the use of live animals in research. No substitute, such as computer models, is as good or as reliable for research purposes as a slaughtered animal. But there is a new sensitivity about the way in which we treat animals. We see them not as a mass of unfeeling cells but as sentient creatures. That is an advance in our whole approach to humankind and other species. We cannot deny that. If animals have to be used and if scientists are to win respect, such experiments must be essential.

Last year we received a report from the other place which greatly added to our knowledge of the subject. It pointed out clearly that regulations within Europe pose a formidable problem which must be addressed. Much of the problem coming from Europe arises from the perception there that this is an unknown aspect of science which will lead us down a path that people greatly fear. We must recognise that.

However, there are other problems, which cause even greater concern. One is our position vis-a-vis other countries. The best evidence for that was a study conducted last year which compared spending on research by 336 British companies with similar investment by the world's 200 top spenders. The results were alarming. The Edinburgh company that undertook the survey placed only 11 British firms in the top 200—two fewer than in the previous year. One of them, ICI, was the highest-ranked British company but was placed only 47th—12 down on its record position the previous year.

The reasons for that are complex. British companies spent on average only 1·6 per cent. of their income on research and development, compared with an average of 4·6 per cent. for the world's top 200 companies. Spending by the 11 British companies in the top 200 averaged just 2·5 per cent., compared with between 4 per cent. and 6 per cent. by everyone else. That situation is worsening.

The survey's most damning figures demonstrate the generosity of British companies towards their shareholders, which spent on average twice as much on dividends as they did on research and development. Companies in the world's top 200 invest more in a future return on R and D,

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

whereas British companies believe that they must pay their shareholders five times more than their international competitors.

Even the high quality of United Kingdom university research has not been translated into commercial success. Technology transfer is meant to overcome that problem, but central to it are patents for biological inventions. The London stock exchange requires patents before it allows a full company listing and venture capital is usually invested in patented products. Traditionally, scientists at British universities have not applied for patents before publishing their results. They must be urged to act far more commercially and to register patents rapidly. In my constituency, they must get motor bikes going down the M4.

Industrial sponsorship of university research has improved to some extent as spending per student has fallen. The Government's policy of research funding on the basis of research assessment exercises means that some university research departments are losing out badly. Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester universities are doing well, but others are not.

Britain is being overtaken by other countries in the struggle to ensure that the glittering prizes of biotechnology will be ours in future. If Britain does not change and act, it will lose the race for those glittering prizes.

6.3 pm

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): It seems extraordinary that, when we debate yesterday's interests—such as closing a colliery because it cannot sell its coal, or a shipyard because it cannot sell its ships—the House is crowded and noisy, but when we debate research among tomorrow's generation of industries, on which Britain's wealth and prosperity depend, the House is fairly subdued and not many right hon. and hon. Members are in their places.

Approving the orders is vital to successful implementation of the reforms set out in last summer's White Paper, which was welcomed in many quarters. In an intervention, I drew attention to a comment made by *Nature*. Another publication, *Laboratory News*, remarked:

> "We therefore welcomed the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement in his Budget speech that the spending on science will be fully protected next year. Mr. Waldegrave's promise has been kept."

Sir William Barlow, president of the Royal Academy of Engineering, said:

> "By creating a research council specifically for engineering and physical sciences it should be possible for the Government to fund the research projects which relate to real markets and will aid the nation's future prosperity."

The Times Higher Education Supplement carried the headline:

> "Science White Paper is good news."

Anyone thinking of voting against the orders cannot understand much about the subject.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) thought that Britain would be hobbling into the future with an underfunded science base, yet this afternoon I heard the most extraordinary speech in the seven years since I entered the House. I refer to that by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) in which, to my certain knowledge, he did not promise any increased expenditure if a Labour Government came to power. There must be great fear among members of Labour's Front Bench about the power and influence of the shadow Chancellor. In those circumstances, if anyone is hobbling into the future, it must be the Labour party rather than the research councils.

I have the privilege to sit on the Agricultural and Food Research Council, and I greatly welcome the reappointment of Sir Alistair Grant as its part-time chairman. He commands the admiration of all connected with the council —and Professor Tom Blundell's energy and enthusiasm are infectious. I am sure that he will enjoy success at the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, as he did at the AFRC.

Perhaps it is a good thing—my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) is not in his place—that the AFRC's prestigious premises in Swindon can be used for the new councils, not least because of their reasonable proximity to Swindon railway station's up platform, which is convenient to a number of us from time to time.

The new council is created by combining the AFRC, with its £110 million science budget, with biotechnology and biological sciences from the SERC, with its £50 million science budget. That must be a sensible and forward-looking policy. I suppose that the new BBSRC is bound to be known before long as the "back to basics" science research council. It has a broad and well-balanced base of fundamental science—from bimolecular science, through genetics and physiology to complex biological and engineering systems. There is no doubt that there are synergies between research projects previously supported by the separate councils.

The industrial user community of agriculture, food, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology also has a coherence that was not achieved when those interests were the responsibility of separate councils. For example, technologies for non-food users of farm produce will have to be adopted by the chemicals and pharmaceuticals industries to make plastics, fibres and therapeutics. Through the directorates for agriculture, food, and chemicals and pharmaceuticals, the BBSRC will fund research responding to market pull from those industries.

Following the wealth creation emphasis of last year's science and technology White Paper, the new council will have fresh policies for increasing interaction with industry and other users of research and training. Although my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is not short of questions to answer, I must ask whether it is right and reasonable to expect about half the council's members to be industrial and Government users. Last Sunday's "Money Programme" on BBC2 focused on the many opportunities that business and commerce may now have with regard to such research.

The BBSR's draft royal charter gives the council responsibility for supporting research and postgraduate training, meeting the needs of users and increasing public understanding of science. In pursuit of that last objective, the council will support a Danish-style consensus conference on plant biotechnology later this year, organised by the Science museum.

The new council's research and postgraduate training funds will flow in almost equal amounts to universities and its world-famous research institutes. In the temporary absence of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, I will ask only one question. Is he aware that the council members of the AFRC have expressed concern about the need for adequate representation of the agriculture and food industries on the expert panels that are to be set up in line with the technology foresight programme? If my hon. Friend is able to make an announcement on that matter, it would be appreciated.

I believe that two hon. Members still wish to speak; I have therefore somewhat précised my remarks. I hope that these debates on tomorrow's industries, without which we cannot expect to achieve a good standard of living, will increasingly attract more hon. Members into the Chamber, and that some of the debates on yesterday's industries—even about subsidising stagecoaches—will create a little less noise in future.

6.10 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I shall start by welcoming these statutory instruments and the new division of responsibility of the research councils, because they will do a great deal to make them more effective. We should perhaps particularly welcome the separation of particle physics from the rest of the science and engineering work, because, undoubtedly, it has often been a drain on resources.

As the exchange rate of the pound has changed, our international contributions to research have become a great deal more expensive than expected. As particle physics has been a drain on the other science and engineering research work, and therefore damaging, I am pleased to see them separated.

I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) about the lack of overall direction of Government science policy. We must remember that the research councils represent only a small part of Government spending on research.

It appears that the Chancellor of the Duchy has totally failed to win over his colleagues to the concept of a Government strategy rather than just an Office of Science and Technology strategy. If we compare the £1·2 billion that is spent on the research councils to the £12 billion that is spent by the Ministry of Defence on development and procurement, we can see that it is merely a drop in the great ocean of Government research spending.

Another alarming feature is the way in which the DTI appears to be continuing to close and merge its laboratories. A number of them have been mentioned this afternoon, but I should like to mention Warren Spring laboratory near Stevenage. I uderstand that there will be an announcement in the next two or three weeks about other laboratories that are either becoming totally independent or being merged with other laboratories.

The Department of the Environment, too, has closed down laboratories. The closure of the National Rivers Authority laboratory near Peterborough will affect some of the members in my constituency who work there. They appear not to be closed down for any useful or practical reason, but simply because of Treasury cuts, or perhaps an ideological reason that will leave the DTI and the Department of the Environment with few facilities.

Those cuts will undermine and undervalue the important work that is done by scientists. Certainly, many scientists feel demoralised at present with the way in which the Government are carrying out their fairly ruthless cutting exercise. The scientific world was rather shocked when the DTI decided not to reappoint its chief scientific adviser, following the departure of Geoffrey Robinson, who has returned to his old job at IBM.

I draw the Chancellor's attention to a course at Cambridge university, in my constituency, that is partly funded by SERC and the Gatsby Foundation. It is an advanced course in design and manufacturing engineering and is run by Professor Colin Andrew. It is achieving a great many of the Government's objectives, because it takes a number of graduate students and, for most of the course, sends them into industries for fairly short periods, not only to observe but actively participate and undertake projects that improve the efficiency of the manufacturing process of those industries.

By the time the students have completed their course, they have experienced 20 or 30 firms and come out well equipped to start a productive job in industry, as well as having a good sound basic scientific knowledge and a good sound knowledge of manufacturing.

Such a course is beneficial not only to students, but to the firms as well. They know that, having spoken to one or two of the managing directors of those firms, their contribution is valued enormously. It is rather a shame, therefore, that SERC could not find enough money to fund the 30 extra students that Professor Andrew was hoping he would be able to take this year. There was certainly no shortage of applications. In fact, the course is over-subscribed many times.

I believe that that is the sort of project that the Government should encourage, and hope that the Chancellor, or perhaps the Minister, will investigate why that course cannot be expanded.

I shall briefly mention academic push and market pull, because in the debate we are trying—it is certainly the job of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—to ensure that academic push is pushing scientific knowledge into the marketplace.

Unless industry is prepared to pick up that expertise and those skills and knowledge, we will not benefit in the way we should. The managing director of the Welding Institute at Abingdon, near Cambridge, has said that he believes that firms are in one of four states: the first is complete ignorance about innovation or scientific progression; the second is awareness; the third is continuous improvement; and the fourth is best practice. He told me that he believes that, unfortunately, about 90 per cent. of British firms fall into the first category.

A number of firms, such as the Welding Institute, Camden Food Industry Research Association, which some members of the Select Committee on Science and Technology were able to visit recently, and the Flour Millers and Bakers Research Association, which I have visited, do an excellent job in transferring scientific knowlege, often with the help of research council money, from the science base often into small firms—firms that do not often benefit from the innovation and invention of British scientists.

I think that we should encourage those technology transfer organisations. If the Government have finally decided that Faraday centres are not the way they want to progress, ways of encouraging those organisations, through Government grants and perhaps research council grants, would be helpful.

Finally, I know that time is short, but I would like to spend a little time talking about the difficulties that many women face in trying to pursue academic careers. I know that the Chancellor of the Duchy set up a working party to consider the participation of women in science. Many of us welcomed that, but, although we were promised that a

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

report would be published in the autumn, we are still waiting for it. We looked for it in September, October and November; I was then told that it would appear in January. However, it has not appeared yet.

The establishment of the working party was, I think, prompted by the realisation that, although many women were receiving a good education and a sound training in science, they were still not using their skills to the full. Much of that expensive training is being wasted—through no fault of the women concerned, who want to work but are encountering the various structural difficulties inherent in the present system.

It must be said that the Government did not set a very good example. Despite equal opportunities guidelines issued within the OST, which were intended to encourage women to return to science and technology, the Chancellor of the Duchy did not see fit to appoint any women to the Foresight technology steering committee. That is a great pity, and it was also a major mistake: women, after all, are largely responsible for consumer spending.

We should look to the future. When we consider wealth creation, we must also consider the areas in which we shall want to spend our wealth; women make many decisions in that connection, and a female appointment to the committee could have made a valuable contribution to the effort to predict the sectors in which wealth creation will be important.

The Prime Minister told us today that girls had achieved better science results this year. We all welcome that news; however, we do not want to wait for 30 or 40 years for those girls to occupy the top positions. In the meantime, many women will feel frustrated about their failure to make the progress that they should be making.

At least one research council head has recognised the problem. *Laboratory News* quotes Professor Blundell, the new head of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences research council, as saying:

> "One important challenge is to keep women in science after the age of 30, when they have to be rather competitive to make progress up the career ladder, but when they have a major and unfair share of the responsibilities at home, especially if there are children".

That encapsulates the problems experienced by women —not only in the domestic sphere, in persuading men to take their full share of responsibilities in the home, but in the scientific sphere, where they are often competing for short-term contracts that may involve work some distance from their homes. Alternatively, they may be competing for permanent jobs in universities or research council laboratories, which may be complicated by child care responsibilities.

Many of those difficulties are, of course, faced by women in all professions: many female professionals would be helped by an increase in the availability of affordable child care facilities, for instance. Moreover, the lack of a proper scientific career structure poses many problems, as does the need to move to different locations to take advantage of research vacancies.

Much still needs to be done. I hope that, when the report on women in science is eventually published, it will not lie dormant on a shelf, but will be a basis for discussion. I also hope that its ideas will be implemented, even if that means extra Government spending on this important subject.

6.24 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I welcome today's announcements. In these times of economic austerity, to find nearly £8 million of new money is no mean feat. Along with many colleagues on both sides of the House, I look forward to the details in regard to ROPA—"Realising Our Potential Awards"—and the postgraduate schemes; I especially look forward to hearing more about the extra funds for industry-identified research projects.

I echo all that has been said about the reorganisation of the research councils, which will refocus their aims and enable them to deal with their tasks more coherently. That applies particularly to their fulfilment of the White Paper's much-emphasised requirements in regard to wealth creation. I have been impressed by the many favourable comments made by witnesses to the Select Committee on Science and Technology; it has also been encouraging to hear of the many commitments made by those on all sides of the debate to the future improvement of university research and their co-operation with industry. These orders are part of that process, and I therefore welcome them.

Fundamental research is an important part of our research activities. Because we have always been good at this in the United Kingdom, I think it right at this time to place more emphasis on wealth creation: we have been less successful there, and we should try to improve. I especially welcome the creation of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, which is concerned with what is affectionately known as "big science". These two subjects have been uncomfortable bedfellows—in the Science and Engineering Research Council—placed together with a wide range of less expensive scientific endeavours which have felt deprived by the large financial demands of particle physics and astronomy.

Our distinguished scientists in those fields have a well-earned international reputation: we should never forget that the United Kingdom was a pioneer in particle physics, space and astronomy. We remain world leaders, much respected and I believe sought after as partners in collaboration. The United Kingdom will, for instance, play an active role in all the coming European Space Agency space science missions; the triumphs of the Giotto mission to Halley's comet, with the involvement of British Aerospace, and the United Kingdom contribution to the design of one of the Hubble telescope's cameras—now working perfectly—are just two examples of successes.

I welcome the separation of these two areas of science, which enables the finance to be isolated from other areas and will—I hope—enable the Treasury to deal with the vulnerability of their international subscriptions to fluctuating exchange rates more equitably than in the past. At the very least, I wish my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy well in his future battles with the Treasury on exchange rates. Government should recognise that the United Kingdom can participate in world-leading "big science" only by being part of international programmes, which require long-term funding stability.

The PPARC's primary function is the pursuit of intellectual knowledge, but it also has a role in helping industrial competitiveness. For example, it influences the employment of trained manpower: space and particle physics is a subject that attracts young people into science, and the experience that they gain in international projects is prized by manufacturing industry. Young scientists with experience in space, astronomy and particle physics—many of whom will be women, judging by last year's exam results—are valued by employers because they have learned to work in teams, to deadlines and in international consortia.

"Big science" also requires technology at the cutting edge, and industry in general values the experience of those who have worked in space and on major projects connected with it. The astronomy, space and particle physics programmes already interact with industry to a considerable extent. Under its chairman, the PPARC will want to build on that, and—in the spirit of the White Paper—to maximise the potential of its programmes.

I believe that the success of the new councils will depend on the individuals who are appointed. I echo the welcome extended to Peter Williams, chairman and chief executive of Oxford Instruments, which is one of the United Kingdom's top companies in terms of turning science into profit. I also welcome the appointment of Professor Ken Pounds, a leading space scientist in both national and international terms. These appointments bode well for the industry-science interface.

Turning to my interest in space, we shall now have three research councils interested in and funding space activities. The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council will fund space science; the Natural Environment Research Council will take responsibility for earth observation and remote sensing from space; and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council will, I hope, be interested in future technologies required for space, which are also relevant down here on earth.

The European Space Agency has a crucial role to play in that area. Although ESA is going through a difficult transitional phase, it is important to preserve the good features of its mandatory space-science programme, to which the United Kingdom is a major contributor. That programme is now the most stable element in ESA and, although we must continue to press for greater cost effectiveness in ESA programmes, we must not forget that the issue of subscriptions to ESA and CERN, the European nuclear research centre, will be central to the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council.

I am concerned, however, that space expenditure will be divided between the three research councils. That will mean increasing importance for the British National Space Centre's role in co-ordinating space expenditure in the United Kingdom. With the creation of the Office of Science and Technology, the Government should look again at the organisation of the BNSC within the Department of Trade and Industry. Can a case now be made for transferring it into the OST, which I believe is its natural home? I hope that the Minister will comment on that, if not today, in the near future.

There is now a positive feeling in the scientific area, engendered by the Government's innovative response to the need to produce a policy on science. We responded with the first White Paper in 20 years and the results of the research councils are further evidence before us. I wish the operations of the new research councils well.

6.31 pm

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): This has been an interesting debate, and I pay tribute to hon. Members on both sides of the House who have contributed to it, particularly my hon. Friends. I shall leave it to the Minister to congratulate his hon. Friends and comment on their speeches—after all, that is his job.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised a point that must be answered, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), on the subject of women and science. The Minister said absolutely nothing about that subject in his extremely long—albeit interesting—speech.

In general, we welcome both the opportunity for debate—twice in a year is really something, and we may have a third opportunity if we debate the "forward look" proposals in April—and the proposals. We support the general thrust of splitting up the research councils into more logical groups. The Science and Engineering Research Council, SERC, had become too unwieldy, although it had the singular advantage of being easier to say than PPARC and EPSRC.

I am happy, too, that the Government have said that, in the light of experience, they are prepared to modify and rethink the objectives contained in last year's White Paper. There have been some particularly welcome signs on the subject of masters degrees and the extent to which they should be introduced.

The Royal Society of Chemistry would like to know the Government's assessment of the relative merits of a four-year degree course followed by a three-year PhD. It runs a three-year degree course followed by a one-year MSc and a three-year PhD. In defining that issue, it would be grateful to know what role the Office of Science and Technology and the Department for Education will play in attempting to resolve it.

It also wants the Chancellor to say what steps will be taken by the new research councils to ensure full interdepartmental co-operation between the OST, the DFE and DTI to develop the highest possible standards of research training. I hope that, broadly speaking, that is the line the Chancellor intends to follow.

I notice from the report of the Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology that there has been much revision and toing and froing in the technology foresight programme. At one time, the debate was described as "acrimonious". I am sure that it was not too acrimonious, but, once again, there may have been a sign of some flexibility.

I hope that, despite all this effusive praise, the Government recognise that many problems remain unanswered. It will come as no surprise that I intend to mention a few. For example, I hope that the Government will give clear guidance on their thinking in the development of the chosen methods of assessment of scientific and technical needs and in securing tangible support from other Departments. I hope that the Ministry of Defence will contribute more to the "forward look" programme than it did to the White Paper. Its contribution consisted of one mean paragraph.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. David Davis): It was a chapter.

Dr. Moonie: It was a pretty short chapter. I should not like to define it as a chapter.

In the light of recent behaviour, the DTI needs convincing about what is happening. Other Departments often mouth support for what we in science are trying to do, but they are less convincing when it comes to doing

[Dr. Moonie]

something about it. The closing down of the advanced technology programme was good timing, coming on the same day as the announcement of the White Paper.

Before this debate, the DTI said that it would not replace the chief scientist. That may convince the Chancellor, but it does not convince me about the DTI's ability to co-operate in what we are trying to achieve for science. I hope that he will forgive me if, until I see a change, I maintain a healthy scepticism about the Government's overall true intentions. Promises are easily made, but concrete support is more difficult to establish in their wake.

If the director general has no direct-line responsibility for the research councils, as seems likely, it would be a misnomer to refer to him as a "director general". His title should therefore be changed to reflect what he will do. He will not direct the work of the research councils but will advise the Secretary of State. Do the Government intend to publish his advice? Will they publish the advice given to him, in turn, by the Committee? After all, this is the Department of open government, and I want a tangible assurance that the process will be transparent.

I welcome the role of the Committee for Science and Technology, but some concern has been expressed about the placement of two chairs of research councils on that Committee. If we are to have a proper purchaser-provider split, taking the purchaser role into the Department, it is illogical that only two of the providers of the chairs of the research councils will serve on that Committee.

That concern was also expressed in the excellent report by the Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. The Chancellor should take cognisance of that. I have nothing against the two people concerned. They are excellent choices as chairs for the research councils, but there is confusion over their roles. As the Committee will advise the Minister, will its advice be published? Will it be subject to scrutiny by the Select Committee in this House?

On the research councils, I am worried about several points. I accept that what is being done in science should relate to what we hope to do ultimately with it in industry, but it should never be seen as taking over what should be done by industry or what the DTI should support. Although I welcome the initiatives announced today and the extra funding that will go to valuable areas, in the past few years the loss in funds for support for research in industry by the DTI amounts to more than £100 million. Getting £15 million of that back through the science budget is no substitute.

Our views on the role of science spending are supported by industry. The role of the Association for the British Pharmaceutical Industry is to maintain and strengthen the excellent contribution of United Kingdom scientists and engineers to the overall knowledge and cultural base of the world community.

From Thorn EMI we have the words:

> "enhancing future options for mankind, improving our understanding of nature and natural phenomena and our place in the scheme of things",

and from the Confederation of British Industry:

> "an immense, largely unquantifiable contribution to Britain's literary, artistic and cultural fabric".

We still need an assurance that money intended for science expenditure will be spent on science and not misdirected into areas in which industry itself ought to be spending. I am sure that there will be no great disagreement about this.

If there are to be changes in the balance of spending within the science budget, there will be losers as well as winners. As yet, we have had no indication as to who will lose. That is the way of things. It is clear that, if we are to move into new areas—if, for example, we are to direct money into some of our new universities that currently lack research departments—unless there is a substantial increase in the budget, which is not yet forthcoming although we wait in hope, there will be losers. I hope that, in the course of the Minister's winding-up speech, we shall be given some indication whether there has been thinking along these lines.

I am glad to say that the report on the allocation of resources was placed in the Library today. May I have confirmation that what it contains merely represents a pro rata division of what would have been the budget based on last year's historic costs, or has there been a substantial change in the emphasis in spending? It is important that this information be provided. Apart from anything else, it would save me from having to go back to last year's figures and work things out.

I should like, in conclusion, to make some specific points about the individual research councils. There is no doubt that the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council has a very important role to play in wealth creation —indeed, that applies to all the councils. But the Government must sort out their technology foresight programme. There is continuing debate about whether the programme should be market-sector-led or technology-led. This is an important difference when it comes to attaching importance to objectives. Is technology foresight intended to be used to change the balance of the science budget? If so, in what way?

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will the hon. Member give way?

Dr. Moonie: I am sorry, but I do not have time to give way. If it is possible to do so later, I shall.

The House of Lords Select Committee has suggested that the technology foresight exercise should be used to help the "Forward Look" programme. In other words, the perspective should be five to 10 years, as opposed to the Public Expenditure Survey Committee round of one to three years. This is a very important distinction, and I should like to be made aware of the Government's thinking on the subject. The Department of Trade and Industry must not be allowed to palm off its responsibilities for applied technology and for research and development closely related to industry.

The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council is a subject close to my own heart. Here, I intend to concentrate on one issue—the large hadron collider. Apart from all the other arguments that I intend to adduce in my personal support for this worthy project—I am grateful for the letter that I received today from the Chancellor, in which the right hon. Gentleman answered some of the questions that I put to him—I have to say that no Higgs Boson, to which he has committed himself— *[Interruption.]* This may rather pass over the heads of many hon. Members. Unless the right hon. Gentleman delivers on this matter, his visit to the annual meeting of the Physical Society, which I think takes place in March, may well be punctuated by empty champagne bottles rather than by the plaudits that he would receive if he were to come out in support.

Let us be very clear about this matter. The Americans have stopped work on the superconducting super-collider —SSC. The large hadron collider is the only viable replacement for it. We must first persuade the Americans and the Japanese to join in the funding, as the project is expensive. We must ensure continuity of funding of our commitment to CERN so that work may continue. If necessary, we must provide bridging loans so that work which must be done before funds would normally be allocated may be properly financed.

We must work out the level of access, but, above all—and I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House want the project to go ahead—the Government must make a clear statement to that effect. It must be made clear to the world at large that we are not dragging our feet, as the Germans appear to be doing. Understandably, the Americans are at sixes and sevens. If particle physics and astronomy are to move forward, we must continue to advance the boundaries of science. At present, the only way to do that is through the large hadron collider.

The biological side has been covered very adequately by my hon. Friends. I do not propose to add anything to what they have said, except by way of an expression of my own concern about the increased number of interfaces and the problems that we have in deciding into which category of research specialties like chemical engineering should fall. These are very important specialties, and they are particularly relevant to wealth creation. It would be very sad indeed if they were to fall between the interests in the new set-up.

I think that I have exhausted the time allocated to me. No doubt the Minister would need more than the remaining 15 minutes to reply adequately to the many questions that have been raised.

6.45 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. David Davis): At the outset, I must convey the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to those who have taken part in the debate for his departure from the Chamber. He had to meet the chairman of the European Parliamentary Science Committee, Mr. Claude Desama.

The purpose of the orders is to put the research councils in place as part of the machinery for delivering the strategy outlined in the White Paper, "Realising Our Potential". One of the oblique advantages of the White Paper is that it has proved to be a catalyst for a series of very high quality debates, here and elsewhere, on the role of science. Indeed, this has been not the least of those debates. We have heard some complaints about the number of hon. Members present, but there is no doubt about the quality of the contributions from both sides of the House. I refer in particular to the formidable contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) and to the contribution of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), whose subleties the Department misses from time to time. I shall return to some of the issues that my predecessor raised. I refer also to the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) and for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), as well as to those of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and other Opposition Members. Many issues were raised, and I shall deal with as many of them as possible.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) referred to the role of the Director General of the Research Councils —in particular, his relationship with the councils. In essence, this is a relationship of general direction. The research councils' missions are spelt out very clearly in the White Paper and are set out in these orders. Indeed, some of the consultations are being taken on board. It is for the director general to work with the council chief executives to keep to the agreed strategy. The relationship is by nature a co-operative one.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy also asked about openness. We shall seek, as far as possible, to make the process transparent. As a first symbol of that—something that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—we have deposited in the Library information about the allocation of funding between the research councils and the logic behind it. The £15·5 million strategic allocation is included in the change, so we do not have just a pro rata figure.

The hon. Gentleman referred to what he described as a conflict of interests on the Council for Science and Technology. This is not strictly a purchaser-provider relationship and there is no obvious conflict of interests. The CST is dealing in overall science strategy—at what one might describe as the stratospheric level, rather than at the level of differential funding between councils. The people in question—Alan Rudge and Peter Williams, I think—were chosen for the CST because of their wide experience. Incidentally, they were appointed as non-executive chairmen of councils for the very same reasons. We understand the hon. Member's point. What is most important is that we get the very best people, and the hon. Gentleman himself has said that those people are very capable.

With regard to animal experiments, an issue raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, I hate palming off such matters to other Departments but the use of animals in experiments is regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 which makes it the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. The research councils have been active in promoting good practice in respect of animals used in the work that they fund and I am sure that the BBSRC will continue to build on the AFRC's good work.

I am not sure which hon. Member mentioned the more general question of ethics guidance. En passant, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy said that I had volunteered to be a subject in the Megalab experiment. During the persuasion process through which my Department put me I was taken aback by the final comment, "Don't worry—we have the technology, we can rebuild you." That brings me to the question of guidance on genetic engineering. A Government body, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, has a specific remit in that respect and there is also an independent body, the Nuffield Council. As we are all aware, the process involves the development of consensus and we expect the research councils to observe and live by that consensus.

Dr. Moonie: On the question of guidelines, I forgot to mention the patenting of genetic material. That is not covered by the present guidelines, which deal solely with ethics.

Mr. Davis: I suspect that that will fall to the Department of Trade and Industry but we, too, will consider it. It is a matter of obvious and international interest, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) asked when we expect the report on women in science to be published. Without seeking to redefine the autumn, I shall say that the target date for the report is now 24 February. I have no reason to believe that that target will not be met.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wantage and others raised specific and detailed concerns about Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton laboratories. Following the end of SERC, they will come together under common management and for an interim period become the responsibility of the new EPSRC. The separate identities of the two laboratories will, however, be preserved. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said, a review is now under way to consider the options for the running of the laboratories as a self-standing institution after an interim period. No conclusion has yet been reached, but I understand the wish for a rapid conclusion.

My right hon. Friend has already stated clearly how much we value the laboratories. There is no doubt that they are first-class institutions. My hon. Friend the Member for Wantage presented a persuasive case which will, of course, be considered carefully. He also made a more subtle point about the role of the research councils in that connection. It follows from the new missions of the research councils that they should support research where appropriate for the fulfilment of missions, but the maintenance of the overall health of the science and engineering base is also part of that mission together with the effective use of funds.

The White Paper, "Realising Our Potential", recognised that science and technology provide the fundamental underpinning of the United Kingdom's ability to compete in international markets. It is given in the House that competitiveness is a fundamental theme in all that we debate. The White Paper set out a strategy, the bare bones of which are an emphasis on quality and relevance of research, an emphasis on partnership between industry and academia and the use of Technology Foresight and the "Forward Look" in guidance, and I am referring to long-term guidance.

We have introduced, or are introducing, new structures to permit such a strategy: the Office of Science and Technology was already set up before the White Paper was published; the DGRC, Sir John Cadogan, has recently been appointed; and the Council for Science and Technology is now established, as is the Science and Engineering Base Co-ordinating Committee, a body about which I should like to speak at length and will perhaps have the opportunity to do so during a "Forward Look" debate. In addition, we are now reorganising the research councils.

The creation of the three new research councils encompassed in the orders is an imortant step. The BBSRC will have an important role to play in underpinning life sciences where we are beginning to see radical new developments. I shall try to deal quickly with the points raised in this connection by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud and by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud asked about representation for agriculture in the Foresight process.

Of course, agriculture is not explicitly represented on the Foresight steering group, but that institution is not intended to be representative. It consists of 10 expert members selected solely with a view to Foresight expertise. However, there will be an agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector panel, so the interests of agriculture will be properly represented.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West wondered how agricultural efficiency and food safety would be dealt with. That will be part of MAFF's role but the new BBSRC will take over the AFRC's responsibility for food and agriculture, as specifically outlined in one of the orders. I hope that my comments have helped the hon. Gentleman.

As everyone has said, the EPSRC will have close links with industries underpinned by the physical sciences and engineering and building on good work already done by SERC.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow and my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon mentioned the appointment of the chief executive of the EPSRC. The hon. Gentleman is very well informed. We shall be making an announcement soon. We have gone about the selection in the same way as we proceeded in the appointment of the chief executives of the NERC and the PPARC. It was the method used by previous Labour Governments. They are important posts so it is important to get the right people but we shall be making an announcement soon.

The PPARC involves special commitments and special problems, involving foreign currency subscriptions and long-planning timetables. The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy mentioned international commitments. The United Kingdom is a signatory of the treaty governing CERN and there is no question of our reneging on our commitments. The United Kingdom supports a globalisation of CERN and the involvement of the United States, Canada and Japan in the LHC—the large hadron collider—following the demise of the roughly equivalent superconducting super-collider, or SSC.

We believe that the new British Director General of CERN, Professor Llewellyn Smith, will work with member states and non-member states to come up with a sound scientific and financial package to enable the LHC to go ahead, but the formal decision comes before the CERN council in June and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will not wish us to pre-empt it at this stage.

Mr. Dalyell: What discussions are taking place with the Americans on the LHC? It is an urgent and important matter.

Mr. Davis: As I have intimated, my belief is that the director general has been having discussions on the matter but I cannot go further than that at the moment.

The PPARC pays subscriptions to CERN and to the European Space Agency as part of its mandatory science programme. As has been said, they are affected by currency fluctuations. One of the roles of the DGRC is to ensure that the fluctuations are absorbed by more than just the small budget of the PPARC. I shall have to leave it at that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon raised a specific constituency interest about the reform of the research councils in general. We hope to take the opportunity offered by the reorganisation to streamline pension arrangements, introducing a single pension scheme for all Swindon-based research councils. It is purely an administrative change and will not affect the pension or redundancy entitlements of staff.

The new research council structure and the new council mission statements, with their commitment to contribute to wealth creation and the quality of life, are key elements in delivering the new partnership which is at the heart of the White Paper. I want to make it clear that we intend to maintain basic research, and the White Paper contains our clear commitment to do so. Research councils will have the responsibility of ensuring an increased emphasis on the relevance of research to the users of that research, but their missions also refer unambiguously to the support of high quality basic research. We do not believe that those are mutually exclusive.

Industrialists have given us the clear message that they value greatly the basic research produced by our science and engineering base. They will wish that to be maintained. In the words of Richard Sykes of Glaxo Holdings plc, what he wants from the country in which he invests are

"well-trained people and good basic research."

The strategy designed in the White Paper and the structures that we are discussing today are already leading to real actions. The new Director General of the Research Councils is already introducing pilot mechanisms to develop real partnership between the science base and industry. Money squeezed out by improved efficiency is being devoted to the "Realising Our Potential" awards that we have heard about. Other efficiency-generated research funds will go to areas identified by industry as being of strategic importance and further cash for Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering fellowships. The system is already beginning to work.

It has been a truism for a long time that Britain is brilliant at generating good basic science—perhaps the best in the world—but for many decades it has not been as good as its competitors at translating that scientific dominance into technological excellence.

It being Seven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion, pursuant to order [28 January].*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

Child Support

7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): I beg to move,

That the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 1994, which were laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.

I am aware of the wide interest in the Child Support Act 1991 and in the changes to it that we are debating tonight. It is most important to set that interest in the wider context of child maintenance and to establish again the principles that underpin the Act and the Child Support Agency.

The Child Support Act was introduced with all-party support on the back of a deteriorating situation in respect of child maintenance. Nearly 1 million lone parents and their children depended on income support, yet only a quarter of those received any regular maintenance. The old system of obtaining maintenance through the courts or the Department of Social Security offices was obviously failing those parents and their children. It was slow, inaccessible and led to low and inconsistent settlements. The Child Support Act was designed to halt the significant decline in the payment of maintenance that had occurred during the previous decade and to move away from a system that, all too often, involved the taxpayer as an unwitting party in the settlement.

The basic principle behind the new system, as the House well knows, is that both parents should be responsible for maintaining their children where they can afford to do so. The taxpayer should have to help only where parents do not have the means to meet their obligation. That basic principle is widely supported, but it means in practice that those who have responsibility for children must shoulder a greater degree of the financial burden for them than in the past. In other words, in many cases parents must pay more if other taxpayers, often on low incomes with families of their own, are to contribute less. Those who support the principle must recognise the need to support putting it into practice.

We always made it clear that we would keep the operation of the scheme under review, and we were aware that other people would also do so. It is no exaggeration, therefore, for the all-party Social Security Select Committee to have described the Child Support Act as

"the most far reaching social reform to be made for forty years".

We recognise also that there have been genuine worries about the way in which the new system is working in detail. We have, therefore, conducted a thorough review of its operation, during which we considered all representations from hon. Members, the public and other interested parties. At the same time, the all-party Social Security Select Committee examined the policy and the operation of child support. The Committee had the opportunity to suggest tearing the whole thing up, but did not. Instead, its thoughtful and balanced report is unequivocal in its support for the basic principles of the scheme.

In drawing up the regulations, we have especially sought to answer the worries of those absent parents most affected by the new scheme, while bearing in mind that any change that is beneficial to an absent parent is potentially of disadvantage to a parent with care and her children. Some of our conclusions coincide with those of the Select Committee, some do not and some have gone further.

We agree with the Select Committee that it is better to leave absent parents more financial choice to meet other

[Mr. Alistair Burt]

demands on them than to try to incorporate into the formula a range of specific costs, such as travel to work, visiting first families and other debts. Such a move, we believe, would provide a shopping list of items that would be viewed as essential by some but not by others, and would have the effect of reducing the priority given to child maintenance. The Select Committee said, and we agree:

> "We believe, however, that child maintenance in the form of money should have first call on a parent's income."

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I accept all that my hon. Friend has said so far, but does he accept that in some regions, such as the one that I represent, for many people the cost of travelling to work is greater than the cost of the mortgage? Will he consider that in his future deliberations about the development of the scheme?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend makes a fair argument, but my response is the same as that of the Select Committee. The difficulty is that my hon. Friend has mentioned a special issue relating to his geographical location. It is precisely for that reason—hon. Members in different parts of the country can draw attention to similar matters—that one would end up with that shopping list of special exemptions that needed to be included in the formula. The argument that I put to the Select Committee, and the argument that the Select Committee accepted, was that, rather than creating that shopping list, it was better to ensure that sufficient residual income remained to meet the costs. I note my hon. Friend's interest in that point, but I would refer him to the Select Committee's response to it.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I am glad to confirm that I agree with my hon. Friend on the general principle on which the Act is based. I am, however, seriously worried about the detail, which, as he says, obviously is not working.

I have written to my hon. Friend about eight specific cases. I can assure him that in each case the details of the Act have caused great hardship to hard-working men who now have two families to support. On each of the eight occasions on which I have written to my hon. Friend I have had the same anodyne reply, drafted by a civil servant, which has wholly ignored the individual points that I have put to my hon. Friend, and which has ignored the plight that the individuals are suffering as a result of the details of the Act. I ask my hon. Friend not to rely entirely on formulae, but to look with some compassion at the individual cases in which huge hardship is being caused and to amend the Act and the regulations accordingly to ensure that that injustice ceases.

Mr. Burt: I hope that my hon. Friend will allow me to develop the case for the regulations tonight. He will find that some of the worries that he has mentioned in his letters are met by some of the changes that we propose.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South) *rose*——

Mr. Burt: I shall take one more intervention and then I should like to make some progress.

Mr. Cryer: To many of us, the changes represented in the regulations are wholly inadequate. If the Minister thinks for a moment that they will satisfy the need for common justice, he is mistaken.

Let me take as an example a situation that is not confined to a region of the country, but is common to the whole country—the complete lack of recognition when a settlement is made on a former partner, including sometimes the marital home, with mortgage payments, often considerable, that continue when the second family starts. It promotes a very strong feeling of injustice, and a feeling that the Child Support Agency is more interested in the Treasury than in the child.

Mr. Burt: Perhaps I might develop my argument. I shall discuss clean breaks later. When the House passed the Act, all hon. Members were conscious of the pressure placed on taxpayers—ordinary men and women, often on low incomes, with families of their own—and the worry that they had for too long supported other people in the costs of their separation. When I hear arguments about the Treasury, I sometimes feel that hon. Members fail to realise that what lie behind the Treasury are everyday men and women who make their contributions to it.

The Government accepted the Select Committee's conclusion that there was no sensible way in which the capital value of past settlements could be reflected in current maintenance assessments, even if that were thought desirable. So-called "clean break settlements" are, essentially, ways to settle the question of spousal maintenance. There can be no clean break between a parent and his children. In any event, the formula already reflects the practical consequences of property settlements. Where an absent parent has not taken his share of any equity in the matrimonial home it is likely that he will incur higher costs when rehousing himself. As housing costs are taken into account pound for pound in the calculation of assessable income, his maintenance bill will lower.

I shall now outline our specific proposals——

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): Before the Minister does that, let me tell him that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said, there is great dissatisfaction among people who are contributing, as opposed to those who are not contributing and who have disappeared. I urge the Minister to think again about the basic principles in the Act. It is not working. People are showing it up to be what it is—a fraud. Something ought to be done about it.

Mr. Burt: With respect, I must tell the right hon. Gentleman that the Select Committee, which had the opportunity to say, "Tear the whole thing up, because it is a fraud, and it is not working", did not do so. [Hon. Members: "Rubbish."] I hear some hon. Members saying that the Select Committee was rubbish, but I suspect that that would not be the view of the House as a whole.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Burt: I should like to make some progress now and outline our specific proposals. As well as introducing some important changes in child support arrangements, they make, as always, some technical drafting improvements designed to ensure that the original policy intentions are fully achieved. It might be of assistance to the House if I dealt with the most significant changes first. I am conscious that many hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall confine myself to those changes.

Regulation 4 modifies in several respects the amount of maintenance calculated under the Child Support (Maintenance Assessments and Special Cases)

Regulations 1992. Paragraph (2) concerns the assessment of maintenance to meet the basic needs of a child or children aged under 16. When maintenance is assessed, the calculation includes an amount in respect of a child's need to be looked after by an adult—the so-called carer element. The amount is set at the single adult personal allowance for income support, and it is included in recognition of the fact that children cannot look after themselves.

In drafting the amendment, we recognised that, rather than ending suddenly, that need reduces gradually as children grow older. Accordingly, it provides for the amount to be reduced by 25 per cent. when the youngest child reaches the age of 11, and by 50 per cent. when the youngest child reaches the age of 14. As now, that element is removed altogether when the youngest child reaches 16. Other allowances for children in the formula continue to rise as children grow older, recognising that some other needs increase as children grow older.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): As the Minister has pointed out, under the regulations the absent parent has to pay the entire amount calculated by social security for the attendant parent maintaining the child. That now results in a payment of £44, on average. At the beginning of his speech the Minister said that the purpose of the legislation was to ensure that both parents accepted their responsibilities. Will he therefore explain why only one parent has to pay the entire bill for the attendant costs of caring for the child under the formula, both as it was originally drawn up and as he is now describing it?

Mr. Burt: That happens because the child is physically present with only one of the two parents. Because the child is present with one parent and needs care, that care has to be provided and paid for. That is why the other parent, who does not have the physical care of the child, makes a contribution in financial form, by way of the carer element.

Ms Primarolo: In total?

Mr. Burt: Yes, in total. That is the point.

The new provision introduced by paragraphs (6) and (7) concerns cases where a person has care of the children of more than one absent parent, and is a consequence of the reduction in the carer element that I have just explained. In such cases an absent parent's maintenance assessment will reduce when his youngest child reaches the age of 11 or 14, even though the parent with care may have other younger children.

Paragraph (3) concerns the calculation of the additional amounts of maintenance paid by better-off absent parents. Where the absent parent has income left after meeting the basic maintenance requirement, he is currently required to pay 25 per cent. of that balance in additional maintenance. That element ensures that children share in the increased prosperity of their parents, even though they may live apart. The deduction rate is set at a lower rate than the 50 per cent. taken to meet the basic maintenance requirement, in recognition of the fact that parents are likely to spend a smaller proportion of their income on their children once they have met their basic needs.

The amendment will reduce the rate of deduction for the additional element of 20 per cent. where there are only two children to be maintained, and 15 per cent. where there is only one child. That provision recognises that extra expenditure on children, over and above their basic needs, is not likely to be as high for one or two children as it is for three or more, and will moderate the very high amounts that some absent parents are expected to pay. That change goes beyond anything recommended by the Select Committee, and will alleviate some of the concerns put to us by hon. Members.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I appreciate the fact that my hon. Friend and the Government have listened and have made some changes. However, in my view, those changes do not go far enough. My hon. Friend is talking about expenditure on children. One problem that has arisen in my constituency concerns stepchildren. Will my hon. Friend explain why such children are not considered? The idea sems to be that the step-parent should simply adopt them. I find that an extraordinary approach.

Mr. Burt: Again, one of the principles of the Act was that parents should, as a priority, be responsible for their own natural children. We believe that the formula sometimes protects stepchildren—the children of a second family—at the expense of the first family, especially where income is near the basic protected income level. At that level, it is possible that, while no payment is being made to a natural child in a first family, there is still protection for the child in a second family. We believe that the principle is important, and we therefore felt unable to accept the recommendation on stepchildren. However, we felt that by increasing the amount of protected income—I shall deal with that later—we would be able to provide extra for the stepchild. The principle that a natural child should have first call on a parent's income is important, and we did not wish to devalue it.

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Burt: No, I want to make a bit more progress before I take another intervention.

Paragraphs (4) and (5) substantially increase the level of protected income for absent parents—that relates to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson). Protected income is the minimum amount that an absent parent and any second family must retain from their disposable income after payment of maintenance. Instead of only £8, as at present, absent parents will now keep a minimum of £30 above the level of help that they, and their new family if they have one, would get if they were on income support.

In addition, absent parents to whom protected income level applies will be able to keep an additional 15 per cent. of the difference between their basic protected income level and their total family income, instead of only 10 per cent., as at present. They will improve incentives to work by ensuring that the absent parent keeps an additional amount from any extra that he earns, and that will benefit not only the absent parent but, ultimately, the parent with care and the children. Again, that recommendation goes further than what the Select Committee suggested. I hope that that will be for the benefit of hon. Members and those whom they represent.

Regulation 4(8) streamlines the calculation of housing costs allowed in exempt income. It provides for the full amount of premiums on an insurance policy to discharge the mortgage on a parent's home to be allowed in the calculation of the parent's exempt income where the mortgage does not exceed £60,000. Where the mortgage exceeds £60,000 the existing provision will continue to

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apply, so there will be a reduction in the amount of premiums allowed to take account of any "with profits" element of the policy. That, too, goes beyond the Select Committee's recommendations.

Regulation 5 amends regulations 1, 3 and 4 of the Child Support Fees Regulations 1992, which make provision for the charging of the collective service to absent parents where the application for maintenance has been made by a parent with care in receipt of income support, family credit or disability working allowance. Regulation 5 proposes that where a parent with care is in receipt of one of those benefits and the absent parent is making regular child maintenance payments direct to the parent with care, the Child Support Agency will not make a charge for the collection fee to the absent parent. Fees in such cases will become payable only where the agency becomes directly involved in either collection or enforcement action. That, too, was a Select Committee recommendation strongly supported by hon. Members.

Regulations 7 and 8 provide for a significant extension to the current provisions by introducing new arrangements for phasing in the higher awards under the new scheme. Absent parents with second families or care of a child for at least two nights per week, and with an existing court order or written maintenance agreement, whose maintenance assessment is over £60, will have any increase in their liability phased in over an 18-month period in six-monthly steps of £20, or 25 per cent. of the difference between the old and new liabilities if that is higher.

The new provisions also ensure that absent parents who are not entitled to the original phasing scheme, because all the qualifying children were not named on the maintenance agreement or because they did not have a second family, but nevertheless retained care of a child for at least two nights per week, are now included in a similar scheme. The new arrangements will help absent parents to adjust to their commitments over a period of time, while gradually increasing the amount that they pay. Those orginally on the phasing scheme will continue to be assessed under those rules as they are more beneficial to those on lower incomes.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Will my hon. Friend explain to the House why, in framing the changes to the regulations, welcome as they are as far as they go, he has distinguished between those absent parents who have families to support and those who have a sick wife to support? Both have calls on their income, but only one is recognised.

Mr. Burt: We took the view that those in greatest difficulty in meeting new commitments to their children would be those who had taken on a second family. Clearly, all changes in circumstances force a certain amount of reconsideration, but the greater problem lies with those who have a new family and therefore new responsibilities to those families. Therefore, we believed that it was better to make the adjustments to allow them to have a greater period of time to pay because it was on the new children that the greatest burden would lie.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): We have all listened with a great deal of interest to the reforms that the Minister has proposed for the benefit of absent parents. What proposals does he have that would be of any benefit whatever to parents with care of children? Would not he agree that there are thousands of parents with care who are suffering from the Child Support Act as it exists and see precious little benefit from his proposals? Those parents have the responsibility of looking after their children on an income that is depleted through the harsh regulations of the Act.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Lady puts the case that I made in my opening remarks. Any concession made to the absent parent who is paying has a consequent effect on those who expect to receive the money. The whole point is to recognise the fact that extra expense improves the circumstances of the parent with care of the child. If those who are required to pay maintenance pay less, somebody has to make up the difference. Either it is the parent with care of the child or it is the rest of society. All of us cannot have it all our own way. Somebody, somewhere bears the burden of looking after children. We firmly believe that where people cannot afford to look after their own children, the taxpayer and society in general have a responsibility to step in.

Also, because of various pressures on all the people who may be on low incomes and who have children of their own to support, where parents can shoulder that responsibility, they should do so. That was the whole point behind the Act. No hon. Member disagrees with that principle but when it is put into practice, the House finds it more difficult, because shifting the burden from the taxpayer to individuals means that, as the taxpayers pay less, some individuals may pay more. We tried to ensure that the burden was placed on those most responsible.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Burt: If I may, I would like to proceed. Many hon. Members wish to take part. I have tried to be generous in allowing interventions, but I should make some progress.

Regulations 10 to 14 relate to the procedural changes needed to implement the important changes. We should not underestimate the extent of the massive task that the agency faces to implement the changes. However, I thought it essential to introduce the changes as soon as feasible, even if that may cause some difficulties and delays to the normal day-to-day business of the agency.

The changes that I have announced tonight and that are contained in the regulations are designed as a measured response to concern from constituents, hon. Members and independent commentators, who welcome almost without exception the Child Support Act, but are worried about aspects of its implementation.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Should not my hon. Friend's regulations take into account the fact that, where mothers do not give enough care to their child, there are caring fathers who replace some payments by seeing that the children have clothing and so on, which they would not have otherwise had? Should not they also take into account the fact that the father who is paying has to spend money on travel? In my area of north-west Leicester, most people have to travel to Leicester, to Derby or to Burton to work and it costs around £60 a month.

Mr. Burt: With respect to my hon. Friend, I dealt with his latter point earlier. I would appreciate us considering the way in which the Select Committee dealt with the same argument. My hon. Friend's first point is important. In the initial consideration of the Act, we considered the instance in which a woman with care of a child was often not given so much money in maintenance. Instead, the absent parent would say that, while he was not giving the mother much money, he would see the children all right for clothes or shoes or something like that. The problem was that where those arrangements worked, all was well, but in many cases they did not and the woman was left wondering whether the extra offers would come through.

In putting the Act together, the House took the view, which was confirmed by the Select Committee, that it was better to receive a regular sum of maintenance money in the hand than to wonder whether that extra support in kind was coming through. Because of that practical reality, the change was made to ensure that maintenance money was delivered.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Burt: I am coming to a conclusion and want to allow more opportunities for hon. Members later. I shall be winding [illegible] and I shall have an opportunity later to deal with their concerns.

It is not possible to meet all concerns that have been raised by the Child Support Act. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is."] No, it is not. If we did so, we would end up renouncing the principles so soundly endorsed by the House in 1991 and again by the Select Committee report more recently.

In recognising the difficulties of those with second families in meeting adjustments to bear a heavier responsibility by allowing them longer to come to terms with payments, by reducing the level of payments in certain circumstances and by safeguarding still further the basic protected income, we believe that we are making more acceptable the balance in those matters between children, parents and the taxpayer. Each has a legitimate interest and a voice, and I am determined that the voice that has tended to be most silent in the matter, that of the mother with care of the child, will not be the voice least regarded.

For too long, an inconsistent and ineffective system allowed a sad decline in the payment of maintenance, and the taxpayer became the sleeping partner in separation agreements. I should emphasise to the House that in 96 per cent. of cases currently handled by the CSA, whatever may be the circumstances of the absent parent, there is dependency on benefits by the parent with care of the child. We should not return to that system. I hope that the changes will embed the principles better, and ensure that the system is fulfilling its aim of securing more maintenance, more regularly for more children. I commend the regulations to the House.

7.27 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): One thing is clear about tonight's debate—it has underlined that every Member of the House knows that for many of his or her constituents the introduction of the Child Support Act has been traumatic and painful. I use the word "traumatic" almost in a literal sense, because it has been a shock which has in many cases threatened the process of rebuilding lives. Whatever we may think of the ultimate solutions and the merits of the regulations, every hon. Member must have been impressed by the anger, the genuine bewilderment and sometimes fear of people who wondered how they would manage in new and strange circumstances.

I recognise that I have repeated many times before, but I shall do so once more, the sentiment that, of course, Opposition Members share a good deal of common ground with the Minister—for example, we accept unequivocally that there is a duty on parents to support their children in all circumstances and in all the ways they can. I personally do not believe that financial contributions are an adequate substitute for the protection and support that full parenting brings, but I want to emphasise that they are an important part of the process. I also agree with the Minister that, having made the decision, Opposition Members must live with the fact that implementation is not easy and will inevitably cause problems and difficulties. I entirely accept that; there is no way that we can escape from that.

One of the most important factors in the new system is certainty of collection. I certainly want us to end what I think can fairly be described as the scandal whereby only one third of absent parents regularly contributed maintenance to their children. I hope that the Child Support Agency—with certain reforms which I believe we ought to consider—will move against that scandal.

Let me make it clear, too, that I can offer no comfort to the writers of many of the letters that I receive. Take the case of someone who writes and says, "My maintenance payment has gone up by 400 per cent." If it becomes apparent from the second paragraph of that person's letter that he has hitherto been paying on the basis of an outdated and inadequate court settlement bearing no relation to the true costs of educating and bringing up a child, we must reply that he will have to accept the fact that he will face a considerable increase in his contribution. Those facts are not an issue between us. I repeat, however, that there is pain and suffering and that there is perceived injustice, and those are not factors that the House can ignore.

I should at once make it clear that I do not propose to advise my hon. Friends to vote against the regulations. I welcome them as far as they go, although I do not believe that they go far enough. They are not just adjustments: some of them are—I want to make that plain—but some of them are quite significant. One of the difficulties of assessing these matters arises from the fact that the complexity of the whole financial system attached to the Child Support Act would drive anyone who tried to master it into a home for the bewildered. It is an extraordinarily difficult thing to come to grips with—I say that with some personal feeling as my lower mathematics creaks under the strain. My real criticism is that, although the regulations are specifically helpful on particular points, they do not soften the harsh outline of what is happening and will not affect or ameliorate the storm of protest.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Before I came down to the Chamber, I telephoned a constituent of mine who had received a letter outlining the six points that the Minister raised. I asked that very intelligent man whether he understood it and he told me that he had absolutely no clue. He said, "Tommy, I'd need a Philadelphia lawyer; what the hell's going on in the House of Commons?"

Mr. Dewar: I want to make it clear, first, that as a sort of retired refugee Scottish lawyer, I certainly do not offer myself as a Philadelphian version of the animal, although I agree with my hon. Friend that the complexity of the system is a problem.

[Mr. Dewar]

The most significant of the proposals before us is the increase in protected income, which, according to the Government's own estimates, will mean that, in 1996-97, something like £60 million a year less will be gathered by the Child Support Agency. I have no doubt at all that the substitution of the £30 addition for the £8 addition will ensure that there is a much more healthy gap between net income less maintenance payments and what a family would receive if it were driven on to income support. I do not want to belittle that change; it is of some significance and it is welcome.

I am not so impressed by the remainder of what is on offer. It is interesting that the collection fee, which was much hated for very good reasons and of whose demise I thoroughly approve, has gone at what was put to me in a parliamentary answer as "negligible cost". I suspect that, if one went through the regulations, one could find further practical changes that would help the atmosphere.

The phasing applies more widely as a result of the changes and is extended over 18 months—at a price in revenue forgone of about £15 million. I accept that it is practical and sensible to suggest that the £44 carers element of the maintenance requirement should be reduced to £33 when the youngest child reaches the age of 11 or £22 when the youngest child reaches 14. I have some sympathy, though, with the point made about stepchildren, which may be a point of some contention in the implementation of the change.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the major problems with the Act and the regulations is the position of second families, whether there are stepchildren or other children? A constituent of mine came to me saying that he had adopted a child but had thought about going back to the court to give it up because the burden on him and his new family was oppressive. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Child Support Agency has set itself up as judge and jury and that is a bad thing? Should not there be an independent appeals procedure? Will my hon. Friend also deal with the question of the clean break, because that is a major bone of contention for families?

Mr. Dewar: I will indeed come to those contentious and difficult issues. On the first point, I agree that language is important. I understand how convenient it is, but the very term "absent parent" causes great distress to parents—usually fathers—who cannot live with their families for all sorts of good and practical reasons but who maintain a very close personal interest and give as much support as they can. I must say that my own warmth of feeling for the Child Support Agency suffered somewhat when a very senior official of that agency started talking to me about the circumstances that would change when an absent partner "repartnered". I realise that that is a useful technical term, but it took me a little while to get up to speed on the phraseology.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does my hon. Friend accept that the real problem is one of trust and that as long as anyone dealing with the agency believes that its members are operating on the basis of financial targets, the trust felt very strongly in relation to normal civil service procedures will be lacking?

Mr. Dewar: I understand that point, although I accept that certainty of payment is very important. I do not go along with the argument advanced in one intervention that it is satisfactory for people to say, "We always get on well together. When I have a few bucks, I pass them over."

Mrs. Dunwoody: I was talking about the staff of the agency.

Mr. Dewar: I may have misunderstood my hon. Friend's point. I shall certainly read what she said.

I was discussing the reduction in the £44 element of the maintenance requirement, which I described as sensible and practical; I think that it will also do something to reduce the resentment that is felt when an absent parent cannot understand why he should be paying what he regards as his ex-partner's income support. That particular change will be useful.

As I said, these are minor changes. Even more minor, and rather more puzzling, is that not recommended by the Select Committee—the reduction from 25p to 20p and then to 15p in the pound in the payment that has to be made from excess income once the maintenance payment has been exhausted. That will apply to those on rather higher incomes and is a concession to the better-off absent father. I must say that that would not be my priority given the problems faced by others in the system, especially those who have to care for a second family.

The package is not enough to restore confidence and encourage hope, although it has some useful points in it. The present settlement—if it is to be the final one—will be seen by many as unpleasantly like an effort to do the essential minimum to diffuse an awkward political situation. I entirely accept the Minister's word that that is not the intention, but if that is the perception it will be extremely damaging.

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the vast majority of complaints that we have received are perfectly genuine complaints from people who not only pay their first wives but are trying to establish a new life with a second family? My hon. Friend the Minister used the words "and can pay". The sad thing is that many cannot pay. It is that element of the whole business that causes so much distress.

Mr. Dewar: The balance is extremely difficult to strike. I agree that one of the simple facts of dealing with matrimonial breakdown is that, very often, two into one does not go. If two families have to be supported, it is extremely difficult to do that from one income. As someone who once did matrimonial legal work, I am painfully aware of that fact.

I do not believe that the package goes far enough or that it strikes the right balance.

Ms Gordon: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dewar: I give way for the last time. I must make progress.

Ms Gordon: My hon. Friend says that the package does not go far enough. Does he agree that the package should include abolition of the benefit penalty for women on income support who refuse to give authorisation to the agency, even if the agency is not satisfied? Is it not clear that, if a woman were to derive financial benefit for herself and her child without feeling under any threat, she would willingly give the authorisation and that, if she did not, her opinion should be accepted?

Mr. Dewar: I am sensitive to the concerns that were expressed, particularly by people representing the women's movement, about the CSA when it was last set up. The number of people who have had a reduction, at the latest count, is 87; the House might say that it is 87 too many, but it is a small number.

This is a time when we have to be frank. I am not in favour of making it a voluntary principle that people co-operate or do not co-operate as they will. It is important that there is co-operation; but I should certainly like to see an end to the penalty if we can encourage co-operation in other ways, if that is possible. That takes us to other changes that I will certainly try to discuss briefly.

At Question Time, when referring to the Select Committee report, the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), said that it was

"a good day for the Child Support Agency".—[*Official Report*, 6 December 1992; Vol. 234, c. 12.]

I am not sure whether there was a touch of triumph or, perhaps more realistically, relief in his voice, but it is unwise to use the Select Committee report as a cover for closing the file and toughing it out. For the Select Committee—hon. Members can speak for themselves—the package is a pick 'n mix—the Secretary of State's selection. Someone will correct me if I am wrong, but it is the Select Committee's intention to return to this matter, and it does not regard what was clearly an interim report as the final word on the matter.

I have never heard my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) so unfairly used by Ministers, as he and his colleagues have become a walking alibi for doing nothing more. That is not a particularly helpful approach to the problem.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dewar: I must make a little progress.

Mrs. Mahon: Will my hon. Friend give way on this point?

Mr. Dewar: I shall give way for the very last time.

Mrs. Mahon: Members of the Select Committee were not unanimous. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) made some excellent points with which most hon. Members would agree.

Mr. Dewar: I take that point. I have read the minority report of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North, which was printed.

In fairness, I should say a word or two about what should be done. At this stage, I have no intention of arguing at length the case for the points that I shall make, because many hon. Members want to speak. Also, there is to be some Opposition time during the coming week, and we hope to devote it to a debate on the Child Support Agency, on a motion which will allow us to test in the Lobby the opinion of the House about further change. That will also allow hon. Members to express more widely not only the anxiety that is felt by absent parents and other constituents but the hopes and concerns of parents with care, because both must properly be weighed in the balance.

The matters which should be considered are, first, the possibility of having a right of appeal to a review officer. In other systems—the Australian system is the one that we always mention—there is power to order a departure from the normal formula if specific circumstances tested against criteria defined in statute justify it. Of course, there are differences between the Australian and the British systems, but the similarities are much more striking and the purposes are similar. I must say—we should not shrug it off—that the Australians tell me that their system has been an important safety valve. Anyone who has dealt with the range of anger and dismay that have arisen over the present system will recognise the importance of a safety valve.

I do not want to pretend that such a safety valve will be a wide-open gate through which thousands will be able to go, but there are undoubtedly cases—all hon. Members can recall them from experience—in which factors directly related to the care of children are not taken into account because they cannot be taken into account. A review officer would be an investment for every one of us in terms of public confidence in the system.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: I am sorry, but I must make progress, otherwise it is not fair to the House.

I will return to that matter in some detail if we have such a debate next week. That should be done, subject to discussion about the details.

Secondly, we should consider the clean-break problem. I accept entirely what the Minister has said—that one cannot have a clean break with one's children, that one should not have a clean break with one's children. Again, the Australian system—it is worth looking at it because it was implemented in stages in 1988 and 1989—has been running for four or five years, so there is a body of experience. Under that system, if parties are separating or divorcing and they have a formal agreement about, for example, the transfer of the matrimonial home or a major financial settlement, they can specify in that agreement, both parties being signatories, a reduction in the maintenance payments in recognition of that transfer. If that is registered and lodged with the Child Support Agency and it collectes the maintenance, it will observe that reduction. If one party subsequently goes on to benefit, it is still possible to vary that benefit, although within well-defined limits, the top variation being 25 per cent.

I am not standing on every detail of that system, and I am not suggesting that we lift it as it is and pop it into our legislation, but there is a strong case for considering what appears to have been a successful system and then looking at the monumental problem that we face and seeing whether there is some way in which we can learn and improve the position.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: I am going to plough on, if the House will bear with me. Hon. Members will be able to return to this matter—it is a checklist.

The third matter—I use my terms carefully—is the possibility of a disregard. I have always been attracted to the idea of a disregard, because there is one compelling argument, and that is that the system is supposed to be

[Mr. Dewar]

about more money being collected from more parents for more children. On the figures available to us, that does not fit with the facts as they exist in the real world.

I recognise that there are competing arguments and that, for example, there is worry that an overgenerous disregard will make work less worth while. I recognise also that there are always problems with the financial implications of a disregard. That is why such matters should be thrashed out and discussed. They should be on the agenda for discussion, if only because my conscience does not live easily with the fact that I know—that the children who are most at risk economically, the children who are living with families who are dependent on income support, will almost certainly get no direct benefit at all from additional maintenance that is paid. Just because of that fact, such matters should be considered.

Those are meant to be three positive proposals for discussion. There is a very positive commitment on my part to consider the proposal on the right of appeal to a review officer. Of course children should be at the centre of the system—that is the point of the Child Support Act 1992, and that is why, in many ways, we have got the balance wrong. Children's interests must be balanced, but they should not be subordinated to the interests of absent parents, and certainly not to the interests of the taxpayer, the Treasury or whatever term the Minister likes to use. We all agree that it is difficult to get it right, but the confusion and the pain surely justify further movement.

I am fearful—I might sound a little like an academic constitutional lawyer—about what I see around me. A legal system must command respect. There is a danger that if disrespect grows to the point at which consent is withheld, we will bring everything into disrepute. We are near to doing that. Despite the changes that the House will approve tonight, I trust, we should not ignore the continuing and dangerous unhappiness that underlines and reinforces our duty to get the balance right. In answer to a question in *Hansard*, the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Bury, North, said:

> "There are no plans for further change."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1994; Vol. 236, c. *578*.]

In the light of the opinons expressed in every part of the House, I hope that the Minister will reconsider that position.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Many hon. Members wish to contribute, and short speeches would be greatly appreciated.

7.49 pm

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I have had many contacts with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), including contacts in consistorial practice. He and I have both dealt with many of the tens of thousands of marriages that have broken down, and we know about the difficulty and the sadness. The children and both parties have to make sacrifices, as do succeeding parties.

It is strange that quotas are to be allotted to parents in certain circumstances. In my experience, these matters were dealt with by the courts, which saw the mother, the father and the children, knew the locality and comprehended the circumstances. I cannot understand how a vast new bureaucracy in Belfast will be able to do that simply by asking ordinary people to fill up a form.

Mr. Stephen: On the issue of court orders, does my hon. and learned Friend recall that, under the old system before the child support legislation, the lawyers for the husband and wife would often put together a settlement which paid no regard at all to the interests of the taxpayer? It was often designed to place the maximum burden on the taxpayer. For example, it could transfer a house with a large mortgage, which the taxpayer was expected to pay. Does my hon. and learned Friend approve of that?

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I am glad to say that I am a Scottish lawyer, and that what my hon. Friend outlines does not apply in our civilised society. If it applies in England, that increases my contempt for the absurdity of its law.

We are dealing with the terrible sensitivities of former human relationships and with children. I was horrified by the Minister's index of what people receive. A person who has four children and has been married for four years gets tuppence, and so on. But I was even more horrified to hear that, as I understand it, the matter is to be taken out of the hands of the courts in April and put into the hands of a bureaucracy in Belfast. What do the bureaucrats know about these matters? On what possible basis can they be sensitive to the needs and realities of the children and the families?

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: My hon. Friend is not a member of my family, but I shall give way to him anyway.

Mr. Burns: I appreciate that my hon. and learned Friend is not an English lawyer, but does he accept that a problem with the court maintenance system in England was that the people who suffered most were the child and the mother? That was because of the extremely low maintenance that was set, and in three out of four cases no maintenance was collected.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: That increases my contempt for the law of England, because it is certainly not my experience in the law of Scotland. My experience there is the reverse. I am glad to say that at least civilisation starts at the Tweed.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I think that my hon. and learned Friend will accept that no hon. Member is suggesting a return to the old system. Does he agree that the system under the Child Support Agency is at least as unjust as that which preceded it? A compromise, taking account of the hardship that the Child Support Agency logistics is causing, could allow the court to review, in appropriate cases, the special circumstances that I put to the Minister and to which I got only a standard response from the CSA. It had no relevance whatever to the individual circumstances of my constituent's concern.

Could we have a compromise arrangement, whereby the CSA remains but the regulations are amended to make sure that such injustices do not occur?

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I have had dozens of cases from the Child Support Agency. In one that came to me last week, the CSA had decided to reduce the amount that the court had awarded. What right has the agency to do that? Are the people in the agency gods, lares et penates, who oversee our lives?

A committee of bureaucrats in Belfast is directing people in the courts who have seen the facts, the family, the children and the circumstances. Upon what possible basis do those bureaucrats across the sea have the effrontery to reduce the award that a judge and justice thought was appropriate? The award was not opposed by the other spouse. He came to me and told me that he was appalled and that the CSA had said that his contribution to his family should be reduced.

The whole development of this matter is offensive in principle and in application. As it develops, it will get more hubristic, more bureaucratic and more unfair. I cannot see any justification for the ordinary citizen not having a right to go to court. I have done tens of thousands of consistorial cases in the Scottish courts. Some are easy, and some are difficult, but the children are always the principal concern. I do not see how a bunch of bureaucrats can do that armed with a form.

I cannot fill up forms, and I am supposed to be a Queen's counsellor. How is Mrs. Snodgrass to fill up a form? When it has been completed, some bureaucrat will read it and say, "You will not get this or that." For the Minister to rabbit on about £42 for this and £42 for something else is totally insensitive. We are talking about families and children; we are not talking about buying postal orders and paying taxes.

I find the Government's whole approach grotesquely offensive. We are dealing with children and families, with human frailty and human difficulties. Such issues cannot be dealt with by a committee or on a form, and I disapprove of that completely. Let us ensure—let the Government be warned that I shall try to ensure—that the matter is left to the courts, who comprehend it. At least they are in reason and in knowledge of the locality, the families and the relationships. I plead, please, for humanity.

8 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I shall be brief. There is good reason why today's debate will sound to many outsiders as though we are set on representing the views of some men against their families. That response is understandable, but it is not adequate.

Many of our male constituents feel that the ground under their feet has shifted markedly over the past 15 years. One in five of all males are now unemployed. If they are unskilled, the figure is one in three. Those males feel disfranchised. The lack of a wage packet means that they no longer feel head of the household; they no longer feel equal to their partners, and they find it difficult to carry out their role as fathers. There is disquiet on those grounds.

There is disquiet on other grounds too, and the Government are even more directly responsible for them than for the unemployment figures. Under the stewardship of the present Government, until the advent of the Child Support Agency, we witnessed the near-collapse of the collection of maintenance for those mothers who are on income support and who were on supplementary benefit. The proportion has halved.

The word went out, therefore, that the Government were not interested in ensuring that those on benefits also received maintenance. That trend continued for 15 years. Many males will have made arrangements with second families which they will be unable to sustain if an Act is introduced retrospectively forcing them to pay a large proportion of their income towards their first families.

The Government have to approach the debate with more humility than usual. Many of those people who thought that they were totally free to make new arrangements with their second families now find that, late in the day, the Government have changed the ground rules under which they are to be judged, and the grounds on which they will have to pay. That is one reason for humilty, but there are also others.

The Minister was generous in his selective quoting from the Select Committee report. If I had introduced the debate tonight, I would have made similar partisan use of that report. However, Ministers will not have forgotten that there is unlikely to be a vote tonight. It is the only night this week when hon. Members do not have to stay, yet we have a presence in the Chamber far in excess of what we normally have at this stage when there is a three-line Whip, especially in social security debates. It gives those on the Treasury Bench some idea of the temper of the House tonight.

As the Minister quoted from the report, I should mention that the Select Committee considered the regulations to be the most far-reaching change since the Attlee settlement of 1945. That means that, if the Government are wise, tonight's debate will be the beginning and not the end of the reform of the Child Support Agency.

The bigger the reform, the more important it is for us to listen carefully to what our constituents tell us and for the Government to take into account what we relate in the Chamber and in private to Ministers, so that the Act can be reformed to make it workable in the way that we all hoped it would be.

Any major change means a resettlement between the three parties that have an interest—taxpayers, first families, second, and perhaps third, families. There are five reforms which the Government will have to consider sooner of later, and the sooner they consider them, the more credit they will get. More importantly, not only will our constituents feel that the House of Commons listens to them, but the Act will win widespread support rather than hostility.

First, the agency is the only body in existence to look at what is happening to family budgets. It has all the details. Despite the attempts of our constituents, we often get an incomplete picture. May we have some information as to the income ranges with which people manage with their second families?

Secondly, the Select Committee backed away from the idea of raising the clean break settlements. We could not get agreement on that, and we hoped that the courts would rule in a way that would have broken open the whole debate. It is not good enough to rely on the argument that some people have managed to hand over a house which is largely a debt for taxpayers to service. Such matters can be considered, justified and calculated.

It is monstrous for those who have made a large settlement—and often acquired debts in order to make that settlement—to be penalised, particularly as the whole House believes that it is a good thing to own houses.

It is absurd that, despite some adjustments to the formula, in all circumstances it now pays for a man to put his first wife and children out of their home and to sell it, and, if there is anything left from the settlement, to buy

[Mr. Frank Field]

something very much smaller, and then for the man to get the biggest, most expensive house he can, as that is taken into account in calculating his income.

It cannot make sense to have a formula that puts mothers and children at risk of homelessness and for single males, perhaps less single if they have new partners, to occupy the most expensive premises they can possibly find.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman will concede that it is not solely a decision for the man at the time of separation. It would require a court to force a mother and children out of their house in the circumstances that he has described.

Mr. Field: One of the reasons why the courts stand convicted tonight, although clearly in Scotland they have a much better system, is that the courts have generally worked in favour of men and against women and children. It was the men that were represented by lawyers and, generally speaking, women and children were not. If they wanted time to push the court around, the men's lawyers got the proceedings adjourned. There are certainly many complaints from women and children about how the procedures work. I have had no request from women and children in my constituency to go back to the old English court system to settle disputes.

Thirdly, because we wanted the formula adjusted so that those towards the lower end of the scale would be able to keep more of their income and thereby maintain their incentive to work, we plumped for a big increase in the amount of income that people could keep when the formula had been applied.

But it is clear from two Question Times, let alone tonight, that travel-to-work expenses are massively important for some of our constituents, particularly if they live in what are called satellite towns or areas and travel far. Again, the Child Support Agency will have more information on that than any other body in the country. If other constituents are like my own, they will have told the Child Support Agency what those fares are. It is important that that information should be published.

Fourthly, it is meanness on stilts to say that, because it takes 13 or 14 weeks for the Child Support Agency to send out an assessment, a person should begin the arrangement in arrears. We hope that the arrangement will work and work fairly, and to the advantage of all parties concerned. To begin by having to pay off a debt is, in any circumstances, difficult, but it is doubly difficult if the brown envelope contains a statement saying that a person's disposable net income for his or her second household will be considerably less than it was hitherto. Surely we must bear in mind the Select Committee's recommendation that people should not have to begin the new arrangement with a large debt around their necks.

My last point is one on which I have changed my view. When we first debated the matter in the House, I argued against the first family on benefit being able to keep part of the money paid in maintenance. I thought that it was unfair between those mothers, the fathers of whose children are unknown or cannot be traced, those who are widowed and those, the fathers of whose childen have been found and are paying over money. There were grounds of equity there.

There were also other considerations. I do not approve of the attitude that has gained currency that somehow it is our responsibility in the first place to pay income support and that any money that fathers pay should be a bonus, rather than a relief of taxpayers who have been paying up to that point. The failure to chase people for maintenance payments, which I have highlighted in questions during the past 15 years, was an unsatisfactory state of affairs.

But although those points stand, when I put forward my views about grounds of equity in the Chamber, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) simply said, "That's life." She said that life is often unfair, but because it is unfair to some does not mean that all women and children should be disadvantaged.

The Child Support Agency now needs above everything else large numbers of mothers and children to speak up in favour of it. That could be done quite cheaply with a small disregard. Therefore, my last suggestion——

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): As my hon. Friend is an influential person, and as the Minister seemed to frame his concessions with my hon. Friend in mind, will he consider adding a sixth point to his list on the business of phasin[illegible]?

The Minister has made a concession on phasing in, but he has limited it to certain people. He does not seem to have accepted the general principle and the fact of life that people do not exist in a vacuum, and that, when one relationship breaks down, it is entirely natural for people to get on with their lives and build other relationships, and perhaps other debts and financial commitments. For the Child Support Agency to drop on a person, whatever his or her domestic circumstances, at a point in the future, completely ignoring financial commitments that that person has genuinely entered into, is most unfair.

Mr. Field: I am grateful for that invervention. The reason I will not disappoint my hon. Friend when I say that I shall not add his point to my list is that it is in the report, although it has not been fully endorsed by Ministers tonight.

They are the outlines of an agenda that I hope the Select Committee will consider in its second report——

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Field: In fairness to other hon. Members who wish to speak, I shall not give way. I am about to bring my contribution to a conclusion.

I hope that that will act as a basis for an agenda for what will be the Select Committee's second report. That itself will not be the final report that the Select Committee will need to bring to the House.

I said at the beginning that I thought that this was the most significant change in the way that people have had to behave toward one another since the Attlee settlement of the great 1945-50 Government. The bigger the change, the more important it is that we are sensitive to how the reform works.

It is important tonight that Ministers win this and other victories against the Treasury, so that the Treasury's mean-minded policy in trying to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement to a more satisfactory level does not put at stake the principle of the Act. The force of interventions will have shown Ministers that hon. Members will not go away, and that, if further reform is not forthcoming, the Act will be at risk.

8.15 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Listening to the debate reinforces my view that the vast majority of hon. Members wholeheartedly support the principle that fathers should pay for the support of their children when they are financially able so to do, and for the state to maintain support through the benefit system when fathers, for whatever reason, unfortunately do not have the necessary income or are not able to do so because they are in receipt of benefit.

Since the Act was brought into operation in April 1993, there has been much concern about certain aspects of the operation of the formula, but not the principle behind the Act. I trust that even after this debate that almost bipartisan support for the principle will be maintained because it is essentially the right principle: parents should be financially responsible for their children.

On the other side of the coin, it is interesting that we hear little about the mothers who, all too often before April last year, suffered a significant drop in their standard of living or found it difficult to make ends meet on the benefit system because far too many fathers had simply abandoned them without meeting their financial responsibilities.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Burns: I shall not give way because there is little time and many hon. Members wish to speak. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I will give way once and no more. I give way to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

Mr. Cryer: The Act was presented to the House on the principle that fathers should be responsible for their children and that non-paying fathers should be made to pay. No one disagreed with that, but that principle has been set aside and fathers who are paying and who are exercising responsibility are now being subjected to further burdens and being hounded by what many people consider to be "Lilley's Gestapo".

Mr. Burns: I reject the last part of the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but I was about to deal with the first part.

There is an impression among responsible fathers who are being asked to pay through the Child Support Agency that they are the soft target and that the Act is not being used to target absent parents who have abandoned their responsibilities. I can understand them thinking that. They are an angry group of people and the more the point is made, the more acceptable it becomes. With respect, I urge the hon. Gentleman and others to look at the facts. It is unfair to say that the agency is ignoring irresponsible fathers who have never paid anything. They are, rightly, being pursued. Perhaps the CSA, or we as Members of Parliament, have failed to convey that it is not a lone attack on responsible fathers; the CSA is also going for fathers who pay nothing. I urge Opposition Members to study the facts before perpetuating a myth.

I welcome the regulations because they respond to the Select Committee's report with proposals which seek to alleviate some of the problems that fathers face. I welcome also the phasing-in arrangements, the increased level of protected income and changes to the additional reduction rate. However, my constituents have raised a number of points, which I suspect are not unique to Chelmsford, and those matters ought to be considered once the effect of the regulations on existing and future assessments is known.

The precise aim of and philosophy behind paying for the upkeep of children should be identified. Is the purpose —as I believe it should be—to meet the cost of looking after a child or children at an acceptable level? If so, just because an individual's income increases each year, perhaps through salary rises, it does not necessarily follow that further significant amounts of his income should be taken to pay towards the upkeep of his children. While it is important that a sufficient amount is provided to provide care to an acceptable level, thereafter money should not automatically be taken from the father according to a sliding scale.

One constituency case causes me particular concern. It involves a man who fathered three children by his first marriage, and who is now remarried and in work. His first wife has also remarried. My constituent and his second wife look after two of the children by his first marriage, while his first wife cares for the third. Her second husband has been out of work for five years and one might deduce that, whatever the situation in the employment market, that husband has no intention of getting a job.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Oh!

Mr. Burns: The hon. Lady makes a noise from a sedentary position. That accusation is made not by me, but by my constituent and his second wife, who look after two of the children from his first marriage but are required to pay the carer's allowance of £44 through the CSA to the children's mother. I question whether my constituent and his second wife should be required to do that.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), other hon. Members and I have raised in parliamentary questions the issue of commuter costs. That is not special pleading as such, because usually only the belts around metropolitan areas have a commuter system of the sort found in London. Such a system is not common to all parts of the country. A monthly season ticket to commute to work from Chelmsford to London exceeds the monthly cost of a £30,000 non-endowment mortgage. That significant take from an individual's income, more so than an average figure, should be borne in mind.

Can anything be done about fathers or mothers who deliberately make themselves unemployed to avoid being required to pay child support so that they may contact the CSA to claim that support from their former partner? I appreciate that in some circumstances there can be substantial disadvantages in making oneself intentionally unemployed, but in others that is not the case. It is particularly irksome to a working couple to be traced by the CSA because a former partner of one of them has deliberately taken himself or herself out of the employment market, either to avoid paying child support or to make themselves ineligible for it.

There is widespread concern about the time taken by the agency to reply to cases raised by hon. Members and to members of the public who have complained or challenged assessments. I was heartened by the written reply that I received from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, saying that measures would be taken to speed up the CSA's response. However, on the assumption that the regulations will be approved, in the short term an even greater burden will be placed on the agency. I urge my hon. Friend the

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Under-Secretary to do all that he can to ensure that assessments and other matters are dealt with by the CSA as quickly as possible, even if that means taking on extra staff on a temporary basis. It is unfair to those who are assessed to have to wait an inordinate amount of time because of bureaucratic processing.

All those aspects are of vital importance to our constituents. I trust that the regulations will make a genuine difference, and I suspect that they will. However, we may have to keep a watching brief on other aspects of the agency's activities, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said at Social Security Question Time on Monday.

8.27 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): To the extent that the regulations will make a difference, I agree with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) that they should be supported in the Lobby this evening. Nevertheless, I do not want the Government or the Under-Secretary to go away thinking that will be the end of the story.

The regulations are detailed, and the Under-Secretary described—in his usual competent way—the changes that they will make. However, he has not begun to address the anguish, anxiety and concern that is evident the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. If the hon. Gentleman has any time to respond to the debate, he must give an indication this evening of the Government's intentions after the regulations are introduced.

I listened carefully to the reasoned speech by the hon. Member for Garscadden, which made a positive contribution to the debate. I should be grateful to him and to the official Opposition if they would make use of a valuable Supply day further to debate the subject, for that would greatly benefit the House.

Even though short speeches have been made, many other hon. Members will not have an opportunity tonight to represent their constituents' interests in the way that they would like. In fact, given the tight confines of the regulations, it might not be in order for certain points to be made—but the Under-Secretary has not made any difficulty about that.

I emphasise that the issue will not go away, and the House should not allow it to do so. It must be raised again, by the Select Committee, the House itself, or as a result of public pressure—which is increasing, judging from the volume of post on the subject that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House are receiving. The power to make necessary changes resides in the hands of the Under-Secretary and the Department.

I am pleased to see that the Secretary of State is here, and appreciate his presence. We are all struggling to try to get an appropriate response, which the regulations do not provide. The Minister knows me well enough to understand that I do not make rash or casual threats. I do not want it to be put by way of threat, but there has been much discussion across the Floor of the House, with everybody agreeing to the principle of the Act.

I agree with that. In Scots law, parents have always had financial as well as other legal liabilities and duties to their offspring. That has always been the case, and was so before 1991, when the Act was introduced. I say this carefully and urgently. There are circumstances in which I would recommend to my colleagues that support for the principle of the Act should be withdrawn if the implementation of the Act is not substantially changed. It would be a serious matter for the Minister if support were withdrawn, and for Opposition Members.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) referred to the system that must be put in place. It has a 15-year time span—or longer. If it is to be responsible and respond to the needs, it must survive changes of Government. The Government must take that into account, because if they do not change the practice in a way that is acceptable to the House, were there to be a change of Government, which, I presume, will happen eventually, but goodness knows when—that can be debated on another day and is in the hands of the electorate, not just here—he has a responsibility as a Minister to ensure that a system is in place that will withstand the test of time and changes of Government. I assure him that it is a fact that he does not have such a system.

I took part in the consideration of the Bill in 1991. The House gave it quite thorough scrutiny. I was not on the Standing Committee, but many concerns were raised about the agency and were dealt with in the way in which the Government introduced the Bill. There was much pressure and worry about mothers being forced to divulge. The Government have dealt with that, but the circumstances have changed dramatically since then. The element of retrospection is a far greater problem in practice than I ever aniticipated. That problem was referred to earlier.

The selection of the Government's target of trying to recover £530 million in the first year of operation, against the background of the fact that they have professional staff who are on performance-related contracts, is one of the most difficult things for people to understand. The people who are being hit by this legislation believe that it is by people who are making their own pay. I do not believe that that is the case. I consider the people who are running the agency to be professionals who are doing the best they can, although that may not be everybody's experience.

There is real concern that the selection of the target of £530 million in the first year was a bridge too far. The transitional arrangements were inadequate. Something has been done about that, but not enough. The whole question of the way that the Act is impinging on second families is completely contrary to natural justice.

Because of the pressures of the Act, I have constituents who are threatening to emigrate, stop work or walk away from their second families. There are also tales of suicide. I do not know how much truth there is in them, but some of the newspaper reports are a cogent body of evidence that cannot and must not be ignored by the House and the Government.

The simple fact, in my experience, is that second families are being asked to pay amounts that they simply cannot afford. One of my cases last week was of a father whose offspring are in Plymouth. He is desperately trying to keep a relationship between himself and his two young children. There is no way in which the current formula can take account of the travel costs involved in seeing his children. He has had to sever the relationship with his children or borrow money from his parents to maintain it. It is a nightmare. It is a mess. There is no administrative machinery available to exercise any element of discretion.

The hon. Members for Birkenhead and for Garscadden listed five or six suggestions. I shall add a couple. In the longer term; if one put money into a proper system of conciliation, that would be a better way of saving Government money. Child care services may be technically out of order in the debate on social security, but those are two important parts where social investment would reduce the long-term costs of the breakdown of families that we see in this country. A whole series of issues could and should be raised, such as getting a proper appeals system and dealing with capital settlements. A raft of things must be considered.

When the Minister comes to reply, if he gets any time, he must address the question of the future. Tonight's regulations are welcome as far as they go. I will recommend that my colleagues support them on that basis. But if he says, "This far and no further," he is storing up trouble for himself, and deservedly so.

8.35 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Despite my hon. Friend the Minister's best intentions, some of my constituents still view the CSA as a cross between the Court of Star Chamber and the Spanish inquisition. They see their second marriages at stake, and the actions of the agency not only burning a hole in their pockets but threatening or destroying their relationships and jobs. We all have a mass of cases. I have mine here tonight. I shall refer only to two.

First, a car worker in my constituency came to see me a week or so ago and said, "Must I really give up my job because of the proposals?" I found that distressing. He was complaining about the scale and the speed of change that had been brought about by the Act. Secondly, a newly remarried man told me that the enforced change in his circumstances was already undermining his second marriage. Again, I found that a distressing case.

I must tell my hon. Friend that I have had more letters, more approaches and telephone calls on this issue this Parliament than on any other. I voted for the Act. I approve of the principles, and I want to see it work. I welcome the new provisions, which, in my view, are fairer. They might persuade that car worker in my constituency to hold his job. They might help the second marriage of the other gentleman to whom I referred. I question whether the relief package—perhaps we should call it a transitional relief package—is enough. I hope that it is.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have said to my hon. Friend, "Please do not regard this as the final settlement." We must regard it as the next stage in the evolution of the CSA. I am mindful of the fact that, tomorrow, 300 aggrieved parents will attend a meeting in Leicester, that there is an action committee in my constituency, run by a Mr. Klenk, and that marches are being organised. There is a body of opposition from a large proportion of the population. When marches are organised and there is that level of activity, as we saw over some of the legislation in the last Parliament, we ignore it at our peril.

I do not wish to detain the House for long; I shall refer to a few points of particular concern, some of which have not been raised. The first is the intrusive and unsympathetic nature of telephone calls from the CSA to families, frequently at night or when they are with their families at tea time. At times they are rung at the office and it is made perfectly clear that it is the CSA. Those actions are damaging the reputation of the CSA at the very least, and are certainly damaging families and job prospects.

Hon. Members have asked for an appeals procedure. I must say that I consider the CSA's powers too final. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) expressed concern about the removal of the courts' powers; I understand that move, because I think that the system was breaking down, but my goodness, the CSA seems all-powerful now. My hon. Friend the Minister must think seriously about some form of appeals procedure.

Then there is the whole issue of former spouses having access to personal and financial details. Until the CSA came along. I thought that an Englishman's home was his castle; the agency, however, seems to have powers similar to those obtained by Customs and Excise over VAT. I find that alarming: the data protection provisions are too weak, and it is threatening second marriages. Something must be done.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Surely it is wrong in principle for the operation of the CSA to force a second wife whose divorced husband is perfectly capable of meeting his obligations to his children to give all the details of her income, or of shares that she possesses. The present Government, after all, introduced separate taxation for husbands and wives—which I think is absolutely right. The information is given to the first wife, and the income concerned may well support not only her and her child, but her second—unemployed—husband.

Mr. Tredinnick: That might have been a planted question. I have already referred similar cases to my hon. Friend the Minister. There is a general feeling that second wives are supporting first wives: I raised the matter in a parliamentary question before Christmas. For a number of reasons, a highly undesirable "arcing" of cash payments is taking place between first and second families.

Ms Gordon: Not only is confidentiality being breached because the agency is able to inquire into the financial affairs of a second partner; it even reaches for information about the financial affairs of the second partner's children. If grandparents have invested money and some interest is due, that can be taken into account as well. I think it is outrageous.

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend the Minister is receiving a clear message from all quarters in the House that people are very unhappy about that aspect. I hope that he will deal with it when he winds up.

We have heard much about the "clean break". I may not be as sophisticated as some, but I always thought that a clean break meant precisely that, I have subsequently learnt that children's interests are paramount, that the old system was not working as well as I had supposed, and that adjustments were necessary. It strikes me as strange, however, that a visitor to my surgery should tell me, "I pay for the clothes and the holidays, repair the car and do a host of other things, but that is not taken into account."

I respect my hon. Friend, and recognise the work that he has put into this, but it is all very fine to say that it is too complicated to consider a range of individual points—travel costs, for instance; he must consider such matters. If we are to do away with the courts and impose a new agency, we cannot operate such an unsophisticated system.

[Mr. Tredinnick]

The attitude of the CSA staff is of concern, too. Generally, when we telephone a Minister's private office —or when an experienced secretary or research assistant is briefed to do it—we are given a courteous and prompt response.

I must tell the Under-Secretary and the Secretary of State, however, that several experienced secretaries—and one or two hon. Members who are not present—have told me that the response of CSA top management is less than forthcoming: in fact, it is downright insolent. Those people had better wake up to the fact that we are elected representatives. When we raise issues, they had better listen.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): When people refer to a "clean break", they often misunderstand the situation. What is really at issue in the event of a clean break between husband and wife may be a nominal, or even significant, maintenance order in favour of children. Because people think of a clean break as referring to the entire family, they may feel hard done by when the matter is reopened by the CSA.

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend has made his point effectively, and I agree with him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) spoke eloquently about travel costs. My hon. Friend the Minister explained why it was better to bundle the separate charges and requirements into a single package, but I tend to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford.

My constituency is in the middle of England: people commute from such areas as Hinckley to London. We are not that far away—only about 100 miles—but the rail fare is very expensive. My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford provided another dramatic illustration of this argument. Such factors cannot be ignored: commuting and other travel costs are astronomical. One constituent told me, "I love my little girl dearly, but it is costing me a fortune to go to see her. I can no longer manage it." Something is wrong, and my hon. Friend the Minister must deal with it.

The Act is good in principle, but it needs a good deal of polishing. The measures announced tonight will go some way towards alleviating some of the problems, and I welcome them; but Ministers should not go away believing that they have done their job. This must be seen to be one stage in the process of getting the CSA right.

8.46 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I hope that the Minister will not assume from the fact that we are not voting against these measures that any hon. Member receives them with approbation. I am sorry that we are not voting against them: I think that this part of the legislation should be junked entirely. It is defective; it was rushed into operation without being thought through; and the pressure on those operating it is such that they are not exercising the highest standards.

One of the dangers of this unfortunate legislation is that many people now feel genuinely and deeply angry about what is happening to them. Trust is very important—people must believe that the Government, in particular, are dealing with them fairly, and there is now deep unease in the population.

I have encountered many such cases in my constituency and have attended two or three exciting and lively meetings of people suffering from the CSA's attentions, but I do not want the House to run away with the idea that only the male of the species is suffering. The ineptitude of the whole business was revealed by a letter from a constituent, who wrote:

> "In April 1993 I applied to the CSA, because I wasn't receiving any maintenance for my two children, then aged 8 and 5. At about the same time I moved in with my new partner after being on my own for 3½ years. A while ago my new partner was sent a form from the CSA, as he has a child, aged 12 . . . On Saturday 22.1.94 we both received the outcome of our cases. Mine having taken 9½ months.
>
> We were shocked . . . at the outcome. I am to receive £2·20 a week for my two children from my ex-husband, who is working full-time and has no second family, and my partner is to pay out £88·79 a week for one child, whilst he has to support us as well.
>
> My ex-husband is self-employed and is apparently showing accounts that don't compare with his lifestyle."

The woman went on in considerable detail to point out what happened to her.

Another woman instituted proceedings for divorce on 20 April 1993, then made an application to the Child Support Agency for an assessment against her husband on 7 June 1993. That assessment related to two children. She heard nothing in reply for some time and eventually ascertained that the inquiry form had not been sent to her husband until 9 September 1993. She eventually received an assessment on 30 October. She was informed that it would be backdated but, because of the delays, her husband is now in arrears of £1,300. As no agreement or order was in force in respect of the children before April 1993, the lady has had no support whatever from her estranged husband. Because of the Child Support Act, she was also unable to apply to the court for an order for interim maintenance.

Those two cases sum up starkly the fact that the machinery simply is not working. All hon. Members can produce examples of cases in which people are suffering hardship and unhappiness and are being put through the wringer in an extremely short period. It is destroying them and I am genuinely frightened about what will happen to the children of both sets of partners. Numerous people complain to me that they will be forced to sell their house and tell me of the pressure on their relationships—those relationships may have been fragile, but a form of stability existed. No matter how the CSA's efforts are justified by the Minister, they are putting so much pressure on people that not only previous partnerships but existing partnerships are directly threatened.

I received a long, sad letter from a woman in the constituency of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), saying that she had written to me because her Member of Parliament seemed unable to take up her case. She was deeply concerned about the mental health of her new partner and described in detail what had happened to him since he received an assessment for amounts which he knew that he could not meet. That is the reality.

I am also horrified at the number of people in high-stress jobs who come to me because the CSA's actions are having a direct effect on their jobs. If people in the police force get into debt, their jobs are at risk because they have broken the terms of their contract.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley) *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Dunwoody: It is no use the Secretary of State shaking his head. If he does not know the effect of his legislation, he should ask somebody to tell him. I have raised the matter with the Home Secretary, who wrote to me saying that it was a matter for the chief constables of each individual force. I have received no guarantee that the CSA's efforts will not cause policemen to appear before a disciplinary board. Indeed, two or three of them have already resigned and I know of at least two more in the same position. Firemen are experiencing similar problems. A social scientist would find the effects of the legislation revealing because those in stressful professions, including Members of Parliament, seem to have second and third marriages.

The implementation of the Act has a direct effect not only on adults but on children. It affects the children's relationships with their parents, the amount of money available for the children and the atmosphere in both partnerships at every level.

I do not wish to go on for ever but I believe that this legislation was not put on the statute book to improve conditions for children. If I believed that it was wholly devoted to improving the lot of the children of divorced and divided families, it would have my wholehearted support and I would not criticise it in any circumstances. I believe that it was put on the statute book for just one reason, and many of my constituents have the same view. It was to obtain money for the Treasury. It does not help those whom it purported to help and should be taken back to square one so that the Secretary of State can start again. He has got it all wrong. Why will he not admit that and at least try to put it right?

8.55 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Like so many other Members, I supported this legislation enthusiastically when it was introduced because of the number of women who had been to my surgeries who were desperate because they could get no satisfaction on maintenance from the court. They were also desperate to get their wriggling absent husbands, ex-husbands or partners to pay something towards their children's maintenance.

Having supported the legislation, however, I am desolated by the effects of the agency. Some hon. Friends have complained about the agency's attitude in answering them on the telephone or by letter. They were lucky to have had an answer at all. I have received no answers to letters that I sent to the agency as long ago as October. Constituents who come to see me complain that the agency simply will not answer their questions, either by telephone or by letter; all it does is send those draconian assessments. Even when a response by the agency is received, it is belated and does not solve the problems that have been put to it.

Like many other Members, I have many commuters in my constituency. It costs some £2,000 a year to travel the 30 miles from my constituency to central London, although many thousands of my constituents do so. Many of them do not have well-paid jobs and the fare represents a substantial proportion of their income, once the cost of housing has been taken into account. To be forced to decide whether to travel to work or feed the family is a stark choice indeed.

The complaints that I receive are the same as those received by many other Members—that no account is taken of the many essential household bills such as gas, electricity, water, insurance, mortgage arrears and council tax. None is taken into account, yet they are all essential expenses faced by every household. Another peculiarity is that only 50 per cent. of pension contributions is allowable as an expense. Many people have no alternative to making pension contributions; indeed, the Government encouraged them to do so.

What worries me is the attitude of the Child Support Agency. Like the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), I am particularly concerned that reviews of decisions take for ever. I welcome these changes, as far as they go. However, I should have liked to ask the Minister, during the course of his speech, to answer one very simple question. I am not absolutely clear about whether the changes will apply to all those who have been subject to assessments up to the present. I should be grateful for an answer on that matter.

If the changes are applicable to everyone who has been assessed hitherto, they will make a substantial change in the case of my constituent Mr. L, whose assessment for one child increased the £10·75 a week payable under a court maintenance order to £122 a week, even though he has a second family. Will he be helped? His assessment included the reimbursement of his travelling expenses. That amount was added to his income in arriving at the assessment. He asked in October for a review of his case. Goodness knows when it will take place. In the meantime, paying £122 a week, he is building up enormous arrears. I agree absolutely with the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) that such arrears must not be allowed to get out of hand simply because the agency is not carrying out the reviews that it should be undertaking.

I am worried by the fact that many ordinary, decent folk are harassed and hounded by the agency. In the case of at least one person, I wrote personally and urgently to the Secretary of State because I was so worried that she would do something desperate as a result of demand from the agency. There must be a taming-down. The CSA is too mechanistic in its whole approach. There is no sensitivity whatsoever towards the first, second or any other family.

Like the constituents of many hon. Members who have spoken and, no doubt, of many who have yet to speak, people in my constituency are darkly suspicious that the main motive of the agency is to save income support money. It is no coincidence that every constituent from whom I have heard pays some form of maintenance. Court maintenance assessments are often hopelessly low, and people are receiving new assessments. I have received not a single letter from among the absent fathers whom I hoped would be caught by this legislation. I am sure that that is no coincidence.

9.2 pm

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I agree with the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) in that he seems to be yet another advocate of doing away altogether with the Child Support Agency. The legislation was brought in hastily and for the wrong reasons. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) that there were two reasons for the introduction of the Act. The first was moral indignation. Here we had the first sign of the Tories' "back to basics"

[Mr. John Heppell]

policy. It may be that in this case the moral indignation was justified. In any event, it was fuelled by the Treasury in an attempt to cut back on the social security budget.

The proposals contained nothing that would help children. There was nothing to reduce child poverty or to protect the family, as the figures tend to prove. Of the £530 million being collected, only £50 million—less than one tenth—goes to the family or to the children; the rest goes directly to the Treasury. I try, and I hope that others will try, to avoid taking the moral line of those who seek new scapegoats. The unemployed man living with the first wife is now being paid by the second wife for the children. What we have here is an attempt to find other scapegoats. The truth is that the situation must be looked at in a sensible but compassionate way.

It would be very difficult to disagree with the principles of what the Government proposed in the first place, but it is very easy to disagree with the practice, with what has acutally been happening. Many of the constituents who come to see me are not just angry or mad, but desperate. They are desperate because they have nowhere else to go. They come to me, but I cannot give them any advice. They put their wage slips in front of me and show me their expenditure figures. They are in a Mr. Micawber situation: their expenditure after CSA payments is greater than their income. They ask what they can do because they clearly cannot pay, but I have no answer.

The CSA does not take into account people's real needs. The main problem is the lack of flexibility and the use of a crude and unsophisticated formula. Under the formula, children of a new relationship are not considered to be natural children and so do not count. In other words, stepchildren and adopted children are presumably unnatural children. The CSA considers people's protected income, but not their ability to pay. There is no point in having a protected income if it is worked out according to the formula.

I was not as impressed as my party's spokesman about the significance of the proposed changes. Indeed, everyone to whom I have spoken about them says that they are not significant and I do not believe that they have made a real difference to the majority of our constituents. I shall not vote against the proposals because they may help individuals, but they do not help the majority.

When I first read about the changes, I was impressed for a moment because I thought that something radical might happen. The leaflet, "Proposed changes to child support maintenance", published by the Department of Social Security states that the formula

> "takes account of the income of both parents, by allowing for tax, national insurance"

—we knew about that—

> "and essential expenses such as rent or mortgage costs."

I also knew about the rent or mortgage costs, but I wondered what other "essential expenses" were taken into account. I thought that the best thing to do would be to ring the CSA and I did so today—not once, but five times.

The first four times I reached an answering machine which told me that the lines were busy. On the fifth occasion, I spoke to a young woman who was very helpful. I explained that I wanted to know about the "essential expenses" other than rent or mortgage costs which were taken into account. Were there one, two or three additional expenses? The truth is that not one other item is considered, which makes nonsense of the changes. It means that the formula is dealing not with reality but with theoretical sums. The use of the formula to decide what they should be paying is leading people into despair and I probably have a better example of that in my constituency than anyone in the Chamber.

One of my constituents committed suicide, although I hesitate to refer to him. His family have my greatest sympathy and I do not want to add to their grief, but I believe that I should be failing others in a similar situation if I did not mention his case. The day after receiving notification from the CSA that his contribution was to be increased by 300 per cent., Graham Clay was found hanging at Newstead abbey. Even if the coroner was not prepared to say so, I am convinced that he hanged himself because he had nowhere to turn.

I ask very little. If the Government are not prepared to scrap the CSA, will they please provide some method of appeal? Will they provide desperate people such as Graham Clay with somewhere to go where their needs will not be assessed according to a formula and where some discretion will be involved in assessing their payments, where they will be considered as individuals and not as numbers?

I am not saying that the CSA is unsympathetic. We cannot blame the Child Support Agency, because we are telling it to work to the formula and if it works to the formula it will seem as though it does not care. I have one request. The Australian scheme gives a right of appeal from the Australian agency. Let us have that right so that people can be considered as individuals. Even at this late stage, let us try to put a human face on the CSA.

9.9 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I begin by congratulating my right hon. and hon. Friends in Government on listening to my views and those of many other hon. Members about the implementation of the Child Support Act 1991. I welcome the changes that are before the House tonight. I think that they demonstrate that we have a listening Government who are prepared to take action and make changes when the need has been proved. I also congratulate the Social Security Select Committee on its report, which made a valid contribution to the debate on the subject.

However, I think that it is important that the changes do not undermine the principle behind the Act, which many of us, including agencies such as the National Council for One Parent Families, supported and still support. It is important that we ensure that what was previously a poor system becomes better. The principle is that both parents should be responsible for supporting their children, even when they split up. The taxpayer should have to help only where parents do not have the means to support their children. Sadly, before the establishment of the agency, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said, nearly 1 million lone parents and their children were dependent on income support.

I attended the Lobby meeting against the Child Support Act and the Child Support Agency that took place in the Grand Committee Room on 2 December 1993. I sat on the platform and listened to the representations that were made. As promised, I discussed the many arguments that were made to me with Ministers in the Department of Social Security.

One point that struck me forcibly was that there seemed to be a predominance of police officers, firemen and members of the armed forces in the audience. When I queried that, I was told that they were there because they were extremely concerned about the implications of the Child Support Agency's financial demands on them, because those demands might cause them to run into debt and thereby affect their job security. That point was mentioned by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I should be most grateful if the Minister would kindly clarify the Government's position in relation to the CSA's claims on those people's income when he replies to the debate, because it will be helpful for all of us to know the correct position on that understandable anxiety.

At the meeting, I made it clear that I too had reservations about the aspect of implementation, especially in two respects. First, I was concerned about the impact on a family budget of an immediate increased claim upon it and, secondly, I was not sure that the formula levels relating to the protected income went far enough. Therefore, I am pleased that those issues and others have been tackled by the Government.

During the meeting on 2 December, a number of major misunderstandings and misinterpretations came up repeatedly. The first is that the agency concentrates primarily on people who already pay some maintenance and neglects the pursuit of fathers who have not acknowledged any responsibility for their child or children. It must be made clear that 96 per cent. of cases handled by the CSA involve children supported by benefit, and that nearly two thirds of cases taken on by the CSA this year will be ones where no maintenance is being paid. In more than 15,000 cases where the lone parent has been unable to provide the address, the absent parent has been tracked down by the CSA. That represents 89 per cent. of completed cases. It also shows that the CSA is not only seeking absent fathers but finding them.

There is no doubt that the old system of obtaining maintenance through the courts was slow and uncertain and led to low and inconsistent settlements. That procedure was clearly failing. However, it must be explained that where both parents are content with existing maintenance arrangements and the taxpayer does not have the burden of supporting the children, the parents are not forced to apply to the CSA. Therefore, in every case that the CSA has taken on, the existing arrangements were to the disadvantage either of the children or of the taxpayer. We must remember that many outstanding maintenance orders are indefensibly low—£5 or £10 a week. No one can pretend that that is adequate support from a father on a reasonable income.

Another misunderstanding concerns clean-break settlements, which were touched on earlier in the debate. I stress again the fact that there can be no clean break between parents and their children, and there never has been, even under the court system. The term "clean break" refers to a spouse's rights, including ownership of assets acquired during the marriage. That would frequently include settling half the house on a wife. However, frequently the couple's mortgage is transferred to the parent with care, along with the house, and if she is on income support that leaves the taxpayer to foot the bill.

Another important result of improved maintenance is that it will make it easier for lone mothers to return to work. That fact is often overlooked by critics of the CSA. Maintenance gained through the intervention of the CSA will provide a portable income for mothers, which they will continue to receive even if they go back to work. The first £15 of maintenance is ignored for the purpose of calculating benefits if a mother is receiving, or is entitled to, family credit.

I participated in social security questions last Monday, and I was appalled that not a single Opposition voice was raised in support of the lone carer, usually the mother, and her children. I heard a male chorus, promoting in unison the absent father's point of view alone. Tonight I fear that both sides——

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Roe: No, time is short and Mr. Deputy Speaker has asked us to be brief.

Both sides of the House have again presented a one-sided story, and I must tell the House that many women in this country——

Mr. Wicks: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Roe: Many women in this country, including some in my constituency, fully endorse the work of the Child Support Agency——

Mr. Wicks: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am in some difficulty because the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) has said that no one spoke up during social security questions. I did.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Bogus.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) is responsible for her own speech.

Mrs. Roe: I was in the Chamber at the time and listened carefully to the questions put to Ministers. I did not hear anybody supporting carers and their children on that issue.

Mr. Wicks: Read *Hansard.*

Mrs. Roe: The case of Mrs. Janis Richards was described in an article in *The Times* last Monday. She said:

> "I didn't know what to do until the CSA took on the case"——

[Interruption.] The Opposition should listen to this. They are proving my point; they are not interested in lone carers and their children.

The article said that, as a result of the intervention of the CSA, Mrs. Richards had received more money for the support of her eight-year-old daughter in the past two months than she had received from her estranged husband during the whole of the previous year. She originally received only £65 a month from her husband, which was totally inadequate. Out of just over £15 a week, she had to pay £8 for her daughter's school meals and bus fares. The remaining sum—£1 a day—was supposed to pay for her daughter's food, clothes, shoes, occasional treats and school trips.

Mrs. Richards said:

> "Whatever happens in my case, I cannot fault the CSA".

I shall also read from a letter that I received from a constituent who supports the Child Support Agency. She said:

[Mrs. Roe]

> "For many years mothers have been left to feed, clothe, and care for the children on very little money, while the fathers walk out and continue to enjoy their income regardless of the fact that they have left their children living in poverty.
>
> Many fathers are encouraged to leave their families once they realise that their wives will receive income support who will also pay the interest on their mortgage, leaving them to enjoy their new found financial gain.
>
> When my ex-husband left me and our two children, he left income support to provide for us and pay the mortgage interest, while he lived in a rent free police house. When I finally received maintenance for the children from their father he ensured that I would receive minimum maintenance by purposefully committing the majority of his income to various loan and debt repayments stating to me that I wouldn't be able to have what he hadn't got so he would ensure his available income would be virtually non-existent by taking out as many loans etc. as he could. While myself and the children have been living in poverty for the past four years, he has been enjoying his police inspector's salary with holidays abroad, new clothes, new car and all the luxuries he desires, with no thought or help with providing his children with even the basic essentials they need."

That letter came from that man's second wife with two children. The taxpayer is funding the mortgage and providing income support for that family. The taxpayer is also providing exactly the same for his first family. He is now on wife number three. Surely it cannot be right for other working families to pay through their taxes to support the children of absent fathers on reasonable incomes. Fathers who can afford to do so should pay the full cost of maintaining their children.

As responsible Members of Parliament, we must listen to both sides of the story and ensure that children receive the support from both parents, which they deserve and need. It will take time for people to adjust to a new system such as the CSA, but we should give it the support that it merits. Let us not forget that bringing up children is an expensive business. What matters are regular payments for their day-to-day living expenses. Children's welfare must have the priority.

9.22 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Before I embark on my speech, I shall clarify one point. The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) was absolutely wrong when she said that the question of carers had not been raised by Opposition Members during Question Time. The hon. Member for Croydon North-West (Mr. Wicks), as he rightly said earlier, said then, inter alia:

> "Will he reform the measure to ensure that the vast proportion of money goes through to mothers with children, and that we have in reality a Child Support Act?"—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1994;: Vol. 236, c. 602.]

It may be in order for the hon. Lady to withdraw what she said.

I speak on behalf of my party and the Scottish National party and I am obliged to my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) for asking me to raise some points. I shall be brief as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak.

Perhaps I should begin by declaring an interest. No, I have not fallen foul of the "back to basics" purge. I am a lawyer who practises in divorce law. It is basic good sense that an absent parent should maintain his or her children, provided that he or she can afford to do so. The final words need emphasis since they do not appear to weigh heavily in the balance at the present time. It would be wrong to deny that the underlying theory behind the Child Support Agency is a right and proper one. Of course society should ensure that children are given proper financial support. Therefore, my argument is not about the principle of the CSA, but about the operation of the agency under the present regime.

I read with great interest the Adjournment debate of 31 January. I have also read numerous letters from the Under-Secretary of State on the subject because, like all hon. Members, I have received numerous letters about it. The Under-Secretary said:

> "The principle of parental support for children is not new. However, there is no doubt that the old, court-based system was failing the majority of children."

Alas, the Child Support Agency is failing the majority of absent parents because the rigidity with which the formula is applied is mischievous. As many hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, we have all had dozens of letters of complaint. People have suddenly been finding that maintainance orders evaluated by the county courts and regularly paid have been trebled overnight. Many absent parents have another home and another family, and the pressure is passed on to that new home and family.

In my years of practice as a divorce lawyer, I often saw clean-break orders—indeed, such orders were actively encouraged by practice directions and under the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973. Frequently, a husband would transfer his equity in a substantial property to the wife and pay maintenance to the children. I know that the courts could never sanction a clean break between father and child, and I would not wish them to do so because that would surely be insidious. The Government, however, through the agency, have missed a very important point. Any lawyer who knows anything about divorce law knows that part of the reasoning behind making a clean-break order with the extra capital being transferred was to enable the wife to provide more than adequately for the children. Allowance has therefore been made in clean-break orders——

Mr. Burt *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister shakes his head. I will take the matter up with him at another time because time is short this evening, but as a practising lawyer I can tell him that that is absolutely correct—*[Interruption.]* As a part-time lawyer, then. That point appears to have been completely missed by the CSA under the current rules.

The Minister was also wrong when he said in the Adjournment debate that there were no investigative powers available to the courts. That is nonsensical. Courts often ordered that specialist accountants should become involved in investigating matters and ensuring that they were thoroughly looked into. If those in the legal profession were doing their job correctly, the courts naturally worked properly and adequately. It is wrong—and a slur on the profession and on courts—to say that maintenance orders were based on slipshod evidence and were the result of arbitrary decisions.

I respectfully hope that the Minister's somewhat facile knowledge of divorce law is not colouring his attitude to the debate. Closing the Adjournment debate, he said:

> "I hope that the changes will help."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1994; Vol. 236, column 711-8.]

That is not exactly an inspiring sentence. The changes suggested by the Select Committee will have to help because we are dealing with misery, depression and even deaths as a result of the introduction of the Act. We are now attempting to amend the legislation to ensure that the changes help. Anything less simply will not do. After all, politics is the art of the possible.

I pay tribute to the members of the Select Committee for the urgency with which they investigated this matter and for the breadth of good sense in their report. No doubt that urgency is a fair barometer of hon. Members' bulging postbags.

To return to the main principle—the paramountcy of the child's needs—I am deeply concerned about the effect that even the amended legislation will have on stepchildren or children of a subsequent union. In a wide-ranging and informative debate in the other place, Lord Russell urged the Minister to look again—this time favourably—on paragraphs 81 and 82 of the Select Committee report. I echo that call. Time does not permit me to quote from the report, but I believe that it is as vital to secure the needs of the second family as it is to secure those of the children in the first family. The report deals with ways of achieving that.

At school—on reflection, to my utter regret—I was often told by teachers that I could do better. The Government can do better, too, and I want to concentrate on three or four cardinal points that need to be addressed. I understand the rationale behind the statement that the obligation to maintain a child adequately comes before any expense or cost, but it is a signal failure of the Act—and, sadly, of the amendments—that an absent father's travel-to-work costs and his right to have contact with his children are not taken into account. Both are vital components in the exercise and should be fully deductible.

I know of many cases, and I have read of many more, where absent parents take the view that without an allowance for travelling it will not be worth while working. That places a further burden on the state. Travel costs are as essential as those for food and clothing and should be recognised as such.

I make a plea to Ms Hepplewhite, if she is within the confines of the building or wherever else she may be, and her happy band of performance-related employees to target the people who decline to pay and then to move on to more lucrative preserves. Even under the amendment, absent parents on modest incomes will pay an additional element of 50 per cent. That is clearly regressive and it would be far better to reduce the 50 per cent. taper for second families so that low-earning as well as high-earning absent parents gain. The present proposals will cause hardship and is, prima facie, unfair.

I accept that there is an improvement to £30 a week in the protected income level, but it should be increased to £40 to enable lower earners to gain some benefit and to cope. The additional reduction to 15 per cent. is welcome, but there is leeway to reduce it to 10 per cent. Before Treasury Ministers tell me how much it will all cost, I remind them that this exercise was intended not to recoup money for the Treasury but to meet the needs of children.

I welcome the amendment to the formula to reduce the amount payable for care of children, but a 50 per cent. reduction across the board for children aged from 11 to 16 would be reasonable. It would be simpler to apply. It is just tinkering with the problem to say that reductions will go up from 25 per cent. to 50 per cent. It would surely be simpler to apply a 50 per cent. reduction.

I sincerely hope and trust that further amendments will be considered because the regulations are widely viewed as a knee-jerk reaction to intense media attention and, of course, to the concerns of constituents, which have been expressed by all hon. Members.

We have seemingly gone part of the way, but we need to go the extra mile to ensure fair play to all concerned. I echo the view of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is experienced in these matters, that the amendments are not the last change that is needed to the Act. Without further amendments, there will be a widespread call in both Houses for changes in primary legislation.

We have an opportunity to stem the tide of widespread injustice. Let us take it for the sake of our constituents and, above all, in the interests of our children.

9.32 pm

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): What has happened tonight has been a tale of two debates. One debate has been on the narrow issue of the Government's regulations, which, I remind the House, were sneaked out three days before Christmas and after the House had risen for the recess. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State is muttering from a sedentary position, but the way in which the regulations were introduced showed an extreme nervousness in the Government. As was argued at the time, it was also discourteous to the House and a denial of democratic accountability. In short, it was a transparent attempt by the Minister to seek to massage the media without proper scrutiny or debate. Belatedly, the Secretary of State has now introduced the measures.

The second debate that has surfaced tonight is the one that the House really wants. It is a debate on the effects and function of the Act that the hundreds of people—absent parents and parents with responsibility for care alike—have demanded should take place.

It is worth pointing out that on two separate occasions in the past few weeks the Government have denied time to the Opposition to allow a full and free debate on a motion on the wider aspects and implications of the Act and on the activities of the agency. I see the Minister shaking his head. I hope that he will deal with that matter in his reply.

Clearly the Government recognise that they have an unsustainable case. That is why they have denied the two debates on those two separate occasions. Such debates would expose the Government to even more ridicule and criticism from Conservative Members than there was this evening.

The Minister might be able to run away from a debate on this issue but, as hon. Members have said, he certainly cannot hide from it. "The debate will take place in the near future." We have heard that before, and Government business managers change the business to stop the debate taking place. However, a debate will take place in the future and it will allow proper examination of the many criticisms of the Act and its effects on families throughout the land.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman is smiling because he knows perfectly well that he and his colleagues have lost the chance of a debate because of their behaviour over the past two or three weeks.

Mr. Ingram: As for the procedural conduct in the House, democracy prevails in a particular way. Opposition

[Mr. Ingram]

Members have not acted unreasonably. There has been a deliberate attempt to stop the debate taking place. It is clear that many Conservative Members want such a debate.

It is worth bearing in mind that the regulations are a reaction by the Government to the substantial and sustained pressure which has been put on them to ease the financial burden imposed on absent parents and on the second families of absent parents. The Government do not intend to introduce any further changes to the Act.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Good.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Lady is one of two hon. Members who take that view—*[Interruption.]*—apart from the Government.

Time and again, the Minister has made it clear that the Government do not intend to introduce any further changes to the Act. In fact, in a written answer, he stated:

> "There are no plans for further change."—*[Official Report,* 1 February 1994; Vol. 236, c. 578.]

Of course, the Government have said that before: "There are no plans to raise VAT, no plans to increase national insurance contributions, and no plans to increase taxes." Perhaps we should doubt such statements.

Mr. Frank Field: Does my hon. Friend accept that, as most people who will be affected by the legislation have not yet received their forms and as the build-up will be towards the next election, it would be foolish of the Government to abide by that statement?

Mr. Ingram: I agree entirely. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point.

Such a statement by the Government will come as a great disappointment to the many organisations and charities involved with parents with care and with the care of children. It will also come as a great disappointment —indeed, it will be viewed with great anger—by groups who are springing up all over the country in opposition to the Act. Given the contributions by Conservative Members, with the exception of the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), it will be greatly resented by hon. Members who face escalating demands for a further fundamental and detailed review of the Act and for changes to be introduced to reflect the many criticisms of the Act.

The Minister cannot ignore those demands. Is he still not prepared to go any further than the regulations? Does he stand by his statement in *Hansard*? If so, does that mean that he rules out any possible changes to build flexibility into the system? That was the main thrust of hon. Members' arguments. Such an argument was made with great passion by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell).

Does the Minister still say that representations that he has received to take into account clean-break settlements, travel-to-work costs, access costs, the effects on children of second marriages and many other financial consequences are to be ignored? Does he really say that, especially in view of the contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the very hon. Member behind whom the Minister has hidden ever since the Select Committee report was published and who clearly set out his own trenchant criticisms of the Act and the way forward in terms of a review?

First, will the Minister confirm that the regulations bring no benefit to parents with care or, more important, to their children? I direct that point especially to the hon. Member for Broxbourne. The Minister will be aware that the Social Security Advisory Committee recommended that a case can be made for an income report disregard payable to the parent with care. Is he completely ruling out that possibility?

Secondly, does the Minister accept that, depending on the family circumstances of both the absent parent and the parent with care, it is possible, even with the regulations, for parents with care to find themselves floated off income support because of the level of maintenance? At the same time, they can be denied other passported benefits such as free dental care, free prescriptions and free school meals. Is that fair? If the Minister thinks that it is not, why will he not accept the need for a further review of the legislation?

The next issue relates to the payment of family credit to a mother who is in part-time work and in receipt of maintenance. Family credit is payable on a six-monthly calculated basis, and if the maintenance stops or is reduced for any reason the mother's reduced family credit entitlement will remain unaltered for the remainder of the six months. Ironically, the new regulations could worsen that situation. I hope that the hon. Member for Broxbourne takes note of that.

The new transitional arrangements may help some absent parents but could also cause parents with care to suffer a reduction in income during the phasing in of payments for which family credit would not immediately compensate. As adjustments to family credit payments can already be made at any time under a reduced benefit direction, the Minister could act to introduce more flexibility on behalf of the parent with care. Surely even this Minister and this Government must accept that imposing a drastic fall in living standards for parents with care and their children is simply unacceptable. Is he still determined to rule out a review? Why has he not introduced regulations to deal with that problem?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, the regulations, both separately and jointly, are welcome, but, as he also said, they do not go far enough. Much has been said about the problems being encountered by absent parents—usually, but not always, the fathers. We accept that the changes will help them to some degree. The new phasing-in arrangements are welcome to the extent that they will help to prevent the ludicrous situation of some absent parents with second families having their maintenance contributions trebled overnight.

It is regrettable that the Government did not follow their thinking through and extend the provisions to single absent parents, to those who are not part of a second family, or to those who may not already be paying maintenance because of a previous clean-break settlement. Those absent parents also need help in making transitional arrangements. Their needs should be taken into account, but they have been ignored in the regulations.

The phrase "clean-break settlement" has been used time and again in the debate. It is not acceptable that the Government should dismiss the issue. They maintain that it is not practicable to build into the process a way of dealing with significant clean-break arrangements of whatever type, but that is simply not true. As my hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden said, the successful

Australian child support scheme does just that by giving powers to an independent review officer to vary the formula determined assessment.

The increase in the protected income for absent parents is welcome as a step in the right direction. However, the proposed changes highlight the regressive nature of the formula which places disproportionate burdens on parents with low incomes compared with those on high incomes. Is that what the Government are trying to achieve with the legislation? Do they want to give the rich better benefits than those on low incomes? In a letter dated 28 January 1993 which he sent to *The Guardian* the Minister said:

> "The new partner of a parent has no liability for the maintenance of the parent's children from a previous relationship. The implementation of the Act has shown this not to be totally accurate."

The Minister should have known when he wrote that letter that the earnings of a second partner or any adult in the household of the absent parent are taken into account in determining the second family's ability to pay full maintenance to the first family. Perhaps he will set the record straight.

Only one conclusion can be reached on the debate that is raging outside and has been reflected in the House tonight: the Government have not satisfied their critics by tabling the regulations. As they are an improvement to the Act, we do not intend to vote against them. It is good to get something out of the Government even if it is not much.

In principle most people viewed the Child Support Act as a potentially helpful and necessary piece of legislation, but it is clear that, unless a fundamental far-reaching review of the Act and the agency is undertaken, the legislation will become no more than a poll tax in nappies for the Government.

9.45 pm

Mr. Burt: With the leave of the House, I shall take this opportunity to respond.

First, I thank all hon. Members for their contributions to the debate. Although right hon. and hon. Members have different views about whether the regulations go far enough, there is a feeling that there will not be a vote at the end of the evening, so I do not intend to be combative in my winding-up remarks. There will be a further debate about the principle of the agency, and that might be dealt with rather differently.

I want to respond to the mood of the House. It has been an interesting debate which leaves a number of questions unanswered. Some of the remarks that were made go to the heart of the issue of child maintenance and some thoughtful speeches were made. Whatever we say here, we are left with the fundamental issue of how to handle child maintenance and who is to pay for the responsibilities of bringing up children.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), in an extremely good speech, did not shy away from the issues. He said straightforwardly that people cannot have it all ways and some difficult questions were raised for those who could be expected to pay more and that it was not always possible to reach a solution in which no one would be hurt and everyone had to pay for their children. He said that the hard facts had to be faced. Not all hon. Members took that approach.

The first issue that was raised—one that could detain us for a long time—was whether to scrap the agency and return to a court system or move to something else. Although hon. Members are quick to say, "No, we must not do it," that was certainly the tenor of the remarks of the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn). It is clear that there is a dispute among hon. Members now that did not exist some two and a half or three years ago when the issue was thoroughly debated.

The problem that we confronted then was how to deal with a system where there was total discretion but widespread recognition that the system did not work. We had to decide how to deal with that and how to move on. The House at the time strongly held and endorsed the principle—but not the practice tonight—that it was better to move to a system which provided greater consistency. However, there is a price to pay and I fully accept that. That is what we are debating now.

I remind those who want to return to total, partial or increased discretion of some of the issues that were faced by women at that time. I refer to the remarks of Sue Slipman of the National Council for One Parent Families on a radio programme when she described her experience of the former arrangements. She said:

> "Before April last year, only 30 per cent. of lone parents got any maintenance for their children whatsoever in this country. Most of it was at derisory levels and I'll tell you what happened when you went to court to get someone to pay maintenance. Maybe he would turn up to the hearing, but maybe he wouldn't, and if he didn't, it would be postponed for six months. You would then get a whole range of debts that would be presented and a whole range of other excuses for why maintenance could not be paid. You might then at the end of that get an order, and it might be paid for two or three weeks, no-one enforced it and no one was ever interested. And as a result of that, the experience of over 1·7 million children in Britain was abandonment by one parent and a life in poverty with the other."

Hon. Members are quick to say that they do not want to go back to that; but if we do not want a system that provides certainty and consistency, which is what the House wanted two or three years ago, and we want to increase the element of discretion, we run the risk that that situation would increasingly occur. That is a genuine issue, but the House must decide——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Burt: No, I have only 10 minutes and I must deal with the matter in my own way.

If we do not want to return to that situation, we will not move away from some formulaic system to deal with the problem and we would be dishonest with the country if we pretended that that could be avoided. That is a fundamental and crucial issue which some have raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) spoke of the problems faced under the previous system and she mentioned some of the successes of the Child Support Agency. Hon. Members sat in silence and listened to the distressing case histories, which they all come across in their surgeries, as I do in mine, but when my hon. Friend spoke of the sort of problems that people once had and then put forward points made by people in favour of the Child Support Agency, there was much less concern. Hon. Members talked through that and tried to dismiss it. That will not do. It is not an either/or situation.

There are problems in dealing with child maintenance, whether one is the absent parent or the parent with care. No

[Mr. Burt]

system is perfect. If the House is trying to be honest, we are trying to find a way through to a better system. The regulations are moving us in that direction.

Mrs. Gorman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Burt: I can allow only one intervention from each side.

Mrs. Gorman: My hon. Friend will be aware that many criticisms have been levelled at the agency. I have sent 12 cases through and I have received comprehensive explanations on each. I have also corresponded with Mrs. Hepplewhite and she has been most courteous and informative.

Mr. Burt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Many of my hon. Friends raised problems in dealing with the agency. It will be no surprise when I say that the agency has been under extreme pressure. It is working hard. I apologise to all hon. Members who have had to wait too long for responses. We are doing all that we can to try to speed that up. However, my hon. Friend makes it clear that that is not everyone's experience in dealing with the agency, whether hon. Members or not.

Mr. Bennett: The Minister has made a powerful case, referring to mothers who received no help in the past through the courts. The trouble is that the Child Support Agency has so far done little to help my constituents; rather it has penalised those who have conscientiously made payments. When will the Government direct their attention towards the people who do not pay as opposed to those who do?

Mr. Burt: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that at the moment about half the cases taken on by the Child Support Agency concern those where no maintenance at all has been paid. By the end of the agency's first year of operation, some two thirds of its cases will involve those who have never paid any maintenance. It is false to say that no search is made for those people.

The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) raised the problem of good cause and similar matters. Hon. Members will remember that, when the agency was set up, that subject was of great concern and the Government worked hard to deal with it. I am happy to tell the hon. Lady that some 36,000 cases, about 5 per cent. of all applications issued, have involved the consideration of good cause. Good cause put forward by the parent with care has been accepted in some 20,500 cases—about 57 per cent.—and some have still to be decided.

To date, only 160 cases have been referred to the Benefits Agency for a reduced benefit direction. If one considers that the agency has some 500,000 cases on its books, that puts the issue into some sort of perspective. We did care about that, we did think about it and we have responded as well as we can.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) made some fair points in favour of the agency, but he also raised issues about which he is concerned, of which I take note. I repeat my apologies in relation to the correspondence. We are working hard to clear it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) raised a number of issues. In relation to the disclosure of information, I am sure that it is clear to all hon. Members that, in dealing with the financial aspects of a case, just as in the past affidavits used to be swopped in ancillary proceedings to ensure that both sides knew the financial circumstances, that has to happen here. That is why information about income, and the like, is revealed to both parties. There can be no way through that. The provisions of the Data Protection Acts apply to the CSA as well. However, we are taking steps to reduce the information requested from second partners in cases where protected income will not be at issue, because that is where it has most impact. I am sure that the House will welcome that.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich spoke of the problems raised for members of the police force. When such cases arose, we discussed that aspect with the Home Office. It advised that policemen would not be dismissed solely on account of increased maintenance liabilities under the Child Support Act 1991. A policeman who is negligent in managing his financial affairs can be subject to disciplinary procedures. In extreme cases, that can lead ultimately to dismissal. However, cases in which maintenance increases are causing difficulty will be dealt with sympathetically, and appropriate advice and counselling will be provided.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) asked whether the changes announced tonight would apply to those who had previously had maintenance assessments. He cited the case of a constituent with a second family, whose assessment was made some time ago. The answer to that question is yes. The changes will apply to those who have had assessments made previously. I hope that also assists the House.

I enjoyed the comments of the hon. Member for Garscadden because they were sensible and dealt fairly with some of the issues. He did not try to hide from the fact that somebody, somewhere, must pay for children after their parents have separated. I thought that it was accepted by the House in the past that where such a situation occurs, that responsibility must rest primarily with the parents involved and not with the rest of society. That happened previously, and the previous system supported it. If we are to move away from that principle, that will be a major departure for the House.

The hon. Member for Garscadden again raised the issue of appeals. I understand his point in relation to a pressure valve, but I will repeat my earlier argument as to why the Australian system should not too easily be viewed as a counterpart—although I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman does not want it introduced root and branch.

The Australian system works on gross income and does not take account of housing costs, a personal allowance, tax, national insurance and other costs. It simply applies a crude percentage. The crudeness of the system gives it an appeal base, but appeals are restricted. They are not open to all—there are strict gateways. The sense of the House was clear, in feeling a degree of unease about the legislation—I understand that. However, there is a danger of suggesting that an appeal mechanism is an abracadabra—that it would be available to all and that all the people who are currently worried would have their problems solved.

The hon. Member for Garscadden was fair and straightforward enough to say that would not be the case. But who among us would go to any of the constituents who have come to us over the past few months and say, "There will be an appeals system, but it will not apply to you"? We cannot tell all constituents that there will be an appeal system for all. That would merely return us to the discretionary system which previously existed. It is an issue to be looked at, but I warn the House that there can be a danger of seeing it as an answer to everything.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman used the phrase, "It is an issue to be looked at." Does he mean that? If so, that is quite an important concession.

Mr. Burt: I will come to the future in a second, if I may. Continuing our warm and good relationship, I will deal with that matter in just a moment.

The House cannot hide from a point that I have made repeatedly: if there is to be separation, who is to bear the costs? In the past, society as a whole bore too many of the costs. I appreciate the point that the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) made and I am sorry not to have referred in more detail to his remarks. Yes, I used comments made by the Select Committee, but rightfully so because they backed up a case. I know that there were matters on which we could not agree. The point that he has made in his report was that the taxpayer has paid for too long. Somehow, we must try to get over that hurdle. If the taxpayer pays less, responsible parents pay more.

Mr. Frank Field: Apart from one person in Gillingham, who has gained a concession tonight, the Minister has not announced any new changes. Is that because the Treasury will not allow him to do so, or is that his position?

Mr. Burt: Forgive me, but if it had been a matter for the Treasury, none of the changes would have come forward, because they all cost. The Government have responded to need and the cost is less important. As to the future——

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to order [28 January].*

The House divided: Ayes 264, Noes 46.

Division No. 102] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek

Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Clapham, Michael
Cohen, Harry
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Graham, Thomas
Harvey, Nick
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkwood, Archy
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Pickthall, Colin
Rendel, David
Rooney, Terry
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Steinberg, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Terry Lewis and
Mr. Eddie Loyden.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 1994, which were laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.

Statutory Instruments, &c

10.13 pm

Madam Speaker: By leave of the House, may I put motions 5 to 8 together?

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Speaker: I shall therefore put motion 5.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

DOUBLE TAXATION RELIEF

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Austria) Order 1993 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 24th November.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 61.

Division No. 103] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry

Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard

Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Barnes, Harry
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Caborn, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*

Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
McCartney, Ian
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Mudie, George
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Reid, Dr John
Rooney, Terry
Simpson, Alan
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Indonesia) Order 1993 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 24th November.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

The House divided: Ayes 262, Noes 55.

Division No. 104] **[10.26 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela

Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James

Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark

Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard

Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. James Arbuthnot.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bennett, Andrew F.
Betts, Clive
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Caborn, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hinchliffe, David
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*

Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Mudie, George
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Reid, Dr John
Rooney, Terry
Simpson, Alan
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Turner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Uzbekistan) Order 1993 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 24th November.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

The House proceeded to a Division——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Serjeant, will you investigate the delay in the No Lobby?

The House having divided: Ayes 236, Noes 52.

Division No. 105] **[10.38 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arness, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack

Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry

Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren

Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David

Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*

Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. James Arbuthnot.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Betts, Clive
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Caborn, Richard
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*

Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Lewis, Terry
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Mudie, George
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Reid, Dr John
Rooney, Terry
Skinner, Dennis
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Turner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Simpson and
Mr. Eddie Loyden.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Air Transport) (Saudi Arabia) Order 1993 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 24th November.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

The House divided: Ayes 208, Noes 50.

Division No. 106] **[10.52 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack

Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Graham
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Horam, John
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Brown and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Betts, Clive
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Mudie, George
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Reid, Dr John
Rooney, Terry
Skinner, Dennis
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Turner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Alan Simpson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MERCHANT SHIPPING (SALVAGE AND POLLUTION) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified——

Resolved,

That, for the purpose of any Act resulting from the Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Pollution) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

- (a) any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State under that Act; and
- (b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC ORDER BILL

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the committal of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill to a Standing Committee on 11th January, any new Clause relating to capital punishment or to the age of consent for sexual acts between men in Great Britain of which notice may be given not later than 9th February in respect of the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House; and that, when the Committee of the whole House has reported with respect to any such new Clause and the Standing Committee on the Bill has reported the Bill, the Bill will be proceeded with as if it had been reported as a whole from the Standing Committee. —*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Flooding (West Sussex)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

11.3 pm

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): It is a great pleasure to raise the subject of flooding in West Sussex, particularly because one has been waiting some time to raise it, but that does not undermine the importance of what I have to say tonight in what I hope will be considered to be a broader approach than the usual constituency problems.

While the concerns that I must express necessarily concentrate on the cause and effect of recent severe flooding in my constituency, it is clear that many of the principles involved and the unanswered questions relate to our county as a whole. I am therefore grateful for the support that I have in raising this subject from other West Sussex Members of Parliament, and the process has been given added impetus by the meeting that we had with the West Sussex county council last Friday. I also welcome to the Front Bench my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, representing as he does the flood defence and emergency services work of his Department as well as a Sussex constituency.

The scale of the problem in West Sussex was immediately apparent when flooding occurred during the afternoon and evening of 30 December last year. I shall always recall that particular day as one on which those like myself travelling from Victoria to the south coast were obliged to abandon the train in the early evening at Horsham. The buses that took us on had the greatest difficulty getting through heavily flooded roads and it was immediately clear that flooding on this scale would have adverse effects on farmland.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, whom I am delighted to see on the Front Bench tonight, has written to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about problems raised with him by the National Farmers Union regarding flooding over large areas of the county. Both he and I, and our local farmers, will be anxious to hear what my hon. Friend has to say on this aspect tonight.

So, too, will all those involved in the human tragedies that befell many of my constituents when several feet of water entered their homes later that night. As the West Sussex county council report says, 2 in of rain fell on that day alone and 8 in in 17 days. On 30 December, extensive initial flooding occurred in virtually every borough and district of West Sussex and, most particularly, in the villages of Barnham, Bersted, Climping, Eastergate, Walberton and Yapton in my constituency.

I recognise, of course, that the subsequent horrors of flooding in Chichester almost assumed national disaster proportions, and I welcome the recently announced study by the National Rivers Authority of that problem. But it is naturally the problems in my own villages on which I must concentrate. Not only were they the first to be badly affected, but in Barnham 35 flooded householders had to be evacuated by inshore lifeboats. Their problems again raise wider matters of principle affecting our country and beyond. They also raise questions about small rural communities in which the Government must take a direct interest and upon which I seek the Minister's initial response.

The problems may be summarised as follows. First, there is the problem of regular flooding. The obvious question that arises is to what extent can and must improved facilities be provided.

Secondly, in making planning agreements for future housing development, is sufficient attention paid to whether they place exceptional demands on current and often old drainage facilities?

Thirdly, there is the related recurring health hazard of overflowing foul sewers. As my constituent Dr. John Mason, a scientific and technical consultant in Barnham, has asked in a comprehensive recent report on flooding in that village, can already stretched foul sewer resources cope with a large volume of surface water flowing into them from time to time and, if not, how can the problem be solved?

I realise that in answer to those questions my hon. Friend will refer to the responsibility of the West Sussex county council, the Arun district council, the National Rivers Authority and Southern Water. Naturally, I have sought urgent responses from all those authorities. So far, I have received only interim answers. That is understandable. Their main concern has been to overcome the immediate difficulties and they promise further and detailed study when the opportunity presents itself.

However, I am glad that the West Sussex county council has accepted my proposal that there should be an urgent meeting involving all the authorities and those who can give appropriate professional advice to tackle these and other relevant questions. I also welcome the detailed study promised by the National Rivers Authority of the problems experienced particularly in Barnham.

One of the most important aspects of those further consultations must be the problem of co-ordination. Too many of my constituents have been passed from one authority to another, particularly on matters relating to flood-affected sewage and disposal. I also received complaints from Arun district council of a lack of early response and consultation by other authorities.

I referred earlier to others whose advice should be taken into account. I still await an answer to my suggestion that telephone switch boxes and electricity supply points should be lifted above ground level at regular flooding spots. In Barnham, flooding caused the loss of electricity and telephone links for several days for too many of my elderly constituents. I urge the Government to become involved in that process by drawing up detailed guidelines for better co-ordination. After all, the Government have direct responsibility for the creation and current review of the role and future of those authorities.

I assume that there are lessons to be learnt from the approximately triennial incidence of flooding in the last few years, and account should be taken of the problems experienced in not only West Sussex but north Wales and the west country—as will be fresh in the minds of many right hon. and hon. Members.

What is the present state of Government co-ordination? After widespread storm damage in 1990, the Home Office was responsible for the co-ordination of Government Departments, and the Department of the Environment met claims for the so-called Bellwin funding. I welcome and appreciate the fact that Ministers from both Departments recently visited flood-affected areas in West Sussex.

I seek an assurance that the Department of Social Security will give special support, as it did in 1990, to people on income support. As to my hon. Friend's own

Department, what is the state of technical studies in the agricultural research institutes in which he takes such a keen interest? Is modern technology capable of providing early-warning systems when flood waters rise to danger level? I appreciate that those questions are wide and complex and go beyond my hon. Friend's departmental responsibilities. As some of them arose from information that came to hand late today, I shall fully understand if my hon. Friend would prefer to write to me on some aspects of the matters that I have raised. I hope that he will be able to do so.

As to direct Government assistance in meeting immediate financial problems, Arun district council estimates that the additional costs of relief are already in excess of £100,000. It has applied to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for help under the Bellwin scheme, which provides special financial arrangements designed to assist local authorities in emergencies, and specifically to safeguard life and property and to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience.

I support that application, as I shall support the expected claim from West Sussex county council, which is likely to run into millions of pounds. That is the purpose of contingency funding for which the Budget provides, and I look for an urgent Government response.

I ask the Government to take an imaginative and sympathetic approach to the special problems of the many small businesses which lost stock and normal peak business in the new year, and for which insurance cover may be limited or non-existent. Perhaps consideration can be given to making some adjustment to the uniform business rate. In that respect, I am glad to have a Treasury presence on the Government Front Bench, as well as the constituency presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames).

There is the possibility of support, through an application for humanitarian assistance, from the European Commission, which is being vigorously pursued by our Member of the European Parliament, Madron Seligman. In 1989, the Commission made an initial contribution to the United Kingdom of £220,000 for storm victims. I ask the Government to add their voice in obtaining additional funding from that source for families and local businesses.

In that context, I am glad that, in general, insurance companies responded to the urgent need for assistance in replacing ruined household equipment and clothing. However, I am obliged still to chase a number of companies because of the continuing anguish that they cause by bureaucracy and delay. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will add his voice to those appealing for swift and compassionate action.

Whatever worries there may be about co-ordination and the continuing problems that face many of my constituents, I cannot end without expressing appreciation to all those who assisted in overcoming many of the horrors of recent events. All the authorities that I have mentioned gave help through their staff—who, in many cases, went beyond the call of duty, often working throughout the day and night without rest.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Hear, hear.

Sir Michael Marshall: I am glad that my hon. Friend agrees. I know that he, too, has spoken about this issue.

Those authorities were backed up by the police, the Army and entire local communities. I single out for special praise the work of the voluntary sector—for instance, the specially formed Barnham Flood Relief Association, which has done so much to help those lacking insurance cover by fund raising and the collection and provision of essential supplies. That association and the Barnham Residents Association, which has monitored the effects of flooding with great care, now estimate that the cost of the damage to the village could exceed £1 million. That assumes average costs of more than £8,000 in the homes —more than 100 homes—that were badly affected by flooding.

It is estimated that 10 per cent. of that total represents an uninsured loss of £100,000. In all, some 300 people have been involved in flooding, and many—sadly—have been unable to return to their homes while waiting for estimates and going through the whole process of obtaining insurance payments, and while repairs are under way. Others have had to live in damp and insanitary conditions, fearing further flooding.

Mr. John Auckland, a former chairman of the Barnham Residents Association—I am indebted to him for the latest situation report—has said:

> "Many houses were inundated with several feet of water containing raw sewage, diesel oil and other chemicals. By the time the mess is cleared up over 60 skips will have been filled with ruined personal possessions. The entire contents of people's homes have been destroyed. It will take months to repair homes and rehabilitate some of the affected residents."

I know from personal observation—my wife and I have met many of the constituents who have been affected—that behind the statistical background lies a horror story involving real human tragedies. Counselling has been needed, as well as practical support and financial help. Above all, there remains the anxiety and worry: it is feared that an area that has been flooded several times in the past few years—albeit not on the same scale—may be flooded again.

It is with that in mind that the Government, Members of Parliament, local authorities and communities must rise to the challenge in mitigating the effects of recent flooding —and, above all, doing all that is humanly possible to reduce substantially the prospect of its occurring again.

11.17 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I welcome the opportunity to speak, and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall) on his persistence in obtaining an Adjournment debate on an extremely important and, in some respects, distressing matter.

As I have the privilege of representing a West Sussex constituency, I well appreciate the concern of my hon. Friend and those whom he represents about the considerable damage and great distress caused by last month's flooding. Together with all the other West Sussex Members of Parliament, we went to county hall in Chichester for an update last Friday; we found that extremely useful.

Hon. Members will be well aware that, after a wetter-than-average autumn, southern England suffered its heaviest sustained rainfall for many years in December and January. Many river catchments were fully saturated early in the winter. Once catchments are saturated, any additional rainfall cannot be soaked up, but flows into the ditches and rivers much more quickly and in far greater volume.

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

Under conditions of prolonged or heavy rainfall, those flows can increase to the point where the carrying capacity of the watercourses is quickly exceeded, which can lead to widespread flooding. In both East and West Sussex, the situation is further complicated by the presence of extensive areas of chalk downland. The unfortunate combination of the widespread appearance of springs fed from the chalk aquifer, together with the surface run-off from saturated catchments, has caused many of the flooding problems experienced in West Sussex.

On 30 December 1993, an intense rainstorms of about four hours' duration crossed the south of England from west to east. That storm produced an average of about three quarters of an inch of rain across the region as a whole, but the Sussex area suffered the highest recorded rainfall intensity of about 1·5 in on average, while the gauge near Chichester recorded 2 in. Farmland was seriously affected by flooding in many parts of southern England. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food sought and obtained an exemption from set-aside rules for flooded land from the European Commission, allowing farmers to harvest their 1993 sugar beet and potato crop from set-aside land after the deadline of 15 January 1994.

On Friday, my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), who is in his place, met members of the Chichester and North Sussex group of the National Farmers Union in his constituency. He has written to my right hon. Friend outlining some of their concerns. I assure him and my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel that those points will be carefully considered by my right hon. Friend and we shall reply in detail to him and them later when we have all the information to hand.

My hon. Friend spoke eloquently and, at the end of his speech, genuinely movingly about the serious effect of the flooding on the homes of some of his constituents.

Mr. Stephen: I entirely associate myself with everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall) has said. In addition to the villages that he has mentioned, may I add Sompting in my constituency?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am aware, as he mentioned the matter on Friday in Chichester, that Sompting in his constituency was also seriously affected.

Although most of the media attention was focused on the unfortunate events in Chichester, a number of other towns and villages in West Sussex were badly affected, including those in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and in particular Barnham, where there was flooding as early as 20 December, and more than 30 people had to be evacuated after the flooding on 30 December. My hon. Friend laid before the House in a clear and necessarily distressing manner the serious impact that that has had. Here, as in a number of Sussex villages, the speed with which flooding occurred made it difficult for timely warnings to be given.

I believe that West Sussex county council, the borough and district councils, the police, fire brigade, the Army and all the other emergency services in West Sussex, and the National Rivers Authority dealt admirably with a very difficult situation over an extended period, and that they responded to the flooding problems in the area in a thoroughly professional and effective manner. As is well known, the county emergency planning department had to mount a complex and resource-intensive operation in Chichester, which they did with considerable distinction. Their efforts reflect great credit on their teamwork and state of preparedness, as my hon. Friend pointed out. The House will wish to congratulate all those involved in that splendid work.

Nevertheless, my hon. Friend raised a number of extremely important questions about how the situation was handled and about the need for better co-ordination among the public bodies and other organisations involved. He was good enough to give me notice of those points and, if I cannot deal with some of the other points that he made tonight, I assure him that we shall write to him with the answers that he seeks. He has rightly said that water companies, the county council, district councils and the National Rivers Authority all have responsibilities for aspects of the problem. Like him, I welcome the fact that those bodies are getting together to discuss the way ahead.

The National Rivers Authority, which exercises general supervision over all matters relating to flood defence in England and Wales, is well placed to assess the overall flood risks in the area and draw lessons from recent events. The authority has said that it intends to review its warning procedures for Barnham and the surrounding areas. I understand that it is looking at the practicality of extending the automatic alarm systems in that area, and a consultant's report is expected shortly.

In relation to the River Lavant, the National Rivers Authority has engaged consultants to investigate the causes and consequences of the recent flooding in and around Chichester. Detailed investigation of the ground-water hydrology of the chalk downs is planned, and this study is likely to lead on to an examination of possible flood alleviation measures.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food makes substantial sums of money available to the National Rivers Authority and to local authorities and drainage boards each year for the construction and improvement of flood and coastal defences. This assistance now amounts to over £50 million annually in England. In large part, the residual capital costs and the cost of the on-going maintenance programme for existing defences are supported by central Government through the revenue support grant given to local councils.

In many parts of the country, the extent of recent flooding was very much reduced thanks to the investment previously made in new and improved defences. I assure my hon. Friend that if, as a result of its investigations, the NRA puts to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food proposals for grant aid towards improved flood-alleviation measures in West Sussex, those will be given the most careful consideration.

My hon. Friend asked about planning agreements. At the end of 1992, the Government issued to local planning authorities revised and strengthened advice on the need, where possible, to avoid additional or new development in areas at risk of flooding. Local planning authorities receive from the National Rivers Authority specific advice on those matters, and it is clearly important that councils, in their planning decisions, give due weight to that advice. In that way, we can try to prevent new development taking place in the flood plain, being at risk of flooding at times of heavy and prolonged rainfall and sometimes creating extra risk elsewhere. We have to recognise, however, that in some places development in the flood plain has already taken place.

Thirdly, my hon. Friend referred to the extremely serious matter of the interlinkage between the foul-water drainage system and the storm-water discharges that take place during periods of heavy rainfall. I hope that the studies that the NRA has put in train will look at all aspects of the flooding problems in the area.

The points that my hon. Friend makes about the need for co-ordination between different authorities are perfectly valid. The Ministry has sought to address this matter in the context of flood warning arrangements, through a series of meetings at national level involving the NRA, the police and the local authority associations. Those are aimed at improving the chains of communication between the various bodies involved in emergency responses to flooding and between them and the public in at-risk areas. I hope that that initiative will bear fruit later this year.

My hon. Friend rightly asked about research. Both the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the NRA fund significant research and development programmes aimed at better understanding of the natural process that underlie flooding, at improved design of flood defences and at more timely and accurate flood warning. My Department alone spends £3 million annually on this area of research. Steps are taken to ensure that the results of this work are widely disseminated to practising engineers, through regular newsletters and conferences, by the Ministry's river and coastal engineers.

The detailed local arrangements for flood warning and emergency response will necessarily vary in different parts of the country, according to the nature of the threat. I am aware that in some areas local councils provide those who live in flood-risk areas with leaflets explaining which bodies are responsible for particular aspects of the local emergency arrangements. Councils and the NRA in West Sussex may wish to consider whether, in the light of recent events, there may be a need for updated guidance in their locality.

My hon. Friend then raised the question of Government assistance in meeting immediate problems caused by flooding. The distress and material loss suffered by those whose properties are flooded are very considerable and will rightly attract considerable sympathy from all parts of the House. There are a number of ways in which central Government and their agencies may give help to local communities and local councils in such circumstances.

First, local councils that have incurred exceptional expenditure in responding to a major incident such as serious flooding may approach my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for special financial assistance under the so-called Bellwin rules. My hon. Friend is, of course, familiar with the scheme. It is activated at the discretion of the Secretary of State in cases where the problems facing local councils have been particularly severe and would result in an undue financial burden on the local authority. Councils must contact the Department of the Environment within one month of the event, giving full supporting details. If the Secretary of State decides to activate the scheme, about 85 per cent. of local authority costs above a threshold are usually reimbursed. I understand that Arun district council and West Sussex county council have approached the Department of the Environment under these arrangements and that their requests are being given careful consideration.

My hon. Friend drew attention to the problems faced by many small businesses affected by flooding over the new year period and asked for consideration to be given to some adjustment in the uniform business rate. This is, of course, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, but I am advised that, under the existing arrangements, individual businesses may be able to obtain a temporary reduction in their rateable value. Businesses should, therefore, approach the local valuation office of the Inland Revenue to see whether such a temporary reduction could be made available to them.

My hon. Friend also referred, rightly, to the possibility of humanitarian aid from the European Commission. Having heard what he had to say tonight, I have no doubt that it will make a formidable case for our energetic and excellent Member of the European Parliament, Madron Seligman, to press. I understand that the initiative in providing aid of this kind rests with the European Commission and that the Commission is assessing the situation in a number of member states, given the serious flooding that has also occurred in Germany and Holland. I gather that such aid, if provided, would be channelled via the Home Office through voluntary organisations such as the Red Cross. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's concerns on this score are made known to the relevant Departments.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the insurance companies. In view of the points that he made, I should be happy to write to the Association of British Insurers to ask it to urge its members to respond as quickly as they can to the requests for help from those who have suffered damage and loss and to give all possible help.

We have had a useful debate on this very important subject. I again congratulate my hon. Friend on the compassionate and formidable way in which he presented his case. It is essential that whenever serious flooding occurs, investigations are held to establish the cause and to see what can be done to reduce the risk of recurrence. The local authorities, the voluntary groups, the emergency services and the NRA in West Sussex can be justly proud of their efforts. The Army deserves to be praised, too.

It is right that the NRA should press ahead with its studies into events at Barnham and Chichester. If, as a result of its investigations, the authority comes to MAFF with proposals for flood alleviation works that meet the necessary technical, economic and environmental requirements, I can assure my hon. Friend that my Department will consider them for grant aid as matter of urgency.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 3 February 1994

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Madam Speaker *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Bournemouth-Swanage Motor Road and Ferry Bill

Sheffield Assay Office Bill

Federation of Street Traders Union (London Local Authorities Act 1990) (Amendment) Bill

University of London Bill

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time upon Thursday 10 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Marginal Tax Rates

1. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the changes in marginal tax rates since 1979 on incentives.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Cutting tax rates has improved incentives at all levels and has contributed to the improved economic performance of the country since 1979.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Is he aware that in 1979 the top 10 per cent. of income tax payers contributed 34 per cent. of the total income tax take, but by 1992 that had risen to 45 per cent? Is not that the most graphic demonstration that the policies of successive Conservative Governments, in cutting direct tax levels, have dramatically improved the incentive to work and at the same time dramatically reduced incentives to avoid paying taxes?

Mr. Clarke: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. In 1979, the top rate on so-called unearned income was 98 per cent. and the top rate on earned income was 83 per cent. Those penal rates drove people into tax evasion and drove them abroad. We now ensure, by rates that give greater incentive, that the better-off contribute more to the total tax revenues.

Mr. Skinner: Why does not the Chancellor of the Exchequer tell the real truth about what has happened since 1979? We have finished up with a £50 billion public sector borrowing requirement, we have a balance of payments deficit of well over £10 billion and likely to rise next year, we have 4 million people on the dole and now the Government have the gall to call upon working-class people to bail them out. Instead of doing that, they should tax the rich, whose percentage share of national income has increased from 35 to 43 per cent. while poor people's share has dropped from 10 to 6 per cent. Get the priorities right or get out of the road.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) has just shown the total folly of the Labour party in taking the advice of the hon. Gentleman in the 1970s and imposing penal rates on the so-called rich, which had the effect of driving people into tax evasion. Bringing things up to date, in the 1980s we had the strongest run of growth in the British economy that we have had in modern times. We are now the only major economy in Europe that is growing again. Manufacturing production is up, unemployment is coming down and business confidence has never been higher. Their fear of people such as the hon. Gentleman will keep people supporting the Government in their efforts to get British recovery under way again.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my right hon. and learned Friend also remind the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that in 1979, in addition to all the other taxes that Labour had imposed, there was an unearned income surcharge which meant that the small earnings of poor people who had worked hard all their lives were then taxed because the money was regarded as unearned? Is that the tax on the rich that the hon. Gentleman has in mind?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that it is, and the Labour party's attitude to taxation in 1970 became disastrous, punitive and counter-productive in terms of revenue. They are now trying to abandon that attitude, but I heard the shadow Health Secretary say on the radio this morning that although he had no spending promises to make at the moment, he would have by the time of the election. No doubt, by the time of election we shall have some fresh tax proposals from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chancellor confirm that, despite everything that he says, after 15 years of Conservative Government, the only people directly benefiting from the Tory tax regime are those earning £64,000 a year or more, while the burden of direct and general taxation on everybody else has increased? Is that not the £64,000 question that the Chancellor must answer? Is not his party not merely the party of broken tax promises, but the party of unfair taxation?

Mr. Clarke: The actual position, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is that the real income of the average earner in the country is now 40 per cent. higher than it was in 1979. Real earnings went up by 40 per cent. above inflation, whereas during the Labour party's time in office, they had completely stagnated and hardly risen at all. More than 1 million more people would be paying tax now if we still had Labour's tax regime from 1979. We have created more prosperity, we have a better tax system with higher incentives and we are on the way to strong economic growth—something which Labour could never deliver.

Mr. Ian Bruce: You and I, Madam Speaker, are simple people.—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr. Bruce: We have a simple approach to such matters, Madam Speaker. Having given us all those statistics about tax rates, can my right hon. and learned Friend tell the average earner what extra money he will have in his pocket today, as opposed to 1979?

Mr. Clarke: If he is an average earner, he will be 40 per cent. better off—almost half as well off again, over and above inflation—than he was in 1979. He will also be living in one of the most successful and prosperous economies in Europe, where he can feel more secure about his job and see more jobs being created. That is something which Labour could never achieve consistently; we achieved it in the 1980s and we are achieving it again now.

Family Tax Burden

2. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the tax burden for a married couple on average earnings, and with two children, in 1978-79; and what is the most recent figure.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): A single-earner couple with two children on average earnings will pay 20·3 per cent. of their gross earnings in income tax and national insurance contributions in the current year, compared with 20·9 per cent. in 1978-79. Over the same period, the real take-home pay of the same couple will have risen by £83 per week in today's values.

Mr. Hutton: Do not those figures confirm the scale of the deception perpetrated by the Conservatives at the last general election, when they promised the British public year-on-year tax cuts? Instead, they have delivered year-on-year tax rises. Is not it clear that the current record level of taxation is not being used to lay the foundations for future growth and prosperity, but is simply the price that we are all paying for 15 years of Tory failure?

Mr. Dorrell: I find it utterly impossible to link that question with my previous answer. What we have done is to introduce a tax system that has made growth possible, while delivering £83 a week in extra purchasing power to the average man. That is the result of our policies, and it is not something for which any of us need apologise.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Has my hon. Friend been able to calculate what would have happened to the taxes of a married couple on average earnings if the Government had decided not to control public spending—if, indeed, they had increased it by £38 billion?

Mr. Dorrell: The straight answer is that £38 billion represents about 19p on the basic rate of income tax. My hon. Friend has illustrated the dishonesty of the claim of Opposition Front Benchers to be interested in controlling the tax burden: in fact, they lose no opportunity to commit themselves to future spending that must be translated into a future tax burden.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Will the Financial Secretary now answer the question that the Chancellor evidently lacked the mastery of detail to answer? Is not the hard truth that the only people who have benefited from the Tories' tax policies are those earning more than £64,000 a year? Let us have an answer.

Mr. Dorrell: The question to which the country wants an answer is this: when will Labour start to take an interest in the creation of wealth? The question that we have just heard demonstrated, yet again, Labour's myopic obsession with redistribution, and their utter lack of interest in the generation of wealth. It is because the British economy became more successful during the 1980s that we have been able to deliver the £83 a week to which I referred, which translates directly into the 40 per cent. mentioned by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. That is the pay-off from the success of the Government's economic policies.

Mr. Brazier: Following that answer, does my hon. Friend agree that further improvements in living standards can be delivered only through growth? According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, our projected growth level is more than double the EC average, while our inflation rate is approximately half the EC average. That means that living standards will continue to improve.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that the only way to improve living standards is to create circumstances favourable to economic growth. That is why, as a result of our policies throughout the 1980s, this country moved from the bottom to the top of the developed countries' growth league. Our policies delivered improved living standards in the 1980s and they will continue to do that throughout the 1990s.

Income Tax

3. **Mr. Byers:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people will begin paying income tax in the next financial year as a result of the freezing of personal allowances.

11. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of how many more people will have to pay income tax by December 1994 as a result of the decision to freeze income tax allowances.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

Mr. Byers: Does the Financial Secretary remember the written reply that he gave to one of my hon. Friends in which he said that some 400,000 individuals would be brought into the tax net as a result of the freezing of personal allowances? How will those 400,000 mainly low-paid workers manage to pay that tax without being led into even greater poverty? Does he accept that the freezing of personal allowances will mean that about £1·1 billion will be taken from taxpayers' pockets? Given the Government's broken promises, will the Financial Secretary tell the House why the country should ever again trust the Tories on tax?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is wrong about an important point. If someone pays tax next year because his income exceeds the personal allowance whereas it does not do so this year, the reason is not that the Government have cut the allowance—we have not—but that his income has increased.

Ms Coffey: Does the Financial Secretary accept that the tax increases that he has introduced, which include the extension of VAT to fuel, mean that the tax burden is being borne disproportionately by the least wealthy? Does not he think that that is unjust and unfair and a betrayal of the fundamental principle of taxation, which is that it is based on the ability to pay?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady has very wisely moved off the subject of her main question, but the ground on which she has chosen to question me is no better. If she examines the distribution effect of the Budgets introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) last March and by my right hon. and learned Friend the present Chancellor in November she will find that, broadly speaking, the burden is distributed evenly across the income scale. That is not a coincidence but the result of the deliberate plans of both those people.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend recall the dark days of the previous Labour Government and their tax regime, which drove overseas all our inventors, scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, risk-takers and job-providers? Was not that the result of socialism and should not we be fighting back? Why should we take lectures from the Opposition? Let us go for them.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend asked if I remembered the dark days of the previous Labour Government. The answer is only just. If one examines that Government's record on the specific subject about which the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) questioned me, one finds that during their five years in office the single person's allowance fell in real terms by 21 per cent. whereas under this Government it has risen by 25 per cent. I do not think that we need to take lectures from the Opposition about the merits or demerits of indexing personal allowances.

Mr. Congdon: Is not the marginal rate of tax as important as the numbers eligible for taxation? Do not the Government deserve great credit for having a basic rate of 20p in the pound, unlike the Opposition's rate of 33p in the pound? Does not that prove that people are better off under this Government?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is as a result of the introduction of the 20p band that 4·8 million people are this year paying income tax at a marginal rate of 20p whereas, as my hon. Friend rightly says, when Labour left office the basic rate of income tax was 33p in the £1.

Low-income Households

4. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to provide financial relief for low-income households; and if he will make a statement.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): The Government have recently taken measures by introducing a child care disregard in family credit and making a substantial package of help with fuel bills available to pensioners and those on income-related benefits.

Mr. Kirkwood: Has the Chief Secretary had a chance yet to study the report that was recently issued by NCH Action for Children? Will he understand that NCH Action for Children believes that its report has been substantially misrepresented in the press? It never said that children were worse off now than they were in Victorian times. It argued that, although the standard of living has increased dramatically all round, the gap between the rich and the poor is as wide now as it was then. What further steps will the Treasury take, together with the Department of Social Security, to meet the urgent needs of low-income households with children?

Mr. Portillo: Our concern is to increase the prosperity of the country generally by following the economic policies that we have, and to provide protection for people on low incomes. The figures of people on low incomes show how well they have done in recent times. Disposable income increased, on average, by 35 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1990-91, and pensioners' real incomes increased by 54 per cent. during that period. The real take-home pay for a household, even on half average earnings—that affects the children about whom the hon. Gentleman is talking—has increased by 34 per cent. during the period of the Conservative Government.

If the hon. Gentleman cares to measure not what people earn but what they have, he will find that 69 per cent. of households in the bottom fifth have central heating—it was only 39 per cent. when the Conservatives came to power —and that 50 per cent. of those in the bottom fifth have cars, compared with 39 per cent. in 1979. There has been an enormous change in living standards in the country and the hon. Gentleman should recognise it.

Mr. Forman: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the attention that he drew to benefits such as family credit was appropriate because they greatly help low-income households, and especially those who are on low incomes in work? Does he also recognise that the greatest benefit of all for low-income households would be to achieve price stability during this Parliament, and will he redouble his efforts to that end?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend makes a good point—low inflation is extremely good for people on low incomes. It is of special benefit to the elderly. Even while we have low inflation, income-related benefits will rise, at the next increase, by about 3·9 per cent. That is obviously well above the rate of inflation, and it is a great deal better than the increase that will be experienced by most of the people who are in work.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will also think that the rates of withdrawal for people who are on benefit are an important factor, and I would remind him that now only ½ per cent. of households face a withdrawal rate of more than 90 per cent., whereas before 1988 there were 70,000 households that had a withdrawal rate of more than 100 per cent.

Ms Harman: Can the Chief Secretary explain a bit further the answer that the Financial Secretary gave to an earlier question—that it is the Government's economic success that has caused them to break their promise to cut taxes? Can he also explain why low-income families will pay more tax after April than they would have done in 1979, whereas families on incomes of more than £64,000 will pay less tax than they would have done in 1979?

Mr. Portillo: I thought that the point that my hon. Friend made, very effectively, was that if the Labour Government were in power today—if we had continued the allowances that the Labour Government had—there would be 1 million more tax-paying households. That burden would fall on the lowest paid, those who are least able to pay. The hon. Lady needs to consider her party's record closely before she starts to criticise us.

Mr. John Greenway: Was not it this Government who introduced very low rates of national insurance for low-paid workers? Has not that greatly helped to get many people back into work?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is correct. He will also remember that we have taken steps to help the most disadvantaged groups. He will remember that, in October 1992, we increased the income support premiums for pensioners by £3 a week for couples and £2 a week for singles. He will also remember that the £700 million worth of additional assistance given to help people pay 20 per cent. of the community charge was not withdrawn when the community charge was abolished.

Private Finance Initiative

5. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the present state of the private finance initiative.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government are committed to a substantial increase in the level of private investment in the infrastructure of public services that were previously totally dependent on public funds. A number of major private finance projects, including the channel tunnel rail link and the Heathrow express, are already going ahead. The high-level working group that I set up under the chairmanship of Sir Alastair Morton is examining how private finance can be developed in many sectors of Government activity.

Mr. Mudie: Is the Chancellor aware that the fear in the country is that there are more announcements than activity? The right hon. and learned Gentleman announced three new schemes in the Budget—the extension of the docklands railway to Lewisham, new air traffic control for Scotland and the refurbishment of the west coast main line. Can he tell the House which of those proudly announced projects has a private sponsor or a construction start date?

Mr. Clarke: Well, they are all being progressed—*[Laughter.]* The Labour party has the glorious record of cutting capital investment in the public services of this country by one third at a stroke, when the International Monetary Fund instructed it to do so, and it still betrays a total absence of knowledge about the management of major projects. We are now defining the projects described, and identifying private sector partners. For example, following my announcement, we shall progress to modernise and upgrade the west coast main line in a way that the economic policies of the Labour party would plainly never succeed in doing.

Mr. Dykes: As my right hon. and learned Friend mentioned the channel tunnel scheme, may I ask him whether he is aware that Customs and Excise and other bodies are planning to have 400 officials at the tunnel entrance on the British side? Will he look into that, to see whether it squares with the single market?

Mr. Clarke: I certainly think that the Government should ensure that the costs that they incur in necessary controls and security protection on the trains should be kept to the barest minimum. I am sure that the Departments responsible will be kept up to that by my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself. Clearly, we have particular regard to our obligations under the single market, one result of which has been the removal of all routine Customs and Excise frontier checks on imported goods, and a substantial lifting of the bureaucratic burden that previously bore on importers and exporters.

Mr. Beith: If all those projects are "progressing", will they take as long as the Jubilee line did to progress through the process of working out a private sector initiative? Is not the truth that while other countries get ahead with, for example, the link to the channel tunnel, only in this country do the Government wait for private finance before undertaking essential infrastructure projects?

Mr. Clarke: The Committee that will consider the Bill on the channel tunnel rail link will have to take into account the hundreds of objections and detailed points that individual members of the public want to make about the route. The Government have just announced the latest batch of decisions about the route, the terminus and the terminals. The Opposition are naive in believing that in this country, or in any other, one can announce a great new project and start construction the following day. The method that we use employs a more rigorous planning system than that enjoyed by any of the populations on the continent. We are using private finance to advance such projects, just as other countries are doing. The attitude of the Labour and Liberal parties towards progressing public infrastructure projects is childish, naive and extremely old fashioned.

Mr. Evennett: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, under the Government, public expenditure has increased in the priority sectors of health, education and law and order, and that Conservatives believe in both public and private finance being used to improve our public services?

Mr. Clarke: Capital investment in the health service has increased enormously under the Government, and capital investment in the railways and roads is roughly double what it was when we took over. We seek to increase both the amount and the quality of investment in the infrastructure of our public services by bringing in the private sector. Our firms and banks are good at enabling countries overseas to do that, and we shall do it here, too. As a result, we shall have the infrastructure that we need, the taxpayer will not have to finance it entirely, and we shall have well-judged, well-managed projects which prove efficient to run thereafter. That is the way in which the world is going—a way which the Labour party is plainly completely incapable of understanding, despite its history of failure on the capital investment front.

Mr. Darling: The Chancellor will recall that, on a wet night in Glasgow last September, he announced 78 new projects to be financed jointly by the private and the public sectors. Given his mastery of detail, will he tell us how many of those projects have a firm start date? Does he accept that, although tarmacking the car park of Eastbourne hospital is no doubt desirable, it is hardly the stuff of economic regeneration, whereas building the channel tunnel is? Last month, he said that the channel tunnel rail link had not even been designed yet. Will he tell us this month whether it will be completed this century or the next?

Mr. Clarke: Heathrow express is under construction. It is financed by the public sector, is being built by the private sector and will provide London with a high-speed main line link between the centre of London and Europe's busiest hub airport.

The next stage in developing the channel tunnel rail link, as I have already described, involves the decisions that my right hon. Friends will announce on the routes, terminals and intermediate stations. Those decisions matter to the people of Kent and east London. The next stage is to have a competition for the private sector—the managers and financiers of the project. A Bill also has to go through the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] No Minister in any Government who were controlled by a sensible party would announce the construction date on the day that the project was announced. We are progressing it quickly and efficiently and will produce a high-speed channel tunnel rail link of a kind that is well managed and matches anything produced elsewhere in the world.

EC Growth Rates

6. **Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what growth rates the European Commission predicts for each EC country next year, in increasing order.

9. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what growth rates the European Commission predicts for each EC country next year; and if he will list them in reverse order.

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): The European Commission has forecast that the United Kingdom will have the fastest growth of major European Community countries in 1994-95.

Mr. Ainsworth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, during my formative years in the 1960s and 1970s, Britain lagged well behind France and Germany in economic growth? Does he not think that the fact that our growth now exceeds that of both those countries has a great deal to do with our competitive tax system, our competitive labour market and our constant war on red tape? Does he not also think that our European partners have much to learn from that example and that Opposition Members have a great deal to learn from their own mistakes?

Sir John Cope: Yes, all the factors that my hon. Friend has mentioned were important in that matter. The fact is that the 1980s was the first decade since the war in which the British economy grew faster than the economies of Germany and France. We are beating them again now.

Mrs. Gillan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with that excellent news of Britain's prospects, it is hardly surprising that the Germans want to invest in Rover and in Britain? Does he further agree that the Opposition parties are completely irresponsible in their attitudes towards business and jobs in this country, as shown by the downbeat and distorted message about our economy that they send out to inward investors? Will he please put the Opposition right and say that we want inward investors in the United Kingdom? We have low corporation tax rates, a skilled and willing work force and the best prospects of any economy in the European Community.

Sir John Cope: I entirely agree. We want investment —inward investment and all types of investment. In the latest quarter for which we have figures, manufacturing investment was up by 2 per cent.

Mr. Hoon: Every other European Government believe that sustainable growth can occur only in the context of a system of managed exchange rates. Does the Minister agree?

Sir John Cope: The exchange rate is important, but I do not agree with the way in which the hon. Gentleman expressed the point.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Minister agree that the favourable comparison of the United Kingdom with other European Community countries in terms of economic growth is almost solely due to the low interest rates that have applied in the United Kingdom, which became possible only following our departure from the exchange rate mechanism? Why, then, do the Government give the impression that they want to return to the ERM?

Sir John Cope: Interest rates were falling before we left the exchange rate mechanism. I agree that interest rates are important. Certainly, our present low interest rates are important in sustaining growth.

Mortgages

7. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the marketing of low-interest mortgages.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): The form and content of advertisements for credit, including mortgage credit, are governed by regulations made under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. Those regulations are intended to ensure that advertisements convey a fair and reasonably comprehensive indication of the nature and true cost of loans to prospective borrowers.

Mr. Ottaway: Is my hon. Friend aware that building societies offering low-interest mortgages—I have an example here of one of 3·6 per cent.—are also insisting that it is compulsory to take out captive insurance for the building and contents? Is he aware that the premiums for such captive policies are way above the market rate, which explains how the mortgages can be offered at such a low cost? Does he agree that that is misleading for the financially unaware? Will he please investigate the matter?

Mr. Nelson: I am aware of the advertisement to which my hon. Friend draws my attention. I assure him that the Government are, and would be, concerned about any instances of unfairness and disadvantage in the selling of tied-in products. The Director General of Fair Trading and the Department of Trade and Industry are looking at the tying-in provisions of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. A balance must be struck between increased consumer protection and increased costs to businesses. I assure my hon. Friend that the authorities and I will look carefully at any particular examples that he and others draw to our attention.

Mr. Betts: The Minister will no doubt argue that mortgage rates have come down since Black Wednesday; the Government can point to that fact. However, many of my constituents are currently paying virtually the same rate for their personal loans as they were paying in September 1992. The banks have simply profiteered from falling interest rates during the period. What action have the Minister and his colleagues taken in the intervening period to raise the issue with the banks and to encourage them to bring personal loan rates down, which would benefit many of my constituents?

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman should know that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer raised the matter on a series of occasions with the leaders of the commercial banks. They, in turn, responded with codes of practice about announcing reductions in the rate of interest and sought to explain that they had adjusted downwards their rates of interest. However, it is undoubtedly true to say that they have taken the opportunity somewhat to widen their margins from their previous levels.

Panel of Independent Forecasters

8. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the work of the panel of independent forecasters.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have read the panel's reports with interest, and I look forward to receiving the next one later this month.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm, yet again, that he has absolutely no intention of disbanding the panel?

Mr. Clarke: Yes.

Mr. Radice: Has the Chancellor noted that the majority of the independent panel advised against tax increases in his Budget? Does he agree that the total of the two Budgets' tax increases, which amounts, as he told the Treasury Select Committee, to 7p on the standard rate of tax, is in danger of choking off the recovery?

Mr. Clarke: Different forecasters have had different views at different times. On this occasion, the members of the panel of forecasters are rather nearer to agreeing with each other than usual. Most of them are very supportive of the Budget. They are all revising their forecasts in the light of the fact that our determined action to ensure that we got control of public borrowing has restored business confidence to an all-time high. They now share our forecast that we can expect gross domestic product to grow by about 2½ per cent. in the coming year. It is realistic to look for about 3 per cent. growth to be sustained thereafter. That growth can be combined with low levels of inflation. Inflation is now at its lowest level for about 20 years.

I am also glad to see that forecasts for business investment are up. Business investment is forecast to rise by 3¼ per cent. in 1994. Total fixed investment is forecast to grow by 3 per cent. That means that sustained growth, with low inflation, based on investment and exports as well as consumption, lies ahead of us if we continue with the prudent economic policies that we are pursuing at the moment.

Mr. Garnier: When my right hon. and learned Friend next discusses matters, especially investment, with the panel of independent forecasters, will he seek to persuade its members that it would be a good idea to lower capital gains tax rates and that, eventually, capital gains tax should be abolished altogether?

Mr. Clarke: If someone could persuade them of that, no doubt they would add their voices to the advice of that kind that comes to me occasionally from various quarters, not least from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I understand the Chancellor's difficulties in answering questions about tax burden forecasts, so in an effort to be helpful, may I ask him about public expenditure forecasts instead? Will he share his well-known mastery of the details with the House and say what is the size of the civil service and what he intends the size of it to be in three years' time?

Mr. Clarke: The share of gross domestic product taken by the state is forecast to fall from 45 per cent., its peak during the present recession, to 41 per cent. on the plans that I have announced—that compares with 46 per cent. under Labour. The Budget demonstrated a strong control over spending. Total Government spending is forecast to rise by 1 per cent. in real terms next year—far below the level of growth of the economy. The new control total, thanks to the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, will rise by an average of only about ¼ per cent. in real terms over the next three years. That is why we are forecasting that spending will be on a downward trend and that the total tax burden on the public and on the economy will also be on a downward trend.

Insurance Tax

10. **Sir Peter Fry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend exemptions proposed for the new tax on insurance and assurance contracts.

Sir John Cope: None, beyond those in the Finance Bill.

Sir Peter Fry: I understand the need for few exemptions, but will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the difficulties that some health care bodies will experience, such as the Hospitals Guild in Northampton, which covers my constituency? That is a non-profit-making body, which passes on most of its surplus to the national health service and to charity. The effect of the tax will be to reduce that help considerably. Most of all, it will cause great difficulties in accounting for the tax on low premiums, some of which are as low as 20p a week. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a case for exempting those low premiums?

Sir John Cope: Of course I have received representations on that matter, but, as I made clear in the debate on Tuesday, we believe that it is best to apply the tax at a low rate over a wide area, rather than to pick and choose between different types of general insurance.

Ms Eagle: Will the Minister admit that the new tax is incredibly regressive and that it hits those who live in high-crime areas, who have much higher premiums as a result of suffering more crime? What can be more unfair than a tax on premiums, which taxes people's security? The Government are making money from people's fears.

Sir John Cope: As I explained in some detail on Tuesday, the tax is mildly progressive.

Mr. Shersby: Will my right hon. Friend give careful consideration to continuing the exemption of tax on premiums for private health insurance for higher rate taxpayers who are pensioners? Is he aware that those pensioners relieve the national health service of a substantial burden of expenditure each year?

Sir John Cope: What my hon. Friend says is quite right. However, I do not think that it affects the insurance premium tax.

Family Tax Burden

12. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he estimates families on 75 per cent. or less of average earnings can expect to pay in income tax and national insurance from this April; and what the figure was for 1978-79.

Mr. Dorrell: A single earner family on 75 per cent. of average earnings will pay about £68 a week in income tax and national insurance contributions next year. That compares with about £79 a week if the 1978-79 tax regime had still been in force and indexed for inflation.

Mr. Eastham: Several times this afternoon the Minister has mentioned the direct purchasing power of the average family. May I remind him that average purchasing power, with VAT at the 1979 level, was £2·49 and that the same purchasing power for the average family with VAT in 1994-95 will be £21·92?

Mr. Dorrell: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman could have heard the answer that I gave him. He asked me how much the tax burden had gone up, by implication, as a result of the changes that my right hon. and learned Friend announced, compared with what the position would have been in 1978-79. The answer that I gave him, which he very understandably did not follow up, was that our tax burden, the direct tax burden—[Hon. Members: "Ah."] That was the question which I was asked and to which I gave an answer. The direct tax burden next year, on a 1978-79 basis, would have been £79. It will, in fact, be £68.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 3 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir John Hannam: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the visit by Gerry Adams to America has done nothing to advance peace in Northern Ireland? Will he assure the House that the lies and evasions of Sinn Fein will not be allowed to hold up progress towards a settlement in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend, and that will be the overwhelming view of right hon. and hon. Members. The way to advance peace in Northern Ireland is for the IRA to end violence now. That is in its hands, and it is in Mr. Adams's hands and I believe that he could and should do it. However, progress in Northern Ireland cannot and will not wait for Sinn Fein. The Government propose to carry forward actively the political talks with the constitutional parties and with the Irish Government. In further meetings, my right hon. and learned Friend will be floating ideas to give further focus and direction to all three strands of the talks process. This is a democratic process. If Sinn Fein and the provisionals want to be part of it, they must renounce violence for good. The way is open to them, but it is for them to take it.

Mr. John Smith: Is it correct that the Government intend to raise prescription charges from £4·25 to £4·75 —an increase of 11·6 per cent., which is more than six times the rate of inflation?

The Prime Minister: When we are in a position to make an announcement to the House about that, we will make an announcement in the normal fashion.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Prime Minister not appreciate that his likely increase, and indeed any increase, in prescription charges comes on top of massive tax increases already being imposed by the Government on the ordinary people of this country? Given all that, for once could not the Prime Minister spare the sick?

The Prime Minister: I think that, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman will recall, only those who can afford to pay prescription charges are asked to pay them. From memory, around 80 per cent. of prescribed items are now free of charge. In 1979, it was, I believe, around 55 to 60 per cent.—a significant change. There is no firm evidence in any information that we have that prescription charges deter patients from obtaining necessary medication. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that. He makes no ackowledgement of the fact that most people do not pay prescription charges. He should get his facts right before he pursues these matters in this fashion.

Mr. John Smith: It is quite clear from that that prescription charges are going to go up. Given that the Public Accounts Committee has identified millions of pounds that have been wasted by the Government's health service quangos, would it not make much more sense to tackle that rather than to seek to tax the sick?

The Prime Minister: The revenue from prescription charges this year is sufficient to fund around 70,000 hip replacements or 45,000 coronary artery bypass grafts. What I should like to hear from the Opposition, for all their complaints about prescription charges, is whether they would abolish prescription charges. If they would, who woud pick up the bill of over £260 million? Would it be the national health service, with fewer people treated? Would it be the taxpayer? Or would they borrow more? That is another example of the right hon. and learned Gentleman saying that he would control expenditure, yet every opportunity he gets, he asks for more expenditure to make cheap political points.

Q2. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 3 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Burns: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will close any genuine tax loopholes, but will not close what the CBI has shown are not genuine loopholes, as, by so doing, they would fail to raise revenue and would merely damage the economy in general and the economic recovery in particular? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that blows away the smokescreen of the tax-and-spend policies of the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: On the last point, my hon. Friend is generous to assume that the Opposition have tax and spending policies. In successive Budgets, we have closed tax loopholes and tackled abuse. My right hon. and learned Friend will continue to do so wherever he finds abuse. The Labour party, with its hare-brained schemes, is not genuinely concerned about closing loopholes. It would close not loopholes but businesses. That would be the result of its policies. As the CBI says today, Labour supports higher taxes on business. That is why Labour will always be the enemy of enterprise, of employment and of British business.

Mr. Foulkes: Has the Prime Minister had a report of yesterday's debate on the Child Support Agency, during which hon. Members on both sides of the House related tales of heartbreak and hardship caused by the operation of the agency and asked the Prime Minister and the Government to undertake another review of its working? Will the right hon. Gentleman now announce such a review so that people may look forward to an end to the hardship and the heartbreak?

The Prime Minister: I read with some care yesterday's debate on the Child Support Agency, and I am glad to say that the principles behind it received a warm welcome from every part of the House. The reforms will have a significant effect once the maintenance bills of those who qualify are reduced. When the legislation was being introduced, we stated that it would be kept under review. We are still true to that pledge—it still applies.

Q3. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 3 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the £26 million investment by Nestlé Rowntree, at its York factory, in the new production line for Kit Kat, which is one of Europe's leading confectionery brands? Does not that illustrate very clearly the advantage, in terms of new investment, of multinational companies having a significant presence in Britain?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it most certainly does. I had hoped to visit that factory in Yorkshire last week, but, unfortunately, was unable to do so. I was looking forward to seeing the new investment and to congratulating the management and the work force on their success. What that inward investment shows is that Britain is increasingly competitive and increasingly attractive to overseas investors. That is good news for exports, good news for orders and good news for jobs. Conservative Members welcome inward investment—we do not carp at it whenever it is received.

Mr. Mallon: The Prime Minister no doubt has noticed that during his visit to the United States Mr. Adams provided some clarification by indicating that he does not accept the principle of self-determination based on consent. Indeed, Mr. Adams said that it would be nonsense to argue for such a thing. Does the Prime Minister agree that that runs counter to article 1A of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, counter to paragraph 4 of the joint declaration and counter to the view of every political party in Ireland, excluding the Democratic Unionist party and Sinn Fein, and that it is not the view of the vast majority of the people of Ireland who support the joint declaration? Can he assure the House that the two Governments will jointly pursue the objectives of the joint declaration and there will be no unilateral deviation from it in the interests of short-term expediency?

The Prime Minister: We will certainly continue to pursue the objectives of the joint declaration—there should be no doubt about that. In America, Mr. Adams avoided the central issue on every occasion he could. Sinn Fein has been challenged to give up violence—it has not done so. I do not believe that I can put it any better than today's edition of the *Irish Independent*. I quote:

> "It is a disgrace that he"—

that is, Adams—

> "should go on mouthing platitudes while the Provisional IRA continues its violence."

Mr. Skinner: The Prime Minister is jealous—Adams was a hit and he was ignored.

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that people in Britain or in Ireland have been deceived by Adams's performance, with the possible exception of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

The Irish Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Spring, yesterday posed the critical question: Has Adams got the leadership and the courage to take his people with him in carrying out his own stated commitment to peace and to going the extra mile? That is the question to which everyone awaits an answer.

Ash-cum-Ridley (Visit)

Q4. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Prime Minister if he has any plans to visit Ash-cum-Ridley.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so but I will keep it in mind for the future.

Mr. Dunn: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the range and variety of schools available to parents in my constituency and across Kent exist solely and wholly because of the Government's policies and that choice and variety in education would be eliminated if the nightmare policies of the Labour party were endured?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right about that. His county of Kent has self-governing schools, selective schools, maintained schools, comprehensive schools and schools that specialise in technology. That is the sort of choice that we believe it is right to offer to parents and will continue to seek to offer to parents. Most of that would be swept away by a Labour Government. They would abolish self-governing schools, abolish city technology colleges, abolish performance tables and abolish the right of parents to know precisely what is happening in the schools that their children go to. As ever, the Labour party would put dogma before common sense.

Mr. Barnes: Could I persuade the Prime Minister to go to Ash-cum-Ridley, wherever that might be, instead of to Renishaw, Holmewood, Clay Cross and areas in my constituency that have high unemployment and have been devastated by the Government's policies, because we think that the Government are a waste of time? There are other places that the Prime Minister should go—he could take a break and go to Ash-cum-Ridley.

The Prime Minister: If my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) cannot persuade me to go to Ash-cum-Ridley, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman will have much luck. As for employment, I share with the hon. Gentleman the wish to increase employment and reduce unemployment in this country. He will have noticed that it has been falling steadily for the past year in this country, unlike any other country in western Europe, and I expect it to continue to fall throughout this year.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 3 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it was not the sale of Rover to BMW that lost Britain the chance of having a genuine global player on world car markets? Rather, that chance was lost during the era of misguided Government direction, industrial practices and unfettered union power when British Leyland became the butt of international music-hall jokes. Can my right hon. Friend imagine at that time anyone wanting British Leyland as a gift, let alone paying £800 million for the company?

The Prime Minister: Rover certainly has been transformed, and I congratulate the work force and the management on their efforts to bring that about, as well as the investment that has been put into the company by British Aerospace. Rover now produces a world-quality product, and it is winning market shares in extremely competitive markets.

As my hon. Friend said, the contrast with the 1970s could be scarcely sharper. Mass meetings at that time were addressed by Red Robbo, and taxpayers' money was being poured into a bottomless pit. Rover is now a world beater and it will become better.

Mr. Caborn: Will the Prime Minister tell the House whether he can give assurances to individuals, companies or organisations about the disbursement of the millennium fund and the lottery fund for the construction of sporting facilities?

The Prime Minister: No, we have given no commitments on that yet. We are looking at the establishment of a committee to determine how the millennium fund will be disbursed, and it will be a considerable period before we are in a position to say what money will be disbursed and where. Consideration of the matter is still in its infancy and it will be some time before we are able to make an announcement.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Will the Leader of the House state the business for the forthcoming week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

Monday 7 February—Until about Seven o'clock, Private Members' Motions.

There will be a debate entitled "Taking Rio Forward" on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Tuesday 8 February—Second Reading of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill.

Wednesday 9 February—Consideration in Committee of the Sunday Trading Bill (Second Day).

Supplemental timetable on and consideration of Lords Amendments which may be received to the Statutory Sick Pay Bill.

Motion on Section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act.

Thursday 10 February—Opposition Day (Third Allotted Day).

There will be a debate on the Child Support Agency on an Opposition Motion.

Friday 11 February—Private Members' Bills.

Monday 14 February—Motion on the European Parliamentary Constituencies (Wales) Order.

Motion on the European Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order.

Motion on the European Parliamentary Elections (Changes to the Franchise and Qualifications of Representatives) regulations.

Motion on the Airports (Northern Ireland) Order.

Motion on the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order.

Mrs. Beckett: May I tell the Lord President that we appreciate the opportunity to use Opposition time for a full debate on the future of the Child Support Act? The Government shirked that this week, although we regret that it has been left to the Opposition to do what we think should be the Government's job.

Will the Lord President not shirk the pressing need for a debate in Government time on the devastating report published by the Public Accounts Committee on today's unprecedented waste, mismanagement and fraud? That is especially important as the huge tax hikes, on which debate was guillotined this week, are a direct result of the Government's failure and incompetence in that respect.

Will he ensure that the Home Secretary makes a statement to the House about any change in policy—a welcome, even if insufficient change—on plans to take political control of the police and the courts? The Home Secretary's predesessor did so when the policy was changed during proceedings on the Criminal Justice Bill 1992.

Finally, has the Lord President seen the report in *The Sun* in which the Home Secretary's predecessor—the present Chancellor of the Exchequer—claims that he is the Government's fireman, and that he is always being brought in to clear up the mess which has been left by others? Will the Lord President give those "others" the right of reply? Will he extend that particularly to those, such as the present Home Secretary, who are having to follow the present Chancellor?

Mr. Newton: First, I ought to apologise to the House, because I failed to turn over the page and announce the European Standing Committees for next week. I will rectify that omission.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee "A" will meet on Wednesday 9 February at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents Nos. 8757/93 and 10761/93 relating to bovine somatotrophin.

[Wednesday 9 February:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community documents: 8757/93 and 10761/93, bovine somatotrophin (BST); relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 48-ii (1993-94) and HC 48-vi (1993-94.]

The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) asked several questions. First, I see no question of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary seeking at any stage to take political control of the police. Yesterday, he announced some changes in the proposals previously made. Those changes responded to representations made in another place and elsewhere. That is entirely sensible, responsible and right.

As for the right hon. Lady's comments on the Public Accounts Committee, it should be made clear once again, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has several times made it clear, that the report did not suggest that there had been any decline in standards. It rightly criticised breaches, and the Government have made it clear that, in respect of any such breach, they will be determined to see that the proper action is taken.

Lastly, as it happens, I have not seen the story in *The Sun* to which the right hon. Lady referred, but I shall make sure that I look at it, and I shall read it with care and interest.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Would it be possible some time next week, or soon after, for us as gentlemen to consider the problem of lady Members of Parliament, and in particular the difficulties of attracting ladies to take part in our proceedings? One of the inhibiting factors is the lunatic way in which we conduct our affairs, which is a subject of contempt in the country outside, irritation to ladies and derision in other countries? Will my right hon. Friend tell us what is happening and who is responsible for blocking the all-party Jopling report?

Mr. Newton: As I understand it, many Opposition Members, both ladies and gentlemen, strongly support the proposals in the Jopling report. As for who is blocking the prospect of progress on the proposals, there was a perceptive article in today's *The Times* by Peter Riddell, which I commend to the attention of both my hon. Friend and others in the House. Beyond that, I do not wish to speculate.

To what extent we always gain from the attendance of lady Members in the House was called into question during the guillotine proceedings earlier this week, in which both a right hon. lady and an hon. Lady—the right hon. Member for Derby, South and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman)—who spoke from the Opposition Front

Bench ended up denouncing the Government at one and the same time for providing too much time and too little time for discussion of the Finance Bill.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Following the embarrassing decision in the High Court last Friday that the guidelines given by the Secretary of State to the local government review were illegal, can we have a statement from the Secretary of State on the future of the local government review, in particular in relation to the timetable, which must surely be put back, given that much of the work that has been carried out up to now has proved wasted and illegal?

Mr. Newton: As will soon become clear to the hon. Gentleman, he is rather overstating the effects of the decision. The effect of the judgment is to delete a single sentence from the guidance to the Local Government Commission. The rest of it still stands, and the reviews that are under way continue. The Government are not appealing against the court ruling.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend has probably read recently about the imperfections of car boot sales. The Customs and Excise men go there and recover a tremendous amount of smuggled wines and beers. Petty criminals use the sales to get rid of their stocks. At the same time, there is a health and safety factor, with electrical equipment in particular. Is it not time that someone should be the licensee of sites, and that supervision should be more profound?

Mr. Newton: I am certainly well aware of concerns expressed in many places similar to those which my hon. Friend has expressed. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and others are aware of those concerns. I shall bring my hon. Friend's remarks to their attention.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Will the Leader of the House join me and others in condemning the high price of children's footwear? If so, will he make parliamentary time available to debate the issue?

Mr. Newton: I certainly cannot undertake to provide parliamentary time specifically to debate that issue. The appropriate course is to rely on consumer pressure, of which no doubt the hon. Gentleman is part, to exert appropriate influence on those selling children's shoes.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Has the Leader of the House noticed early-day motion 320 in my name, which has been supported by more than 200 hon. Members on both sides of the House?

[That this House expresses its deep concern at continuing reports that citizens of developed nations travelling abroad may be encouraging the use of children in prostitution and pornography; reaffirms its commitment to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which seeks to protect children from sexual exploitation; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to seek to play an active role in bringing about concerted international action to tackle this problem and in particular to examine ways of ensuring that individuals involved in such exploitation are brought to justice within the United Kingdom.]

It deals with the exploitation of children, through pornography and prostitution, by tourists from developed nations visiting, predominantly, third-world countries. Could time be made available to discuss that important matter and its implications? We hope that the Government could lead other member states in the EC to negotiate with the Governments of, for example, the Philippines, Thailand and, in particular, Sri Lanka, which is a member of the Commonwealth and with which we have a close relationship?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will answer questions next Thursday, and she may wish to draw the matter to his attention. All hon. Members share concern about such matters and my right hon. Friends will be anxious to find appropriate ways to tackle those concerns as and when they can.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Will the Leader of the House consider providing time for a debate on mad cow disease and whether it may enter the human food chain? Will he persuade Ministers to come to the Dispatch Box and to tell the House what research they have commissioned and what the latest advice they have received on whether mad cow disease could enter the human food chain? May I tell him about a distressing case in my constituency—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am afraid that I must intervene. We are not here to hear about cases or evidence, but simply to ask the Leader of the House for a debate on the subject.

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise time for a debate on the Floor of the House, but of course I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's question to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Such matters may be relevant to the debate in Standing Committee A about bovine somatotrophin to which I adverted earlier.

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): Will my right hon. Friend consider an early debate on the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 on councillor convictions and disqualification from office? Is he aware that the Derbyshire county councillor who was recently gaoled for fiddling his expenses retained his committee chairmanship while in gaol and until he lost his appeal this week? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that councillor should pay back that money, and that gaol on the rates must be stopped?

Mr. Newton: It is an astonishing story, and I am sure that those concerned locally will wish to draw it to the attention of the district auditor.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Since the Leader of the House has shown his attachment to the importance of the Jopling report, which perhaps applies only to hon. Members living in Greater London and has little significance to those of us who represent far-flung places, will he address the issue of "taking stock", which was defined by both the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Scotland in the wake of the general election?

Given that the official Opposition have now comfortably voted with the Government to appoint Conservative Members from English constituencies to serve on a Committee that deals specifically with Scottish legislation, does he not feel that now is an appropriate time to debate the issue of "taking stock", which seems to be on the back burner?

Mr. Newton: This is the United Kingdom Parliament, and it is appropriate that it should operate as such. On the hon. Lady's last point, we are genuinely anxious to make progress, but I am afraid it is another of those issues on which progress is not as fast as we would like, because of the absence of the usual channels.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will my right hon. Friend consider whether we could debate the events surrounding the investigations into Westminster council? I am particularly concerned about a recent newspaper report which alleged that the investigations were tough, but most were conducted without those under investigation being told that they had rights to solicitors? By invoking the criminal sanction—which has been broken by almost every member of the press, and I gather many of the public—many of those who wished to clear their names were unable to do so.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that there has been a great travesty of justice because of the failure to allow individuals to clear their names so that they now stand guilty before they have had the opportunity to clear their names?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend probably understands that I would not wish to comment on his suggestions off the cuff. We are concerned—as everyone will be—to ensure that serious allegations are properly investigated. I am equally confident that those people who undertake such investigations will want to ensure that they are conducted in a proper manner, and will examine my hon. Friend's remarks.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: May I remind hon. Members that this question time relates to next week's business and is not an open question time to the Leader of the House? Hon. Members should be asking him to change the business next week so that they can discuss other matters. This question time is not just a free-for-all.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does the Leader of the House recall that I have mentioned several times the serious situation facing the engineering steel industry in the Wentworth and Rotherham constituencies? Does he accept that such a debate is especially important now that the Government have decided to withdraw the iron and steel industries redundancy payments scheme for steel workers? Can we have a debate about that, if we cannot have one about the survival of the industry itself?

Mr. Newton: I well appreciate the hon. Gentleman's very appropriate constituency interest in those matters, but I cannot undertake to provide time for a debate.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): Will my right hon. Friend make time for an early debate on management of the South Wales police authority? He may be aware that there is widespread concern in south Wales over suggestions that 40 police stations may be closed. Many officers in the force, who are being approached with a view to repaying overtime, are concerned to make the contrast with my constituency, where the Dyfed-Powys police have recorded the lowest crime rate and the highest clear-up rate, and recorded a 13 per cent. fall in crime. Perhaps that contrast needs to be made in this Chamber.

Mr. Newton: One of my hon. Friends has just whispered to me that it must be the influence that my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) has on his constituency. In business terms, it seems possible that my hon. Friend might be able to advert to those matters when we discuss the Welsh local government finance orders.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Will the Leader of the House make time on Monday for the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement on the Swan report on the conditions in which seriously ill women are being kept in at Ashworth special hospital on Merseyside? That report follows the public inquiry undertaken by Sir Louis Blom-Cooper QC into the conditions at that hospital and the scandalous behaviour of staff employed there.

The chair of the special hospital has refused right hon. and hon. Members access to details of that report. As a result we cannot represent our constituents [HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] Will the Secretary of State make a full statement in the House on Monday about the contents of the Swan report?

Mr. Newton: I was not aware of the serious matters that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. I will make quite sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is made aware of them.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that an early statement or debate on the progress of the Banham commission would enable the Liberal Democrat party to make clear its preference for the bureaucratic nightmare of regional government? it would also enable the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) to make clear what he has hitherto only whispered—that he supports the break-up of Somerset into three, a proposal opposed by the majority of people in Somerset, by numbers of Liberal Democrat councillors at county, district, town and parish levels, and by myself and three Conservative parliamentary colleagues who represent the county?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend will find that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be making those matters clear shortly and that they will be very much along the lines of what I said in response to an earlier questioner. I must express some doubt as to whether any such statement will draw clarity on this matter, or on any other, from the leader of the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Could we have a debate next week on the right to buy, especially in light of the concerns being expressed in Rutland and Melton by council tenants, who want to know whether under British law it is now possible for companies—or whatever—to buy council houses as intermediaries at a £50,000 discount? They want to know, so can we have a debate on those matters next week?

Mr. Newton: I will simply say that, in my judgment, the hon. Gentleman is doing himself no good by this campaign.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Bearing in mind the five implied spending commitments that the Labour party has made this week alone, including one this afternoon by the leader of the Labour party, will my right hon. Friend ensure next week and every week that we have a statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the effects of those spending commitments on the taxation of everyone in the country?

Mr. Newton: What a very good idea.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May we have a debate next week on London, please, and in particular on the state of London's roads? I do not know whether the Leader of the House has a chance to understand the chaos on London's streets when he is driving around in his ministerial limo being pampered by minions, but hardly a street in London is not being dug up at the moment. The Rotherhithe tunnel and the Albert bridge is closed; it is chaos out there. We need a debate to pin the blame on those responsible. If the Minister for Transport in London spent a little more time in this House rather than other people's houses, we could ask him some questions.

Mr. Newton *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. Before the Leader of the House responds, may I say that long questions prevent other hon. Members from asking questions. I am watching the clock, and I am always anxious to call all hon. Members, but if the questions are too long, I shall not be able to do so.

Mr. Newton: I might respond rather more sympathetically were I not conscious that the next public spending demand from the Opposition may well be more expenditure on the maintenance and improvement of roads.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the time has come for a debate next week to consider early-day motions 341, 459 and 467, which have support from hon. Members on both sides of the House, and about which requests have been made for a number of weeks.

[That this House calls upon the Right honourable Member for Yeovil to disassociate himself from the description by Tom Dommett, a Liberal Democrat County Councillor, of his constituents in Somerset, as 'Yids, Nig-nogs, Ities and Pakis . . . no better than New Age scum and vermin'; believes that the use of such grossly offensive language about people of other nationalities and races is wholly unacceptable in public life; notes that this is yet the latest example of blatant racism within the Liberal Democrat Party; and calls upon the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, the Right honourable Member for Yeovil, to expel Councillor Dommett from the party forthwith.]

Will that not give us the opportunity to discover why the Liberal Democrat party can lecture us in a high moral tone and then use racist literature? Would it not also give us an opportunity to have a look at its latest handbook——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must come to the point. I am always anxious to call as many Members as possible. This is an important time for Back Benchers, but if hon. Members abuse it, I shall have to curtail it.

Mr. Nicholls: —which would denigrate people for having regional accents?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend was in danger of putting some strain on my support system by linking quite so many widely spaced early-day motions, but I understand that they all refer to the leader of the Liberal Democrat party, to whom I have already made some reference. All the persistent and understandable efforts from my hon. Friends to extract things from the leader of the Liberal party appear to be meeting little success, but we shall continue trying together.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Can we have a debate next week on the millennium fund? It seems that every day projects are claiming that they have already keyed into the millennium fund, when the committee has not yet been appointed. It may well be that the Prime Minister himself gives tips and winks to certain projects.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will have heard what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on that matter only a few moments ago, and I certainly do not intend to add to it.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Now that there seems to be increased interest on all sides of the House in local government corruption, will my right hon. Friend organise a debate on that topic, and invite comment and condemnation of nepotism and corruption on Labour-controlled Monklands council from the local Labour Member of Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition, who has been strangely silent on the matter?

Mr. Newton: As it happens, I can claim that we are providing some fairly substantial opportunities. There is, of course, a local government debate to follow business questions this afternoon, and helpfully, the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) has "the future of Scotland's democracy" as the private Member's motion on Monday. I have not been informed whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition intends to speak about Monklands, but that possibility should be considered.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): When are the Government likely to make a statement about the apology that they should be extending to the Council of Europe, the Western European Union, NATO, foreign visits by CPA and IPU delegations—*[Interruption.]*—let me finish. If you would—*[Interruption.]*—I have a much more attractive voice than you silly beggars—because of the non-attendance of British delegations, a Luddite policy that has been adopted by certain honourable dunderheads in the House?

Mr. Newton: I do not know that I would have cared to apply such a description to those at whom I understand it to have been aimed—particularly the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who appears to have other preoccupations, and apparently did not even hear what was said by her hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds). Perhaps I should tell her that her hon. Friend was extremely unflattering about her.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Later this afternoon, the House will have an opportunity to discuss certain aspects of local government finance; presumably, in the fulness of time, we shall be given an opportunity to discuss local government structure, following the report of the Local Government Commission. Will my right hon. Friend consider providing us with an early opportunity to debate the functions of local government, and, in particular, to investigate whether the principle of subsidiarity is being fully applied in that context?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my hon. Friend's ingenuity, combined with his persistence in raising the matters that he clearly has in mind, will enable him to find some way of speaking on the occasions that I have already provided.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate early next week about quangos —especially their membership—with particular reference to Wales? Or is he happy with the present position, in which many members are still Tories, are unaccountable, and are often unelectable?

Mr. Newton: There is no question of appointees' being unaccountable, whatever their political provenance. We shall ensure that the bodies concerned are conducted properly, using every means at our command.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Will my right hon. Friend please make time next week for an urgent debate on public expenditure? I feel that the House needs to analyse Labour's new policy of increasing spending on health, housing and overseas aid by £16 billion without raising taxes or increasing borrowing. Has Labour discovered a magic formula, or is it just an illusion?

Mr. Newton: I think that is an attempt—probably the world's largest ever attempt—to have your cake and eat it. We see it every day. I am a bit confused about whether pledges not made in the House count in these calculations; that appears to be another variant of the Opposition's habit of making promises that they can later disown.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On Tuesday, we are to debate the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill. Will a motion be tabled authorising the Procedure Committee to embark on the process of setting up another Committee to scrutinise the power that the Bill gives a Minister to repeal whole Acts of Parliament? Alternatively, before any such move is made, will the House have to wait until the Bill has been passsed before such a motion is tabled? If the Procedure Committee is embarking on the introduction of such a structure without the authority of the House, why is it doing so?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, is visibly present; no doubt he will respond to what the hon. Gentleman has said, although I acknowledge that he cannot do so now. I have sent both the hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend copies of a paper outlining some of the Government's ideas, and suggesting that we would welcome the thoughts of the Procedure Committee. I consider that an entirely appropriate and sensible way in which to proceed. We shall then be able to consider what matters should be put before the House.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate on the potential abolition of Avon county council, whose spending priorities are becoming ever more bizarre? Its decision this week to spend £100,000 on traveller liaison officers was greeted with outrage in my constituency, where these people are regarded as an absolute nuisance. Our only possible salvation will lie in the abolition of this dreadful, unwanted and unloved county council.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I might urge my hon. Friend—should he catch your eye, Madam Speaker—to repeat and elaborate on those remarks in the debate that will shortly take place.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): The Leader of the House referred to BST in his statement, but I apologise for not understanding exactly what he said. Will there be a debate on BST before the Government take a final decision on its use?

Mr. Newton: I announced that European Standing Committee A would be considering documents relating to bovine somatotrophin. The purpose of its deliberations is to inform the Government's approach.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Could we have a debate next week on the new decisions relating to aircraft noise and night flights over west London and elsewhere, in view of their great importance to my constituents, and the people of west London in general, who want no night flights at all?

Mr. Newton: I well understand my hon. Friend's concerns. I am not in a position to promise a debate on that matter, but I am sure that my colleagues will examine his remarks.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Before Friday will the Leader of the House reconsider the subject of tobacco advertising, which is covered in early-day motion 1, signed by 165 hon. Members?

[That this House calls for a ban on tobacco advertising.]

The tobacco industry has told me that it has given inducements to the Conservative party to ensure that such a ban is not introduced. Will the Leader of the House confirm that Conservative Members will have a free vote next week and be able to support what the evidence cries out for—a total ban on tobacco advertising, not the half-hearted half-ban that his party intends to introduce?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman knows, following earlier documents the Government will shortly be publishing an action plan describing in detail the measures that they propose in order to reduce even further the prevalence of smoking. That document will describe the Government's plans for the control of tobacco advertising. I think that the hon. Gentleman had better await that document.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): Has my right hon. Friend had any representations or requests from the Opposition to change the subject of next week's Opposition day to debate early-day motion 457, which deals with taxation and social renewal, and which has been signed by 36 members of the Labour party?

[That this House, noting the grossly unfair distribution of wealth in Britain under capitalism and the widening gap between rich and poor that has taken place over the last 15 years and recalling that the present Budget deficit is entirely attributable to tax reductions given to the richest taxpayers, and the cost of unemployment that was deliberately created, is convinced that the burden of military expenditure is far higher than can be justified and that other Government policies have been wasteful and inefficient; believes that the imposition of higher levels of VAT and its extension to fuel imposes a heavy burden on those least able to pay, as do other increases in taxation imposed in the recent Budget; rejects arguments that all reductions in taxation are

necessarily desirable regardless of the purpose for which the tax is raised and the social consequences that would follow; affirms that the recovery of full employment, planned defence diversification, the rebuilding of our infrastructure, the extension of essential public services and the regeneration of British industry will require massive public investment, the harnessing of the nation's savings and taxation fairly shared and assessed on the ability to pay; and calls for a clear socialist commitment to be made now, about future economic, fiscal, industrial and social policies to secure these objectives.]

It calls for massive public investment and for a clear socialist commitment to be made now on future economic, fiscal and industrial policies. Does my right hon. Friend agree that such a debate would prove enlightening and terrifying for the House, and especially for the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has made some telling points, which I shall certainly bear in mind when looking ahead to the business of the House.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): Will the Leader of the House reconsider what he said earlier about the Public Accounts Committee's report? Does he understand that it was a special report and said some damaging and worrying things about the conduct of public business? He seemed to say just now that the Government had some proposals to clean up public bodies. If so, will he arrange for a debate next week so that he can tell us about them?

Mr. Newton: I made it clear that the Government would take appropriate action in the individual cases. The action varies; for example, in the case of the Wessex and West Midlands health authorities, it has already been set in hand. In other cases, reports are still awaiting Treasury minutes or other responses, but the Government will take appropriate action in every instance.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on a matter in which I know he has a close interest—the politically motivated campaign being waged by the Labour and Liberal administration of Essex county council against grant-maintained schools?

Mr. Newton: As a fellow member of Parliament for Essex, I am of course well aware of the concern about this matter. My hon. Friend might perhaps be one of those who find an opportunity to raise the issue in the forthcoming debate on local government.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): The Leader of the House will know that hardly a week passes without a fresh scandal involving a quango in Wales. Is he aware that my colleagues are fearful that corruption is starting to take a grip on some of these public bodies, and that it may be a result of the Welsh Office's incompetence in monitoring them, a role which it is supposed to undertake on a day-to-day basis? Will the Leader of the House set aside time for a debate on this critical issue, and on the future of the Welsh Office and quangos in Wales?

Mr. Newton: I do not accept for a moment the hon. Gentleman's suggestions, but I draw his attention to the fact that the Secretary of State for Wales will be answering questions in the House on 14 February.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Bearing in mind the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) for municipal gutters, could we have a debate next week on the Labour-controlled borough of Tameside and the manner in which it contracts out its homes that care for the elderly, a matter recently described so well on Radio 4?

Mr. Newton: It seems to me that that is yet another matter that could be in order in the forthcoming debate.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Bearing in mind the fact that the interim report from the Health and Safety Executive about the Associated Octel disaster, or potential disaster, may be published in the next few days, if it is, will the Leader of the House make arrangements for his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to make a statement on that, and on its broader implications for emergency and emergency planning services?

Mr. Newton: I will bring that request to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): In backing up my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), I ask my right hon. Friend to reconsider whether there is any possibility, in the business next week or the following week, of having a specific debate about education policy, geared towards the vicious, nasty and vindictive policies that are being adopted by Essex education authority and other county council education authorities? Those policies penalise parents with children who attend grant-maintained schools, or who may want to hold a ballot for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I can add to what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), but, as my constituency is the space between the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon, my hon. Friends can perhaps understand that I recognise their concern.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement about the situation at the Royal Alexandra trust hospital? Constituents of mine are still waiting for months—five months approximately—to see a urologist there, and months and months to have operations there. The trust system in Scotland is falling so sadly down that there is a crisis in my constituency. The morale of our people waiting for health treatment is so bad that it is an indictment of the Government.

Mr. Newton: I know of no basis for the general description of the trust system that the hon. Gentleman gives, but obviously I am not informed about the special problems to which he adverts, and I will bring them to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Further to the question of the hon. Gentleman the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), will my right hon. Friend next week, for the debate on Friday, try to ensure that, whatever the Government's long-term view may be, they will allow the Tobacco Advertising Bill to get into Committee, so that the effect of

[Sir Peter Emery]

cigarette smoking and especially the effect on asthma could be fully debated, rather than just on the Floor of the House, even if the Government have to take action at another time?

Mr. Newton: I think that my right hon. Friend, in his capacity as Chairman of the Procedure Committee, will acknowledge that in the end the decision as to what happens to a private Member's Bill is a matter for the House and not the Government.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): In the week that the Rover car company was swallowed up, will the Lord President refer to the President of the Board of Trade for a statement that there is still a major car company in the United Kingdom—the Nissan Motor Company in my constituency, Washington, Sunderland, which was the biggest United Kingdom car exporter in 1993? It has exported 182,000 cars, worth £1 billion. In addition, the Micra and Primera cars are built by British workers and British management, and we are proud of that car company in our region.

Mr. Newton: I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He knows of the long-standing interest that I have had in industrial matters in the north-east, not least in the year that I was a Trade and Industry Minister and visited Nissan. It is a considerable credit to that company, and to the work force in the north-east, that we have the gathering success in what is a resurgent British car industry.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Bearing in mind the undoubted but regrettable propaganda coup scored by Gerry Adams in the United States this week, will my right hon. Friend ask his colleague the Home Secretary to come to the House to give a statement about the future of the broadcasting ban, which at the moment is widely abused and circumvented by all the television companies? I am certain that that would be a recognition of the tremendous unnecessary mileage that was given to a man who is a terrorist and whose brother has been convicted of terrorist offences.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend may find that that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, who is due to answer questions in the House on Monday. However, I shall draw his question to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke): Bearing in mind the fact that old-style economic recovery cannot possibly solve the problem of unemployment, and that high unemployment, especially among the young, is likely to have incalculable costs as a result of social alienation and conflict, could we have a debate on that matter, and specifically on European Union proposals that we should aim to shift the burden of taxation so as to encourage the use of labour—that is, people—and discourage or reduce the use of natural resources, because natural resources are the capital on which our future prosperity depends?

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman considers what has happened to employers' national insurance contributions, which constitute an important cost involved in employing labour, and which the Government are now in the process of reducing again as part of a package of measures taken together, and if he examines what has been done to reduce the contributions paid in respect of less well-paid workers over the past few years, he will realise that the Government have directed much attention to that problem, with the sort of success that is now attracting companies to come here rather than going to places where they incur much higher social costs.

Points of Order

4.10 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Are you aware that from the Terrace—and indeed, so far as I can tell, from the Speaker's Apartments—it is possible to look across the river and see the Japanese flag flying over county hall? Personally, I find that offensive, and I suspect that many other Londoners do, too. Are there not regulations and restrictions prohibiting the flying of a foreign flag from a building other than an embassy which is the property of the country concerned?

Madam Speaker: That is hardly a point of order for me, but if what the hon. Gentleman says is true, I am interested to hear that he has seen that flag from the Terrace of the House of Commons. I must say that I have been rather too busy to notice it from my apartment.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I should be grateful for your guidance in telling me whether it is in order for the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) to continue his vicious and spiteful vendetta against another Member of the House on the basis of inaccurate information, under the cloak of parliamentary privilege?

Madam Speaker: Had the comments made by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) been out of order, I would of course have intervened. However, I caution all Members that we should have courteous language here, so that we can conduct our debates in good order and with respect for one another.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you confirm that the matters that I have raised are matters of public policy?

Madam Speaker: I think that, when the hon. Gentleman raised the matter the day before yesterday, he was somewhat out of order, and I refer him to the remarks that I have just made. I am sure that there will be other opportunities for him to put his case in a proper manner.

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance

[Relevant document: the First Report of the Environment Committee on Standard Spending Assessments (House of Commons Paper No. 90).]

4.12 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1994-95 (House of Commons Paper No. 179), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss at the same time the following motions:

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1994-95 (House of Commons Paper No. 181), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (No. 9) (House of Commons Paper No. 180), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

The debate enables us to reach the culmination of the local government finance settlement for 1994-95. The process began a full 12 months ago, almost before the ink was dry on the previous settlement. During that time we have held extensive discussions with local government about the cost of local services, the need for Government support and how that support is to be distributed.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I am sure that my right hon. Friend gets substantially more kicks than ha'pence in his job, so I am sure that he will be delighted to know that my city council has written to say how delighted it was with the settlement that he has given it. Provided that Lancashire county council does not go berserk, it should enable our citizens to pay less council tax.

On a sadder note, I hope that my right hon. Friend will join me in regretting the storm damage in Lancaster, which has ripped the roof off one of the university college buildings, caused a chimney stack to fall over—fortunately, with no loss of life—and the whole of Castle hill to be shut because of falling tiles and roofs. Will he also commend the emergency services for doing a superb job?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that the whole House would want to commend my hon. Friend for her perfectly proper ingenuity in being able to say publicly what we all feel and to support the emergency services for their work in the particular unpleasant storm damage. I hope that it will be repaired as rapidly as possible.

I certainly got more than ha'pence out of that intervention in terms of compliments, though I do not know whether one can be absolutely sure that Lancashire county council will not go berserk—but no doubt we shall see.

We carried out considerable discussions because we thought that it was necessary to try to improve the method of sharing the money out among local authorities. That was a proposal from the local authority organisations. Whatever else may come between us, most agree that the report has been carried out in a thorough way. They may

[Mr. Gummer]

not be entirely happy about the results and they may disagree among themselves, but it was carried out with us in a thorough way.

At the start of December I announced my proposals for the coming year. Since then my colleagues and I have met 58 delegations from local authorities and received 148 written representations. We carefully considered all the points that were raised with us during consultation. My final decisions are embodied in the reports before the House.

From the outset, we have made it clear to local government that this would not be an easy year. We knew that we needed to establish a sound basis for future economic growth. That meant cutting the public sector borrowing requirement, and we expect local government to play its part. Local government accounts for about a quarter of spending. It therefore cannot be immune from the pressures that all of us face.

Tough action to sort out public finances will help to ensure that the economic recovery is sustainable. It is already true that the economic recovery in this country is much more favourable than for most, if not all, members of the European Community. We must ensure that that continues. Inflation has been below 2 per cent. for the longest period since 1960. Interest rates are among the lowest in Europe. Unemployment has fallen by more than 225,000 since January last year. Other countries are looking to see how they can even begin to copy that.

United Kingdom industry is in an excellent competitive position. Good cost and productivity gains are providing exporters with the opportunities that they need. At this point in the recovery, nothing would be more damaging than a loss of confidence in our ability or willingness to control public spending. We do not intend to make that mistake.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way at this early stage. My point is important. Surely the Government must take steps to ensure that local authorities collect the council tax. Figures that have been made available to us show that a number of local councils are not even starting to do the job properly. Some have collected only 25 per cent. of the 1993 figure. Unfortunately, many of them are Labour authorities. Surely the Government can do something about that and thus assist in the recovery that my right hon. Friend is talking about.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. If one does not collect the council tax, one can hardly complain about not having the money to provide services. He is also right to say that those who are least good at collecting the council tax are, almost without exception, Labour councils. However, there is likely to be an improvement.

I heard today that Southwark council—about the fourth worst in the country, I believe—has decided to discuss the possibility of contracted-out collection of its council tax, so unhappy is it with the system that it has at present. One can imagine why the council is so unhappy about the matter. It was unable to collect much of its council tax last year because of considerable difficulties with the collecting staff. I hope very much that other local authorities will take that example and that we shall see a better answer in future.

In a difficult period, I am still able to say that I am increasing the provisions we make for local authority spending next year by 2·3 per cent., after allowing for changes in local authority functions. Total provision next year will be £42·7 billion. That is equivalent to £880 for every man, woman and child in the country. It represents a massive commitment to public services—a commitment that we are making even in this most difficult of years.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): My point follows the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). It is one thing for a local authority to get a good standard spending assessment settlement; it is quite another for it to use it sensibly. I give an example. Cambridgeshire needed 68 extra police officers, as everyone agreed. We had an excellent police SSA of £1·5 million, but the Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition on the county council spent only £100,000 of that. That tells us something about the commitment of a Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition to the police and to law and order, and about having a Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition anyway.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There is only one party that is committed to law and order—the Conservative party. If there is an advantage to be got from the most recent county council election results, it is that they show just how soft the Liberal Democrats in particular are on any law and order matter. It is very noticeable all over the country; Cambridgeshire is a particular example.

Government support for local authority spending next year will be £34·3 billion—an increase of 1·7 per cent. over 1993-94. That should enable authorities to provide local services at a cost that their council tax payers can afford. The level of council tax is, of course, a decision for each authority and will depend on, among other things, the services that it chooses to provide, how efficiently it can deliver them and how well it collects what it is owed—the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) made. I am therefore not about to start predicting council tax levels. When taxes are set, local people will be able to judge the performance of their councils.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): My right hon. Friend knows about the position in Ealing. The Conservative council there has succeeded in reducing council tax by an average of £100, and for band D it has been reduced by £122. I ask my right hon. Friend to compare that with the spend, spend, spend policies of the loony Labour council in Ealing between 1986 and 1990. When Labour took over in 1986, there were huge reserve balances. When Labour left office in 1990, having trebled the rates, it left a debt of £2,000 on every man, woman and child in Ealing.

Mr. Gummer: I feel that I should declare an interest here. During the week, I live in the London borough of Ealing. Everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) says is true.

I give my hon. Friend an additional piece of information which I am sure that he would like to know. I have had occasion to make some points about Birmingham council in the past. After a long meeting with Councillor Stewart, she has, I am pleased to say, taken my advice. The council has announced that it is likely to reduce its council tax, admittedly by only £22 or £23 for a band C property. At least that authority has seen that it is possible, within this settlement, to do that. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that that says something clear about the settlement which has been made at so difficult a time.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Despite the increase in funding that the Minister announced in his statement before Christmas, the London borough of Newham received a reduction of 2 per cent. Is the Minister not aware that our homeless expenditure in the borough is £12 million a year? His trumpeted new formula, about which he was so confident a few moments ago, provides only £2 million of that amount, so £10 million has to be taken from the standard level of services that even his Government think is necessary. Is that the partnership about which he lectured us for 40 minutes at West Ham town hall?

Mr. Gummer: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was unhappy with my speech on that occasion. A number of his Labour colleagues said how pleased they were with my speech and how pleased they were with the partnership part of it. Partnership is exactly the word. The SSA in Newham, which has been established on the basis of objective criteria, is reduced by 0·8 per cent. To help Newham, it is receiving a damping grant of £13·3 million to help it over that difficult period. Reminding the public of that £13·3 million does not seem to enter into the hon. Gentleman's definition of partnership.

Already, the SSA per head in Newham £1,143—well above the average for outer London, which is £782—and it is the fifth highest in England. Before we go to town on the local pressures of Newham and attack all the hon. Gentleman's local government colleagues who have worked hard and before we refuse to accept that they have been careful, we should remember that their SSA is the fifth highest in England. Many other hon. Members who are representatives of councils may argue with the hon. Gentleman, at least on that.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I want briefly to thank the Secretary of State for what he has said about the decisions that we expect in Birmingham and the £22 reduction in band C council tax. That is coupled with an extra expenditure of some £40 million on education, which for the first time will take us above the standard spending assessment, which has been reduced. We are extremely grateful for that and we make no bones about it. The day Councillor Stewart was elected leader, three days before the Prime Minister made his speech at the Tory party conference, she uttered the words that in Birmingham we are going "back to basics"—and she meant what she said.

Mr. Gummer: I do not wish to enter into the painful situation of Birmingham city council, where the present leader thinks that the policies of the previous leader were all wrong, as both leaders are of the same party. When one wants to find divisions, one usually finds them in the Labour party, at least between those two. It was convenient that Councillor Sir Richard Knowles was in charge of the Labour party in Birmingham for a long time——

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Not two minutes like George Gardiner.

Mr. Gummer: It was not two minutes. He carried out policies which have been entirely thrown out by Councillor Stewart. I am pleased that Councillor Stewart has taken my advice and I hope to have further meetings with her. Perhaps we can do even better than the £22 reduction.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I welcome the revenue support grant settlement for 1994-95 as it affects local authorities in my constituency, and especially the significant increases in the standard spending assessments for Broxbourne, East Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield. May I therefore congratulate my right hon. Friend on his decision to base the SSA formulae on more up-to-date expenditure data and to incorporate information from the 1991 census? That has certainly significantly benefited the

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments, which were supported by the Select Committee on the Environment in its recent report. It is also clear from that report that Newham would have done worse under the Labour party than for the reasons for which the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) thinks that he ought to attack me. I notice that Labour Members supported an amendment which would have meant that Newham, like the rest of London, would not have benefited from the area costs allowance. I hope that the hon. Member for Newham, South will ask his colleagues why they voted for that amendment. I should like to know whether Opposition Front-Bench spokemen also support that view.

I wonder whether the hon. Member for Newham, South has noticed that the proposal would remove about £54 million from Newham and would involve nearly £1,000 million for the whole of London. When people talk about money for London, I hope that everyone will notice that Labour Members on the Select Committee on the Environment wanted to take action which would have affected £1,000 million of money for London.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Where do you get all this?

Mr. Gummer: I get it from the record of the Select Committee and that is a very suitable place to get it from. No doubt the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) will wish to speak to his colleagues. The proposal might help Workington, but it certainly will not help London.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The Secretary of State is providing information of which I was not aware. I will go away and study it assiduously as soon as possible. However, does he not accept that there are still many people, including some of my hon. Friends, who feel that London receives far too much by way of resources? That is absolutely wrong. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, according to the latest indices for urban and local authority deprivation, Newham is number one? London is not studded with meat pies. There are areas of deprivation in London that are as bad as, if not worse than, any other place in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: In a spirit of cross-party support, I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. It is perfectly true that London has particularly difficult circumstances. That is why the area cost adjustment is there and why it is not, as the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) suggested,

"the result of political judgment rather than statistical fact."

[Mr. Gummer]

As the Minister responsible for London, perhaps I may ask the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) to have a word with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish and make it clear that we are talking about an objective effort. When the area cost adjustment was queried last year, we took a great deal of trouble when we examined the statistical base. The statistics suggested that the figures had been underestimated rather than overestimated in the past, so the new statistics have been taken into account.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West would want to press that case very strongly. When we consider the figures, it is clear that interference would involve £26 million in Haringey, £35 million in Camden, £45 million in Hackney, £37 million in Islington and £53 million in Lambeth.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: You have got it wrong.

Mr. Gummer: The facts are clear. According to the Select Committee report and the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish,

"the Area Cost Adjustment is the result of political judgment rather than statistical fact."

I thought that the Labour party wanted statistical fact rather than political judgment. No doubt Labour would be happy for Tower Hamlets to lose £45 million on that basis.

Sir Anthony Grant: I apologise for interrupting my right hon. Friend again. With regard to the area cost adjustment, I make no comment about London. However, it produces very peculiar results. The most peculiar result of all is that Cambridgeshire receives no benefit from the area cost adjustment while Bedfordshire, which is right next door, does. That is quite absurd.

Mr. Gummer: One of the problems is that those who win are fond of it, and those who do not win are not fond of it. We have taken the most extensive statistical efforts to discover the facts. I went into all this thinking that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish and some of my hon. Friends might be right. After all, Suffolk receives no benefit from the area cost adjustment. However, when I examined the facts, and when the figures were examined with great care, we concluded that the figures supported the case.

I realise that these matters are difficult and I am sure that they are not easy for the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) to understand. However, when the work has been carried out so assiduously and in company with the now Labour-dominated local authority associations it is unsuitable and odd for Opposition Members to suggest that as the proposal does not suit their constituencies it must be the result of a political judgment.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why it is that in most areas the allocation per primary pupil is more than £3,000, whereas in places like Tameside and Stockport the corresponding figure is less than £2,000? Given that teachers are paid on a national scale and that those in London receive a small additional allowance, it is remarkable that certain London boroughs need to spend twice as much on a pupil as do many areas in the north-west of England. Can the right hon. Gentleman claim that the situation is based on statistical fact rather than on political judgement?

Mr. Gummer: I can not only claim it—I can state that it is utterly true. We are dealing here with statistical fact. This is not just my claim. People from all political parties have gone through the facts in detail in an effort to demonstrate that the situation is different. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, but as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West will no doubt agree, there are very clear reasons, in terms of total employment costs, ethnic mix, and so on, for the differences.

When facts relating to a matter of concern to all parties are trawled and they all come to the same conclusion, it is nonsense for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that everybody—including members of his own party—is engaging in some sort of plot to prevent his constituents from receiving money to which they are entitled. We must all try very hard to ensure that the public are not outrageously misled on a matter of this sort. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will think about that.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I must try to make some progress, as I am sure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will agree. I shall try at a later stage to facilitate hon. Members who have been trying to intervene.

We must look closely at the spending priorities of local government and take any opportunities to improve its efficiency. In particular, pay accounts for about 70 per cent. of local authority budgets—teachers' pay alone accounts for about 25 per cent.—so we expect pay awards and pay bills to be kept within what is affordable. We have just received the 1994 report of the school teachers' pay review body, along with those of other review bodies, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced the Government's response. For the teachers, we propose to accept the recommendation for a 2·9 per cent. increase. I believe that that award will be affordable provided that local authorities are realistic and sensible in their budgeting.

Of course pay increases have to be paid for, and this must be achieved through improved efficiency and increased productivity. There will be no extra money. We cannot go on putting more and more taxpayers' money into local authority budgets to cover pay increases that simply cannot be afforded. That is the challenge that everyone in the public sector has to face, and I believe that sensible, efficient local authorities will be able to rise to it.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The right hon. Gentleman has just announced that the teachers' pay award will be 2·9 per cent. That exceeds by far what local authority budgets provide for. The right hon. Gentleman has said that the settlement will have to be paid for by improved efficiency and increased productivity. As the principal way in which schools can increase their efficiency is by increasing class sizes and cutting numbers of teachers, may we take it that this salary increase will be paid for by job cuts?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman fails to remember the explanation that he himself gave in "The Walden Interview" of 14 October 1990, which was before the last general election, when he said:

> "The most challenging issue in education is not so much the issue of resources but how you manage the service."

The hon. Gentleman was quite right. It is perfectly possible to manage the service through efficient use of teaching, back-up and administration staff. Account must be taken of the way in which, in the case of many Labour-controlled areas, central administration costs so much.

In all these areas it is possible to achieve the efficiency by means of which many costs can be met. The hon. Gentleman tried this year when he was shadow Minister of Education. Every year, he claimed that the only way to meet the teachers' pay bill was to reduce the number of teachers, and he put forward figures which in the event turned out not to be so. What I look for are local authorities which start not by reducing jobs but by reducing bureaucracy and inefficiency, and which look to ways of saving money rather than——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I think that I should give way to my hon. Friend who is Chairman of the Select Committee.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Will my right hon. Friend join me in praising the primary schools in the Dacorum district of Hertfordshire which have set up purchasing consortia? They have agreed to share attendances at outside conferences and working parties so that not every school is denuded of staff at the same time, and they are ably demonstrating that costs can be reduced and services can be improved.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right in his reference to Dacorum. Perhaps it might be said that Dacorum is doing precisely what the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said that he would like councils to do when he said that it is not the issue of resources but now the service is managed that matters. Not only that: he also said that the bill for teachers is so enormous that it is difficult to pay it. Of course that is true, and we must find ways of doing it through efficiency.

Mr. William O'Brien: Will the Secretary of State pay attention to the authorities that make up the Webber Craigh Group, of which Wakefield—my authority—is one? In the past, that group's expenditure has been suppressed because of the lack of rate support grant. This year an adjustment has been made, and we congratulate the Minister and his colleages on that. Because expenditure was suppressed over the years, we are now finding it difficult to make the economies referred to by the Minister. Now that the second level of rate support grant has been reasonably set, will he also set the cap at a reasonable level to meet the demand for services in the Webber Craigh Group, especially Wakefield?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the excellent work that that group has done on these issues. Some of the background work on unemployment and morbidity that has been done there is of great help, and I would not like in any way to underestimate what that is. I am happy to look at any of the specific issues raised by the hon. Gentleman because this authority group has sought to find ways of facing up to some of the real issues.

This is another example of the sort of area in which we have tried to be closer to the realities in the new SSA formula. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the difficulty is that when it has been favourable it tends to be commented on favourably, but when it happens to have reduced the SSA in an area it is not quite so popular. However, I will certainly look at the points raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): My local authority is also a member of the Webber Craigh Group of authorities. As the Minister and his colleagues know, it has worked hard to get economic indicators as part of the SSAs, and all of us are grateful that the Government have accepted that. Over the past three years, we have had to make savage cuts in our services because of the reform that happened then. Now that the Minister has put that situation right, will he consider that perhaps we are entitled to a little something from the Government for the years that have already passed?

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that one of the problems about changing this is that those who benefited from the previous situation understandably say that they cannot possibly change now because they have got used to it, and that they must have some help in changing when they have to lower their spending because they got too much in the past. Those who find that the change is in their favour come to me and say that that means that they must have had too little in the past and therefore need extra support now because of that.

If we are to have a system whereby we are willing to react properly to real and sensible points made by local authorities, we must draw a clean line and say that we will start again from this point and do it as well as we can. Otherwise, the temptations not to change when change is necessary would be great, and I do not want to succumb to those temptations: I want to have a system that we are willing to change when a good case is put to us. The economic indicators aspect is important and I appreciate the work done by various local authorities of very different political views on which we have been able to depend.

We can expect the usual demands from Labour members for higher spending. Of course, it is a little more difficult this time because the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) would undoubtedly have a word or two to say about that. If one reads the local government press, one sees that many in the local government world are saying that they were expecting a tougher settlement—a cash standstill or worse.

An article in the magazine *Public Treasurer*, which I am sure is prescribed bed-time reading, last month said:

> "The local authority finance settlement has come to resemble an elaborate *pas de deux*"—

I am not sure whether I wish to do a pas de deux with the hon. Gentleman.

> "After the announcement, councils warn of dire cuts in jobs and services."

The article goes on to quote Mr. Tony Travers, a leading independent expert on local government finance, as believing that local authorities last year

> "overstepped the mark and caused themselves embarrassment"

when the number of jobs lost

> "failed to come near their earlier doom-laden predictions".

Of course, that happens year after year.

In December, the *Local Government Chronicle* said of last year's prophecies:

> "It is obvious many of the more vocal councils were crying wolf and their supposed job cuts have failed to materialise."

I have no doubt that we will have the same from Labour members this year.

Our grant distribution has one simple aim: to ensure that the available resources are divided fairly so that all

[Mr. Gummer]

authorities are placed on an equal footing. Achieving that, however, is far from simple. In evidence to the Environment Committee recently, the local authority associations agreed—I point this out to the hon. Member for Blackburn, who has made some opposite remarks—that

> "The distribution of grant to 420 authorities in England on an equitable basis is a complex task and it is not surprising that the extensive analysis and research over the years has shown that there are no simple answers."

I have already referred to the thorough review of the calculation of SSAs that we have carried out over the past 12 months. That review was prompted by the need to incorporate new data on social conditions which are now available from the 1991 census. I am pleased that the review of SSAs has been carried out in close co-operation with the local authority associations. A lot of hard work has been done, and my ministerial colleagues met delegations from individual local authorities to hear their views and discuss their ideas.

I refer to the views of the Audit Commission. The Commission published its own study and noted that the SSA system

> "is a more sophisticated system for equalising needs than any overseas system examined in this study and it is an improvement on its predecessor in many respects."

I think that we can accept that as a fairly widely held view. I acknowledge and thank the Environment Committee for its timely report on SSAs. The Committee took evidence from a wide range of people. I am gratified that one of the Committee's first conclusions is:

> "We welcome the openness with which this year's SSA review has been carried out, and we trust that this approach will continue in future years".

One of its final conclusions is:

> "We recognise that the changes to the SSA methodology this year have led to some common-sense improvements in the 1994/95 proposals."

I hope that the hon. Member for Newham, South will take that for the important——

Mr. Spearing *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I am sorry that I tempted the hon. Gentleman. I really want to get on, but I will give way.

Mr. Spearing: I suspect that the Environment Committee did what is usually called a "quickie". I think that the Secretary of State will find that the Committee took limited evidence from three major local government organisations in one day. There was relatively little in terms of memoranda and the Committee did not address the question of homelessness which I put to the Minister in my earlier remarks.

Mr. Gummer: I do not want to move too closely into the definition of "quickies". The document has more than 100 pages, so I should have thought that the process was fairly lengthy. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman should dismiss so cavalierly the evidence of the three local authority associations, all of which are dominated by his party. The hon. Gentleman's local authority has the fifth highest standard spending assessment in the country, and it is difficult to see how he can complain.

Mr. Tracey: I wish to raise a point with my right hon. Friend regarding the Select Committee report. I was interested to read what the report said about the funding of London. Was my right hon. Friend surprised, as I was, to find that Labour Members have suggested that the day visitor principle—one of the principles relating to the calculation of SSA—should be examined? If that principle were to be changed radically, that would seriously affect the number of London boroughs and, of course, it would affect also the number of other parts of the country which are controlled by Labour authorities?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to point to that element, which has been introduced for the first time and has been widely welcomed. My hon. Friend might like to put together a list of the reductions in money coming to London which would have arisen if the proposals made by the Labour group on the Select Committee were carried through. That piece of information might be of use, not only to the House, but to a wider audience.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The Secretary of State made an error when he said that Newham was fifth last year; it is now 10th. Does not the index with which he is working with Manchester university put Newham first?

Mr. Gummer: I was referring to this year, which is still 1993-94. We are talking about next year. If Newham is 10th next year, and the hon. Gentleman finds the whole system unacceptable because of that, he is being a little idiosyncratic in the defence of a system. There is also the significant dampening grant of more than £11 million.

Mr. Leighton: The grant was £13 million.

Mr. Gummer: It is kind of the hon. Gentleman to make sure that I did not understate my point. A figure of £13 million for next year is not unreasonable to help people over the change from fifth to 10th. I hope that the co-operation which we have enjoyed will continue, because one must have a system which provides fairness and objectivity.

It is important that it is not a matter of central Government versus local government, and that the system tries to share out the money in the most effective way. Therefore, these matters must not be party political, but they must be political matters as they involve the distribution next year of over £17 billion in revenue support grant. Grant distribution is therefore not something that I can delegate.

In any settlement, authorities which do badly are tempted to cry foul but that is not the case this year. Greenwich borough council is not one of the Government's greatest supporters—I am sorry about that and I hope that the council will become so—but it says that it

> "has been heartened by the attention paid in the settlement to the points which it put forward."

Northumberland county—again, not a Conservative authority—said:

> "The County Council is greatly encouraged by the changes to SSA methodology."

In his evidence to the Select Committee, Mr. Tony Travers said:

> "A number of commentators have accused SSAs of being politically rigged . . . Yet there is no evidence of such political intervention".

That is why I regret and resent the scurrilous allegations of the Opposition—particularly the hon. Member for Blackburn—that the system is somehow affected by the party political divide. That is clearly not true, and all the independent commentators and Tony Travers have said that in turn. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw that allegation, which is unworthy of him and which is not suitable if we are trying to find the best way to reach an achievement.

It is perfectly proper for the hon. Gentleman to say that more money should be spent, although the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East might object to that. It is perfectly proper for the hon. Gentleman to object to some aspects of the Government's policy on the matter. It is not proper for him to complain about a system which is known to be objective and which is supported as objective by large numbers of the hon. Gentleman's supporters.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Gummer: I ought to move on, but I will keep my eye on the hon. Gentleman who is attempting to intervene.

I do not want to weary the House, and I hope to continue the present system. There may be some changes, but I hope that they will not be too radical so that they can settle down satisfactorily. The methodology that I proposed in December is set out today in the local government finance Report which is before the House.

I do not want to recount all the changes in the methodology, but there is one specific set of changes which have occurred since the start of consultation which I should mention. During the consultation, a number of authorities commented on the data which we had proposed to use in calculating their SSAs. In particular, Havant district council and Tameside metropolitan borough council drew our attention to problems with the data for the number of people claiming housing benefit, which we used in the new economic index. Opposition Members have referred to that.

In the light of representations from the councils, I have adjusted the data used in the SSAs for Havant, and for authorities bordering Manchester. I hope nobody thinks that that is party political. I have done my best to get as near to the objective truth as I can.

A number of other data changes have been made where more up-to-date or accurate figures have become available. For example, we have since the consultation been able to incorporate actual basic credit approvals and the latest estimates of supplementary credit approvals into the calculation of the capital financing element. The latest information on the size of local authorities' local tax bases has been incorporated to grant calculation also. In many cases, the effect of the changes is small but accuracy is important if the system is to continue to have the widespread support which the changes have brought about.

This year's review of SSAs has been thorough and wide ranging. I agree with the Select Committee that

> "there will always be a trade-off between improving the technical content of the SSAs and increasing its complexity."

I hope that we do not need such a wide-ranging review for some time to come.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Minister has quoted selectively from the Committee's report, and he has tried to suggest that the only people who believe that SSAs are not an objective and mathematical equation are Labour members.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Audit Commission said in evidence that by the choice of the data used, their formulation and the weight which they were given, the system could be no more than a covert way of taking political decisions in the distribution of grants?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman ought to read the Audit Commission report more carefully, and he should be much less selective in quoting what the report said.

I will repeat what it said in full so that the hon. Gentleman will not in fact miss this out. The Commission said that the system is

> "a more sophisticated system for equalising needs"—

I cannot think of anything more objective than needs—

> "than any overseas system examined in this study and it is an improvement on its predecessor in many respects."

I find that difficult to square with the selective comments of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): May I thank my right hon. Friend for listening with such care to the representations which were made to him by local authorities in the south-east, and in particular for extending the area cost adjustment? That has resulted in Colchester borough council having an increase in its SSA of 14 per cent. Does he agree that, given that generous settlement, there can be no justification for excessive rises in council tax this year?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is kind to say that we listened to Colchester borough council. We have listened to all who came to us, and we have tried to make as clear a change as possible. Of course, we cannot make changes for individual local authorities. The system is designed to be objective, so it would be wrong to believe that something special can be done for any particular authority. I agree with my hon. Friend that, given the difficulties of the time, the settlement is sufficiently good for people to expect local authorities to make the kind of efficiency savings which will enable them not to have large rises in council tax.

I note that both the London borough of Ealing and the London borough of Brent have announced that they will be reducing their council tax by £100.

It may be that the political complexion of those two authorities explains how they are able to do it against the background of the Labour authorities that they replaced. They may have had a good deal more elbow room. It is more difficult for well-run Conservative councils which have already been extremely good about running their affairs to make such significant decreases. But then people have had the benefit of lower council taxes over the years.

We shall continue to discuss the SSA methodology with the local authority associations. For 1995-96, we will want to consider the treatment of the police element in the light of the proposals in the police Bill. I have also undertaken to have a further look at the way in which the area cost adjustment in the south-east region decreases as one moves away from London.

I appreciate the position of authorities which will see a sizeable reduction in the SSA next year. Despite the firm underlying rationale of the changes that I have proposed, authorities will need time to adjust to those changes. Not only have we created a system that we can stand by as objective, but we have seen that where changes are large there must be some help for people moving from one figure to another.

That is why, in December, I made proposals for a special grant to compensate authorities which have lost more than 2 per cent. of SSA as a result of the incorporation of the new census data, and of the changes stemming from the review. That grant is a generous response to the problems of those authorities and it was

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widely welcomed during the consultation process. The special grant report No. 9 will establish that grant for 1994-95, and some £280 million will be distributed to local authorities in that year.

The SSA reduction grant will ensure that authorities which face a reduction in SSA will not have to make an unreasonable demand on their council taxpayers. I shall look closely at the issue again next year before deciding whether it is justified to continue to damp the year-on-year impact on local taxpayers of the SSA changes.

I announced my intentions for capping for 1994-95 on 2 December. The House will know that I hope that we will not have to have recourse to capping this year. We had few cases of capping last year and I hope that we shall have even fewer this year. Those intentions give effect to the Government's view that local authorities must play their part in controlling public expenditure by setting budgets that taxpayers and the country can afford.

As the House will be aware, capping works in two ways: by limiting budgets which in my view represent too large an increase over the previous year or budgets which are simply too much. In relation to the former, the provisional criteria allow authorities with budgets close to their SSAs larger increases than authorities with budgets which are higher relative to SSA. Those excessive increase criteria remain my firm intentions for 1994-95.

I also announced on 2 December my proposals for relevant notional amounts for certain authorities. "Notional amounts" is not a phrase that I like, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it is one that represents the base from which I shall measure increases in budgets for the purposes of the excessive increase criteria. I proposed notional amounts for authorities which are subject to a change of boundary from 1 April 1994 to take account of the effect of their budgets of changes in their area and population. A small number of authorities made representations to us on those proposals.

In those cases where authorities have submitted information which in our view provides the basis for a better assessment of the effect on their budgets, I have specified a revised notional amount which will be used —if the House approves the notional amounts report—as the basis of the operation of the excessive increase criteria. In all other cases, the notional amounts specified in the report are those originally proposed. So we have tried always to go along with local authorities where they have come armed with effective proof.

On absolute excessiveness, we have considered whether authorities which are subject to a substantial reduction in SSA as a result of the changes that we have made following the SSA review and the incorporation of data from the 1991 census should be required to reduce their budgets in cash terms. Authorities could not necessarily have anticipated the scale of those reductions and they may need more time in which to adjust their expenditure. I hope that Opposition Members will accept that, again, I have tried to find a way of helping those authorities which could not protect themselves in advance, even in circumstances in which their overall excessive expenditure ought to have made them wish to reduce it.

In order to help, it is my intention that authorities with budgets more than 12·5 per cent. above SSA, of which the SSA has been reduced by at least 5 per cent., as measured for the purposes of SSA reduction grant, should not be required to make more than a cash freeze on their budget for the previous year in order to avoid designation for capping. In all other respects, the provisional absolute excessiveness criterion which I announced on 2 December remains my firm intention.

As for start-up costs of local government reorganisation, we have announced details of a scheme for 1994-95 to allow authorities to borrow for certain costs. I have previously announced that if authorities include in their budgets any reorganisation costs, as defined in the scheme, those costs would be disregarded for the purposes of capping. That remains my intention.

I would not, however, expect provision to be made for significant expenditure by authorities other than those which are to be reorganised from 1 April 1995. Authorities should be quite clear that, when I take my capping decisions, I may come to a different view on the treatment of reorganisation costs. It would, for example, be open to me to decide to take account of all or part of that provision for capping purposes, if authorities had used it as a means which clearly was not part of what was designated or sensible for reorganisation.

This year's settlement shows the Government's determination to take tough decisions on public spending, while recognising the importance of local services and of providing authorities with the resources that they need to provide those services at a reasonable cost to their taxpayers. It also demonstrates the Government's wish to see a fair distribution of the available resources on a robust basis which uses the most up-to-date information. It shows above all that the Government are willing to listen to local government——

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): what about an elected authority for London?

Mr. Gummer: —and to co-operate in improving the systems within which local authorities must operate.

Some of the examples which the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) would have heard if he had been here, many of which related to London, show that, when we have listened to local authorities, we have changed our proposals to fit what they have asked for. All the SSA changes were changes that the local authorities themselves sought, and we sought to meet.

Mr.Corbyn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman—to whom I shall not give way—would have been better advised to listen carefully to the points that I made. Yet again, I was able to show——

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to refer to a Member in disparaging terms and then refuse to give way to him to allow him to defend himself?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): It is entirely a matter for the Minister, or any other Member who has the Floor, whether he decides to give way or not. It is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Corbyn: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have dealt with it.

Mr. Corbyn: What is the convention on the matter?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been here for many years and he knows of many ways in which he might pursue any complaint.

Mr. Gummer: I was coming to the last sentence, but I should like to say, so that the hon. Gentleman should not feel that I have been unfair to him and in response to his intervention from a seated position about London, that I was able to deal with London. I mentioned that his colleagues on the Select Committee suggested measures which, if they were carried through, would remove £1,000 million from London. Others of his colleagues in the Opposition wanted us to change the SSA on daily visits. That again would take money from London.

The hon. Gentleman should have been here to hear that, because he could have interrupted me to say how pleased he was that I was fighting for London. I am sure that he is pleased that I am fighting for London, and that he will fight with me for London against his honourable colleagues.

Mr. Corbyn: I am deeply grateful to the Minister for giving way at last. I really appreciate it. I want him to know that. While he is on the subject of London, he will just occasionally have picked up the argument for an elected authority for London so that London's planning, transport, housing and other issues can be properly co-ordinated. Every other capital city around the world—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Obviously, the Minister's colleagues are upset.

I should be grateful if the Minister would let me know what he says to Londoners when they respond to his document by asking for the return of an elected authority for London that could help to solve London's problems and enable London to speak with one voice.

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to say that, of all the issues that Londoners want to talk about, an elected authority is pretty well down the list, even if they want to talk about it at all. It is interesting that, with our enormous investment in the London tube system, we are paying for all those years when the Greater London council did not invest in that system. In almost every case, the all-enveloping London authority wasted thousands of millions of pounds. It also left behind enormous problems, which are now being suitably met both by elected boroughs and by the involvement of Government in the enormous investment in London.

I commend the settlement to the House. It is a fair settlement in a difficult year and it has been recognised as such across the board. It has wide support and we have sought to achieve a fairer system of sharing out the money. I am pleased that many different authorities, of all political complexions, have suggested that what we have done is well done.

5.10 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): In July 1979, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) announced his strategy to set local government free. He said:

> "We will sweep away tiresome and excessive control over local government. They do not need, they do not want, the fussy supervision of detail that now exists."

But 15 years on, the reality is very different. Each of the 144 Acts of Parliament affecting local government that has been passed since then has restricted its rights, increased the tiresome and excessive control of which the right hon. Gentleman spoke and extended

> "the fussy supervision of detail".

The party that once campaigned to roll back the frontiers of the central state has been responsible for a massive extension of the powers of the central state. In an article just last week in *The Guardian*, a former Conservative education Minister, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) said that the result of the past 15 years has meant

> "the virtual destruction of the autonomy of local government".

In Britain, local government is more centrally controlled than it is anywhere in the western world, in Europe or outside the old Soviet Union. The Conservative party of Joseph Chamberlain now has a local government policy of which Joseph Stalin would have been proud. The key to the central state power that Ministers now exercise over England's 400 local councils and 24,000 councillors is capping.

The first objection to capping is that it patently undermines local democracy and local accountability. That view is widely understood across the parties and was even a few years ago. In her memoirs, Lady Thatcher records that the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Chris Patten, was

> "strongly opposed to any kind of comprehensive capping of local authorities. He argued against it . . . on the grounds that it would undermine the principle of local accountability".

The second objection to capping is on the grounds of fairness. As long as local government draws a substantial part of its revenue from central Government—that will continue for ever into the distance—there will have to be as fair a system as possible for the distribution of that grant to recipient local authorities. That was the purpose of the standard spending assessment system when it was established in the late 1980s. At that time, as the Audit Commission made clear in its report "Passing the Bucks" published last March, and the Select Committee on Environment repeated in its report:

> "SSAs were now being used for tasks for which they were not orginally designed."

The Secretary of State comprehensively failed to mention that in his quotations from the Committee's report, which were so selective that I seriously doubt whether he has read or comprehended it.

The Audit Commission report continued:

> "The manner in which SSAs are used to limit council expenditure has confused accountability for local services between central and local government."

That is obviously the case because, as the Audit Commission said, when the SSA system was established, less than 50 per cent. of total local authority revenue was controlled by the SSA system. Now, 80 per cent. of local government revenue is directly dictated by the SSA system and the total spending of every authority is controlled by its SSA.

If one uses a machine in a way for which it was not designed, one imposes intolerable stresses on it for which no design solution exists, and the result will be irrational, unpredictable and, in the case of SSAs, profoundly unfair. I am glad that every member of the Select Committee recognised that truth. Again, the Secretary of State stayed silent on this statement by the Committee:

> "We appreciate that the use of SSAs in the capping process is putting pressure on the SSA system. We recommend the

[Mr. Jack Straw]

"Department address the problem of how to reduce the pressure on SSAs as a result of using them in the capping process and that it considers and evaluates alternative approaches."

The SSA system is literally a zero sum gain, to use the jargon. One council's improvement is another council's loss: a reform made here will lead to a perceived injustice there.

However fair Ministers may claim to be in making judgments about the system, some of the conclusions defy human experience and understanding. Under the new social index, Hove in Sussex ranks as a region of greater social need than Liverpool; Runnymede ranks as more deprived than Wolverhampton. Ministers must understand that those absurdities would matter far less if councils had the freedom and flexibility in their revenue base to set their own tax levels and were not the subject of the most monstrous gearing penalties, under which, for every £1 change in their grant, there is typically a £4 change in the level of their council tax.

The third objection to universal capping is that it does not work on its own terms—it lacks utility. Of course many councils, particularly those in high-stress urban regions, have had their budgets forced down well below the levels necessary to maintain a decent level of service year after year. Many authorities have been forced to cut out discretionary but important sectors of spending. There are also councils, however, whose budgets have been forced up by the capping process and are above the levels that the local electorate and councillors thought appropriate.

In January 1993, Ernest Mallet, the Conservative leader of Elmbridge district council in Surrey, described the capping system as a joke. He said that, in his view, it encouraged councils to "spend up". He added:

"if there were no capping, our spending would probably be about £1 million—[or 8 per cent.] lower".

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Mr. David Curry): The hon. Gentleman has chosen the worst example that he could give. The spending of the council to which he referred is 49 per cent. above its SSA. It is about the only place in the country where his thesis is unsustainable. Capping is pulling down that expenditure and ought to pull it down. That irresponsible council needs to be taught a lesson.

Mr. Straw: I am talking about a Conservative council and about what happened in 1993. The Minister should listen rather than quote silly figures. I have used the argument on that council before and it has never been contradicted by Ministers in the past. Mr. Ernest Mallet said that if there were no capping, the council's spending would be about £1 million lower.

Ministers have played their part in the process. While Environment Ministers, as we have seen, have attacked local authorities for spending too much, education Ministers have attacked the same local authorities for allegedly spending too little. That was precisely the position that Birmingham council was in year after year. It was caught in a vice of Ministers' making. Environment Ministers said that it was spending too much, but education Ministers, year after year, complained that it was spending too little.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said that Birmingham had seen the error of its ways and was trying to make a virtue out of spending more on education. It set a budget that plans for the maintenance of services, but the budget speech did not once refer to the loss of a single job in Birmingham. If the hon. Gentleman's thesis were correct, Elmbridge district council's spending could not be 49 per cent. above its SSA because it would have been capped. He cannot say that its spending would be £1 million lower if it were not for the system. Its spending is 49 per cent. above the SSA. It is one of the councils about which the truth is very clear, but capping is reducing that expenditure.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman will have to take that matter up with the Conservative leader of Elmbridge council. I was referring to what that gentleman said in January 1993. His figures were correct. There is plenty of evidence to show that capping authorities that were spending under their standard spending assessments—that applies to some small districts and to other authorities—put political pressure on them to spend up to their SSAs, thus using the assessments as a control figure for which they were never intended.

The Minister of State mentioned Birmingham. He may not realise—this is also incontrovertible—that having spent years complaining about the fact that Birmingham was spending too little on education, this year he and his colleagues at the Department for Education have cut the amount that it can spend on education by £18 million, so this year Birmingham is spending above its SSA. On this occasion, will he condemn or congratulate Birmingham for doing what last year Education Ministers called for but Environment Ministers damned—spending more on education?

Mr. Curry: The answer is plain. We have always made it clear that spending is not hypothecated. That is one of the firmest principles of the SSA system and it was sustained by the Select Committee on the Environment. Spending on education is therefore a matter for Birmingham. Of course we must distribute grant according to some sort of methodology and education is one of the elements, but once the grant arrives in Birmingham the council can spend it on what it wants. It may not be wise, but it is legal and that is the essence of the matter.

Mr. Straw: I am glad to have that on the record and I support the principle. Perhaps the Minister and the Secretary of State—who also takes that view, I think—will talk to their colleagues and especially to the Secretary of State for Education and stop him from saying something wholly different from the message that we just heard from the Minister.

The problem is that the system ends with something reminiscent of the 1970s incomes policies so despised by the Conservative party. In place of local discretion and negotiations with electors there is a national going rate, regardless of local circumstances. On a normal distribution curve, the pattern of spending before capping is translated into a single vertical line.

As a delegate to the Conservative party conference last autumn, Miss Sarah Whitehouse, put it

"under rate capping"—

meaning the system of capping that we have now—

"you can't tell the difference between Labour and Tory."

I think that one can, but her remarks contain an essential truth, as there is no longer any discretion at a local level enabling people to enter into a bargain with their electors about what they should spend.

What is more, the effect on public spending is perverse. I am not aware that the Treasury and the Department of the Environment have undertaken any studies on the utility of capping. No doubt they are frightened of what they might discover. Several times in his speech the Secretary of State quoted with approval the views of Mr. Tony Travers—a man whom he described as

> "an independent expert on local government finance".

A study by that same Mr. Travers—from the London School of Economics—which was published in July 1992 found that capping had

> "led to higher spending by councils, the opposite result to that intended".

During the debate on housing last week I warned Conservative Members, with my customary concern for their welfare, about the dangers of relying on the briefs produced by Conservative central office. When such giants as Iain Macleod, Rab Butler and Enoch Powell worked there, Conservative central office research department had the enviable reputation that, however disputatious the arguments advanced, its assertion of fact would be beyond question. As standards have plummeted as much inside the Tory party as they have within the Conservative Government, much of that department's material is now tendentious, inaccurate or downright mendacious in the extreme.

Ten days ago central office, panic-stricken by the effects of Labour's exposure of the Conservatives' tax fraud at the last election, produced the so-called list of Labour spokespeople's alleged spending commitments that I have here. In it, central office alleged that the cost of ending capping and compulsory competitive tendering—as I made clear in a speech in Brighton on 1 October 1993—would be £800 million. Were the Secretary of State or his political advisers or officials consulted about that figure? Where did it come from? If not, was the statement a straightforward invention—like so many statements from Conservative central office? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I am happy to give way to the Secretary of State at any moment.

When will he and central office wake up to the truth that the policy that we intend to adopt on local government finance is, with one important additional safeguard, precisely that policy outlined by the Prime Minister, in the White Paper that I have here, when he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury in July 1988? When the White Paper was produced the Secretary of State was a local government Minister, so I assume that he had something to do with it and approved of what it said.

In the White Paper the Government announced that they would

> "in future exclude expenditure from the public expenditure planning total which local authorities finance or determine for themselves."

It went on to explain why they intended to do so, saying:

> "The present procedures lump together expenditure for which the Government has different degrees of responsibility. This blurs the status of the various aggregates—grant on the one hand and locally raised finance on the other. A further disadvantage is that by counting the total expenditure of local authorities in the planning total insufficient attention is paid to the grants that central government provide to local authorities."

It went on to say:

> "Very few other industrial countries plan public spending in this way. For federal states, such as Germany, the United States or Canada, this would conflict with their federal constitutions but even in other unitary states such as France or the Netherlands the Government generally makes budgetary plans only for central government expenditure . . . the new process of public expenditure control would be enhanced by redefining the planning total so that it distinguishes expenditure which was the responsibility of central Government from that which is the responsibility of local government",

which would be excluded from that planning total.

I am not surprised that the Secretary of State is burying himself in his notes on the Bench. The crucial question is, if that policy was right then and he endorsed it, what—apart from the monumental mismanagement of the Secretary of State and his colleagues in the Cabinet, which has brought the economy to such a low point—has changed since? That policy was sensible and is the one that we shall adopt.

As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said in his excellent article in *The Guardian* last week:

> "We should end capping, re-establish local government and allow it to resume its traditional right to act on behalf of local communities, answerable to them through the electoral process."

Mr. Tracey: While the hon. Gentleman is on the question of policy, will he say what is the Labour party's policy on councils that do not collect council tax in such great measure?

Mr. Straw: Our policy on Labour, Tory, Liberal or any other council that does not collect council tax is that it must do so. We have only one policy; it is the same for the collection of local and central Government taxes. The hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) should devote as much attention—proportionately more, given the weight of the problem—to the collection of Inland Revenue taxes by the Government as he devotes to the minor problems associated with collection of the council tax. It is a scandal that £1·7 billion of income tax and other central taxes are uncollected. When will the hon. Gentleman start to condemn his hon. Friends for that?

On top of that, I hope that the hon. Member for Surbiton will look at the appropriation accounts for 1992-93, which spell out the extent to which Ministers are complicit in tax dodging in the black economy—that is in addition to the £1·7 billion of tax that has been levied but not collected. The Inland Revenue and the Public Accounts Committee say that there may be an annual tax loss in the black economy of several thousand million pounds per annum. That is in paragraph 171, vol. 12 of the appropriation accounts. The hon. Gentleman needs to spend more time doing that instead of nit-picking at the excellent record of most Labour authorities.

Mr. Gummer: May I bring the hon. Gentleman back to local government? If the London borough of Southwark is not collecting its council tax, it cannot spend it. Does the hon. Gentleman support the proposals of the London borough of Southwark to put council tax collection out to tender?

Mr. Straw: I support the right of democratically elected councillors of Southwark to make their own decisions. The Secretary of State is a centralist and believes that he should make the decisions for every single council in the land.

Mr. Curry *rose*——

Mr. Straw: The Ministers are now doing a Mutt and Jeff act. I will give way to Jeff.

Mr. Curry: In an article this morning, the hon. Gentleman said that part of his formula for local government was a universal system of election by thirds. Is that telling local government what to do or leaving it the choice?

Mr. Straw: That is an absurd proposition.

Mr. Curry: Well, the hon. Gentleman suggested it.

Mr. Straw: The Minister is making the utterly absurd proposition that local government should entirely write its own rules. Of course it should not do that. *[Interruption.]* Local government is part of the national democratic framework, or should be—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are too many sedentary interruptions. I am also concerned that instead of debating local government finance, we are now discussing other matters which may be related but are not the heart of the matter we are debating now.

Mr. Straw: I say parenthetically that the Secretary of State does not even know what the rules are.

By law, without discretion, in every metropolitan borough there are elections by thirds, except in one year when there is a bye. In London boroughs, there are elections every four years. In the shire districts, there are either elections by thirds or all-outs every four years. In the shire counties they are once every four years. That is a rag-bag of a system. Democratic accountability could be improved by elections by thirds everywhere and by changing the financial year so that the local elections each year could genuinely be a test of the local authorities' financial proposals to their electorate.

Mr. Rooker: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is a fundamental principle that there is a direct and specific connection between local government finance and accountability at the ballot box? The House is the Parliament of the nation—it is our duty to write the rules. One of the rules that we should like to write would provide for annual elections. I have repeatedly asked the Government to restore annual elections, even in Birmingham, to give us back the missing year from the abolition of the county council. It is wrong that one year in four should be missing and that London should have the chance to vote only once every four years.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is exactly right. Our proposal of annual elections is very popular with the electorate. They want the chance to choose; why is the Secretary of State denying it? I am astonished that it has become a partisan issue. We should all be agreed on it as it extends accountability.

Mr. Gummer: Let me bring the hon. Gentleman back to the collection of council tax. I am not asking him whether he would insist that Southwark does that, but the public would like to know, as he has been extremely diffident in his advice. Is he or is he not in favour of contracting out, and would he or would he not support the London borough of Southwark? It is perfectly reasonable to ask whether he would or would not support it—or does he not know?

Mr. Straw: Although I am not in favour of compulsory competitive tendering, as I believe in local democracy, I believe that local authorities have a right to decide whether their services should be directly delivered or put out to contractors. If Southwark decides that that is the most appropriate way to collect the council tax, I will support Southwark's right to make that decision. It could not be clearer.

I am sorry that the Secretary of State has turned accountability into a partisan issue as we support greater accountability. If the financial year for local government were changed, as we are proposing, each year's local elections would not only be a test of local government policy but could act as a referendum on the budgetary proposals of local councils.

The Secretary of State had much to say by way of self-congratulation about how well he had done in the public expenditure round. He seemed not to recollect the embarrassing table on page 97 of the Red Book, which shows that his Department suffered the largest cut by far in planned expenditure of any single Department—three times that proposed for the Ministry of Defence which suffered the next highest cut. He also referred to claims made last year about job losses. I notice he could not produce any claim that I had made which turned out to be inaccurate because the claims made by the Opposition turned out to be all too accurate. We did a proper study of the likely effects of last year's settlement upon job losses.

The previous Secretary of State said that there would be no job losses. As the recent study from the Local Government Management Board made clear—a study in which Department of the Environment statisticians take part—there has been a reduction of 50,000 local government staff in the year to September. At least 30,000 of those were reductions in staff as a direct result of the local authority financial settlement last year and not because of transfers to compulsory competitive tendering or of transfers of staff to grant-maintained schools.

It is too early to predict the overall consequences of the settlement, but we know two things. First, there will not be sufficient money to pay teachers and other public servants. What I object to about the Secretary of State's statement and the Government's stance is the pretence. They promise to make the pay award of 2·9 per cent. recommended for teachers, and seek to curry favour with a particular section of the electorate by doing so, but fail to follow that through by providing the necessary resources. As local authorities' administrative expenses as a proportion of the total are now tiny, many local authorities will have to pay for teachers' pay awards increases with the jobs of other teachers.

The settlement will have a severe effect on some local authorities. Liverpool is one example. Under the ludicrous ranking of the new social index, Liverpool is only the 85th most deprived area of the country, below Salisbury, Bath, Hereford and other green and pleasant cathedral towns. In the real world, however, simple observation shows that Liverpool has one of the worst concentrations of social and economic problems, not just in the United Kingdom but in the whole of western Europe.

The Government know that that is true. That is why they supported Merseyside's successful argument for objective 1 status, which revealed that the average income of households in the region was only 79 per cent. of the EC average. That great city, responsibly led by Harry Rimmer and his colleagues, now for its pain faces a gratuitous cut of £4·5 million in its SSA. Most of that is explained by an absurd cut—not offset by other improvements—of £11·5 million in its SSA for children.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): The Secretary of State made several references to the fact that the Government were accommodating, flexible, ready to meet local authorities and hear their objections. We have faced capping and cuts. The city council then decided to commission Miss Rita Hale as a consultant and took its case to the Minister of State. Is my hon. Friend aware that it went away with another cut of £100,000 in its grant? That is another gratuitous kick in the teeth for the city council.

Mr. Straw: Yes, I am aware of that. I was saddened by reports of the meeting, and I hope that the Minister will consider Liverpool's problems again.

As we know—not least from the harrowing James Bulger trial last year—Liverpool's problems in relation to children at risk are no less severe than those of other areas. Where is the rationale in earmarking a 30 per cent. cut in Liverpool's spending on children at risk and on other children's services? That is irrational and is bound to be harmful. The vice in which Liverpool is now caught is a direct result of the total central control that Whitehall—200 miles away—now exercises over Liverpool city council's ability to solve its problems.

Mr. Wareing: My hon. Friend mentioned that the European Commission had granted objective 1 status to Merseyside: it recognised the area's problems. Liverpool fears, however, that not much money will be available to meet objective 1 aims. All other programmes have been cut, and the Merseyside development corporation is likely to be phased out by 1997. We are told that the European objective is to create employment and services for the people of Merseyside—contrary to the aims of the gauleiters who reign from Marsham street. If the gauleiters are to review Liverpool's programme, they should consider the need to match the objective 1 funds.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is entirely right: he has illustrated the extent of Liverpool's financial problems.

Within living memory, the Conservative party and its allies the progressives held sway in Liverpool, as they did in many other great towns and cities. Now, the Conservatives have been reduced to a rump in local government. That may explain why so few Conservative Members are present for this debate, why so few were present for the debate on housing, and two weeks ago, in the debate on the flagship policy of the national business rate, why for hours on end not one was in the Chamber to support Ministers.

The Conservatives now control just 10 London boroughs, one metropolitan borough and one shire county. In contrast, Labour has never been stronger in local government, with good reason: people know that Labour provides a higher level of service and better value for money than either of the other main parties.

Of the 10 councils with the best record on nursery education, seven are Labour-controlled; none is controlled by the Tories. In Labour areas, 40 per cent. of three and four-year-olds have the chance of a nursery education; in Conservative areas, the figure is only a third of that—just 13 per cent. Of the five local education authorities with the best record on class sizes, three are Labour, while four of the five worst LEAs are Conservative-controlled. Contrary to what was said by the Secretary of State, class sizes have risen as a result of the intense squeeze on LEAs.

Of the 16 most efficient councils named last year by the *Local Government Chronicle*, eight are Labour, while just two are Conservative. Of the 25 most efficient housing authorities named before Christmas by the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction, 11 are Labour-controlled, three are Labour-dominated, and only four are Conservative.

Collection rates have been mentioned. Far the worst council in regard to rent arrears is Conservative Brent. It is owed £16·8 million—a third of its rent roll. The Conservatives have been in power for four years, and they cannot even collect the rent. If we consult the Department of the Environment's computer to find out which authority has the highest proportion of homes that are available for rent but empty, which authority emerges at the top of the list? I almost hesitate to name it. This authority has only 40 council houses, although 1,463 people are on the waiting list; of those 40 houses, 13—30 per cent.—are empty. I refer to the district council in the Secretary of State's constituency.

Conservative Ealing has the highest council rents by far: £66·06, twice the national average.

Mr. Tracey *rose*——

Mr. Straw: The hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) clearly wants another fact to take around his local estates. Every one of the five councils with the highest rents is a Conservative-controlled London borough.

Mr. Corbyn: One of the strategies adopted by Westminster council was to leave homes empty, so that the homeless remained on the streets, in hostels or in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, and then sell them to the highest bidder, thus depriving the poor of somewhere to live. Is not the Secretary of State's local authority likely to adopt the same strategy?

Mr. Straw: Yes—and we look forward to hearing some condemnation of what has happened in Westminster. I shall return to that later.

As I think the whole country now knows, average household council tax bills are £14 higher in Conservative areas than in Labour areas, although they generally provide worse services. The Secretary of State said that it was up to councils to set the level of their taxes, but that is not so. The total revenue of councils is set by the Secretary of State in the capping orders and notional amounts: it follows as night follows day that council tax levels all over the country are also effectively being set by the Secretary of State.

Let me warn the Secretary of State and the country that, if his decisions about the relation between capping and SSAs cause average bills to be higher in Labour areas than in Tory areas—contrary to this year's position—that will serve only to confirm our claim that Conservative Ministers tend to favour Conservative rather than Labour authorities. The absolute power of Tory Governments over councils must be accompanied by corresponding responsibilities for council tax levels.

For all the fancy words of the Prime Minister—who said last year that he wanted a "renaissance of local government"—or the Minister's frequent mention of the need for a new consensus, Ministers can rarely bring themselves to praise local government. Instead we are fed a diet of low-grade, mendacious abuse, especially by Conservative central office.

Two weeks ago, it published a dossier on the London borough of Haringey: it is a tissue of fabrications, inaccuracies and downright lies. According to one of its sections, after the demolition of Wood Green and Hornsey

[Mr. Straw]

town halls, a secret report to the Labour group had recommended the sale of a grade 2 town hall for about £5 million.

We can argue about statistics, and we sometimes do; we can argue about political philosophies. It is difficult, however, to argue about whether a building is standing or has been demolished. For the benefit of the Secretary of State, here is a photograph of Hornsey town hall. It is still standing, as is Wood Green town hall.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will my hon. Friend refresh my memory? Was it not Conservative-controlled Kensington and Chelsea council that knocked down a town hall overnight when the preservation order was about to be served?

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps I should point out that this is not a general survey of council properties. We must return to the main thrust of the debate, which concerns local government finance.

Mr. Straw: I entirely accept what you say, Madam Deputy Speaker. The point is that, had those town halls been demolished and had Haringey council lost the money —as Conservative central office alleged—serious spending cuts or a council tax increase would have been necessary. This is not just an aberration in an otherwise impeccable statement about Haringey's record; it is symptomatic of the lack of care and the tissue of innuendos and lies that emanate from Conservative central office.

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to accept that Wood Green and Hornsey town halls are still standing, but can the hon. Gentleman explain why Haringey's long-term debt is double that of Romania?

Mr. Straw: My answer is that, until I see further and better particulars from Conservative central office, I should not dream of accepting that what the Secretary of State said was remotely accurate.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): If the hon. Gentleman is not happy with the documents produced by Conservative central office, I commend to him a document called "Haringey Council" written by the council's deputy leader. It describes the council as having a legacy of waste, inefficiency and centralism and says that it suffered from a crisis of management which still infests the council's culture. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with his own side?

Mr. Straw: No, I do not. Haringey has a very fine record and produced an extremely good rebuttal document which deals with the town hall and the rest of the lies. I recommend it to the hon. Gentleman.

I am glad that he intervened because I understand that he is the chairman of the local government committee of Conservative central office—a part-time post if ever there was one. He racketed from Bradford to Brentwood with failure in his wake. It was he who, as leader of Bradford council, diverted £13 million of housing capital allocation to fund the inner-city ring road, cut £13 million from the education budget in a single year and increased rents by £8, thus losing £8 million in subsidy from the housing revenue account—no wonder Bradford Conservatives lost control as quickly as they had gained it. Now he is in Brentwood and cannot gain the support of his senior party officials.

The *Brentwood Weekly News* of 20 January 1994 states that Mr. Dashwood-Quick, the chairman of West Horndon Conservatives, went on air to say that the Government

> "had a clear lack of responsibility, poor leadership and disregards the views of grass roots Tories who helped get us elected".

He is also reporting as saying:

> "all decisions seem to be governed by a need for expediency rather than what is right."

Mr. Dashwood-Quick was right.

The Secretary of State for the Environment mentioned Birmingham, Britain's second city. Under Labour control, the economy and environment of that great city has been transformed for the better. The programme of public buildings in the centre of the city, from the international convention centre, the symphony hall, the council house and down to New street, makes the area one of the finest cities not only in the United Kingdom but in Europe. It is so fine that the Prime Minister was all too happy to share in the reflected glory for the Birmingham summit in October 1992.

Of course, such programmes of inner-city and urban renewal require vision and cash. Of course, they were bound to cause controversy, but Birmingham Labour leaders and Birmingham Labour party had the courage to see their vision through. No one can gainsay their achievement, except the small-minded partisans among the Conservatives and their lickspittles in the Conservative press.

Last Friday, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment with responsibility for housing, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), issued a tacky, two-page attack on Birmingham, under the heading "Birmingham the Barmiest". However, not even he could bring himself to make his assertions with absolute confidence. He said that Birmingham was coming up on the inside as the new loony left authority but added the important qualification

> "if you believe last week's Mail on Sunday."

My advice to the hon. Gentleman is that it would be dangerous to believe *The Mail on Sunday* last week or any week, as he clearly realised.

In the same disreputable handout, the Minister relies on the *Birmingham Evening Mail*. Virtually every adverse story about Birmingham which appears in the national papers begins life in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* or its sister paper *The Birmingham Post*. The headline "20 Barmy Ways Labour Waste Cash in Brum" which appeared in *The Sun* was a direct lift from the list of 50 such charges in *The Birmingham Post* last November. There is, of course, a reason for that. *The Birmingham Post* and the *Birmingham Evening Mail* are owned by Midland Independent Newspapers. One of the few surviving Tory Members of Parliament for Birmingham is the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). He is not only chairman of the Conservative party but chairman of Midland Independent Newspapers.

The man who is allowing Conservative central office to peddle whoppers about town halls in Haringey and even bigger untruths about tax is the man who heads the two monopoly papers in Birmingham which tell lies about Birmingham city council. Instead of acting as the mouthpiece of Tory central office and denigrating it, those two papers should be speaking up for that great city. If there is any meaning in the word "independent", the group could begin to show it by inviting someone other than the right hon. Gentleman to act as its head and appoint as chairman someone who does not have such a patent and vested interest in shoring up the fortunes of a Tory party on the slide in that great city as elsewhere.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): If Birmingham city council is the paragon of virtue that the hon. Gentleman describes, will he explain why the current leader only recently took control in a left-wing coup, dispossessing the Labour group's chosen leader?

Mr. Straw: I am almost tempted not to allow any more interventions from Conservative Members for fear of their humiliating themselves. In case the hon. Gentleman had not spotted it, the truth is that, when my good friend and great colleague Sir Richard Knowles retired as leader of Birmingham city council, there was an election. In the Labour party we honour our elders and allow them to go in their own time—not for us the backstairs coup for which the Tory party is even today sharpening its knives.

Mr. Gummer: Hardly had Sir Richard Knowles left office than the new leader attacked his policies, said that they were wrong for Birmingham and wanted new ones. The hon. Gentleman must decide which Birmingham he is talking about—the Birmingham of Councillor Stewart or that of Sir Richard Knowles—because Councillor Stewart said that she would have preferred to use the money very differently.

Mr. Straw: I happen to know both people rather better than the Secretary of State, and one cannot put a sheet of paper between them. I have here the budget statement of the new leader of Birmingham city council who went out of her way to praise her predecessor's record.

As for the charge of inconsistency, the Secretary of State should be careful. We have heard him pontificate about the merits of the council tax but I have here the 27-paragraph speech—called "The Morality of the Community Charge"—which he made in Blakeney in Norfolk in 1988 and which I suspect that he wants to forget. In it, he castigated the idea of any tax based on property. It contains the fantastic sentence:

> "As a moral traditionalist, I have grave misgivings about situational ethics"—

whatever they may be. He then described the iniquities of domestic rates. He ended by saying that the community charge was indeed

> "a morally superior alternative"—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Could I be very boring and inquire how this relates to the financial reports that we are supposed to be debating?

Mr. Straw: I was challenging the sincerity with which the Secretary of State is recommending the new system when only four years ago he was supporting a completely different system—the poll tax—and when he also supported the 1988 White Paper, which set its face against capping.

In the list of councils that did best and worst in the provision of nursery education——

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the picture painted by the Conservatives of the difficult decisions taken by Birmingham city council with its limited finances is not accurate? Does he agree also that the Government's handling of the economy prevented the council developing the city centre and promoting housing, social services and education? It is only as a result of clever leadership that Birmingham has been the only city that has invested in its city centre and saved jobs. What Councillor Theresa Stewart means is that now we can turn our attention to meeting other pressing needs, and the needs of other parts of the city.

Does my hon. Friend agree about two matters? If the Government had taken——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions should be short and this sounds as though it is going to be a mini-speech.

Ms Morris: No, it will be a very short intervention, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government had taken a lead from Birmingham city council and invested in industry, the nation would not be in the mess in which it is now? Does he also agree that there is no difference of opinion between councillors in Birmingham city council? We are tackling all our problems, but because of the way in which the Government give us finance we need to do things one by one instead of being able to do them all at the same time.

Mr. Straw: I agree. I congratulate Birmingham city council on its excellent record in economic and social development. On the issue of the so-called prestige projects, Councillor Theresa Stewart said in her budget speech:

> "I want to say a word about the so-called prestige projects which I am supposed to love to hate. I believe we have safeguarded their position"

in the budget. She recognises their importance to economic development in that city.

In the list of councils that did best and worst for nursery education, to which I drew attention some minutes ago, the few Liberal Democrat councils that exist are at the bottom of the list, not the top. The Isle of Wight, where the Liberals have been in control since 1985, is 96th in the list of 107 local education authorities for nursery education. Only 7 per cent. of children in the Isle of Wight have the chance of a nursery education. By their deeds shall ye know them. The only appearance of a Liberal council anywhere near the top of the list—Tower Hamlets—reflects the investment of ILEA, not of that Liberal borough.

In the past few months, the country at large has seen the reality of Liberal Democrat control of councils—overtly racialist, unprofessional and literally out of the control and influence of the national policy. As the ombudsman said of Tower Hamlets, many of the problems of Tower Hamlets stem from the Liberal Democrats' decision to decentralise administration of seven neighbourhoods.

To try to salvage their fortunes, the Liberal Democrats in Tower Hamlets have now hired the services of the television reporter Mr. Vincent Hanna, not as a public relations adviser, but as acting chief executive, for a fee of almost £3,500 a week. Mr. Hanna is now earning——

Mr. Corbyn: He is not worth it.

Mr. Straw: Mr. Hanna is now earning, I understand, almost as much as Mr. Ian Wright, Arsenal's excellent striker. I think I know who is better value, and it is not Mr. Hanna.

Only 12 months ago, the Prime Minister said that we must build a new accountability fit for the 21st century, a new accountability that goes directly from those who run public services to those who use them. The Prime Minister was correct, but I doubt whether he realised what he was saying, for contained in those words was a revealing admission that, 14 years after the Conservatives came to power, there is a crisis in the accountability of the public services. Indeed, far from having a system fit for the 21st century, we have one that is slipping back to the 18th century, in which graft, corruption and favour reign supreme.

That was the message of last week's Public Accounts Committee Report. It had nothing to do with denigrating loyal career public servants and everything to do with blowing the whistle on Ministers and their appointed cronies who fail to understand how vigilant they must be in maintaining the critical line between the public's interest and the interests of the Conservative party and its backers. Far from strengthening accountability, it has been weakened by Government policies. Responsibility for £24,000 million a year of public services has been removed from local government and a high degree of cynicism has been generated about the way in which some so-called flagship authorities have been favoured at the expense of the rest.

Everyone knows that, year after year, grant was stuffed the way of Westminster and Wandsworth. This year, 17 per cent. of the total of transitional relief is going to a single borough—Wandsworth. The arithmetic is plain for people to see. Everyone knows too that the trail from Westminster city hall and its appalling policies of social cleansing and political gerrymandering leads straight back to Conservative central office and to a number of hon. Members, in this House and in the other place.

Of course we accept that there should be due process, but that was not, by the way, what was accepted when it came to Labour councillors or other councillors who were being surcharged at the behest of Conservative objectives. We do not have to wait for the procedure to be through before we hear from Ministers about their view of the policy. After all, when those objections were made three years ago, Ministers in the other place were saying that the scheme of designated sales was a very good scheme which addressed a difficult problem for Westminster. Ministers have never been slow to criticise or condemn Labour councillors on the flimsiest evidence or none. When, then, will their trappist silence on Westminster end?

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, in the excellent article in *The Guardian* to which I referred, said:

> "The superseding of local responsibility by centrally appointed bodies and individuals has gone too far and weakens the democratic political culture".

He is right.

We oppose the orders because they are the tangible representation of a centralised system of control, which denies people proper choice, which removes responsibility from elected local councillors and which has undermined the standards of the public service and the health of our democracy.

6.5 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I do not want to continue along the road down which the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has led us, but I wonder whether he could help me. I do not know whether he is listening to me, but I wonder whether he can confirm that the Vincent Hanna whom he mentioned is the same Vincent Hanna who had such fame in the BBC exit poll in 1979 that was the subject of an inquiry in the BBC. Is he one and the same?

Mr. Straw *indicated assent.*

Mr. Field: I take it amiss when the hon. Gentleman tells us that Conservative Members are uninterested in local government or are somewhat opposed to it, because my family have served for five generations in local government and we have enjoyed our service immensely. I think that many of my hon. Friends would share that view. We think that local government is an honourable service and that to serve it is a way of putting something back into life in return for what we receive from our local community. I resent the assertion made by the hon. Member for Blackburn that Conservative Members do not value local government and the service that it provides.

The hon. Member for Blackburn took us from Joseph Stalin to Dashwood-Quick; we went via Romania. He focused on the empty houses of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment—all 13 of them. I have heard a de minimis argument maximised from time to time in the House, but never in such an extraordinary way. When he discussed capping and his usual antipathy to it and proved the way in which it encouraged everyone to spend, it seemed to me that he must have been thoroughly in favour of it, if that was the nature of his argument. It is well known, however, that his views about local government are about as up to date as a wicker shopping basket.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, hopes to catch the Speaker's eye in Monday's debate about the aftermath of and the follow-up to the Rio conference. In his usual generous-hearted way, he asked if I would introduce the Environment Select Committee's report on standard spending assessments this evening, as a member of that Committee, rather than hope that he might catch the Speaker's eye on two separate occasions in a short time. I am happy to have that opportunity this evening.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made some kind and courteous comments about the Select Committee's report, for which I thank him. He referred to Mr. Tony Travers, who was one of the witnesses who came before the Select Committee, and pointed out that a report by Mr. Travers said that the doom and gloom of last year's settlement had been very much overdone by Opposition Members. Indeed, if every one of us who has served in local government had a pound for every occasion when an initiative of the Government or some announcement or settlement was going to be the end of local government and bring it to a screeching halt, we would be richer than the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and we would all be able to afford a council house in Westminster.

The report makes more than 20 recommendations, which encompass a mixture of technical and procedural changes, as well as matters of presentation. The theme throughout the report is an acknowledgement of the genuine attempt that Ministers, officials and local authority associations have made to bring a better understanding and a greater transparency to what was a rather opaque process. Although that process hardly ignites the interest of the citizens of our nation, it certainly touches on each and every one of their daily lives in the cities, boroughs and districts in which they live.

There was a universal welcome for the openness of this year's standard spending assessment review, and our recommendations reflect the Committee's desire for that progress to be taken further and improved so that it is as transparent and open as possible. That could be done by improving the technical construction of SSAs and by reducing the pressure on the whole system by reconsidering their use for purposes other than grant distribution.

I know that many Opposition Members wish to speak, so I shall not take up the time of the House by going through all the Committee's recommendations. Instead, I shall highlight some of them. One recommendation, which is especially pertinent in view of a number of the interventions in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, concerns openness. That is a good place to start.

Most, if not all, of the members of the Committee had had experience as councillors, either on our present local authorities or elsewhere in the country, so we appreciated the fact that there is a cake-cutting system. Sometimes—in fact, practically always—that system is seen as political. Our recommendations include a suggestion that it would be useful if Ministers highlighted where they had exercised judgments, spelt out those judgments and explained why they had been made. I see no reason why we should be shy of doing that. After all, politics is what we are here for, and Conservatives are here to form a Government and discharge our responsibilities. We should not be shy of setting out where Ministers have made those decisions.

Much time was taken up in the Committee by discussions on a subject that has already featured in our debate—the area cost adjustment. I believe that my right hon. Friend dealt effectively with that subject when he opened the debate, but I am certain that if we could see the way in which Ministers take decisions, and when and why they take them, we could begin to depoliticise the process, which would be helpful.

The Committee thought that the Department of the Environment could be more helpful to local authorities if it provided them with individual completed calculations to show the composition of their SSAs. I do not know whether my experience is typical—one cannot help drawing on one's own experience of the way in which matters are arranged by one's own local authority and of taking deputations to see Ministers—but it seems to me that hon. Members are often used by their local treasurers to see Ministers in order to explore the figures behind the decisions, and to get down to the formula, or the arrangements of figures, for their local authority.

An enormous amount of public money seems to be spent, and national resources wasted, by deputations coming to Marsham street from all over the country. It is a time-honoured craft. I am sure that some people come because they like shopping in Harrods and others because they like singing "The Red Flag" in the four-ale bars in the House. So there may be other agendas involved. In general, I believe that the deputations come in order to get down to the nitty gritty of the figures.

If, when they weigh that recommendation, my right hon. and hon. Friends in government believe that it would be expensive and onerous, I wonder whether they might consider making the data available, in disc form compatible with local authorities' computers, to each family of authorities—perhaps to a few authorities in each family, as an initial experiment, if they are not prepared to go the whole hog and dish out all the facts and figures, which I appreciate would be a pretty mammoth exercise. I believe that that could lead to considerable savings.

We agreed with all our witnesses that hypothecation should not feature in SSAs. I especially homed in on that thought, because we read reports that the Labour party is now flirting with the idea of hypothecation to overcome the great problem caused by the fact that it keeps telling us where it would spend money but never tells us where that money would come from. We also know that the Liberal Democrats fought the general election on the idea of a hypothecated tax.

In my view, that idea strikes at the core of democracy, because if we start hypothecating taxes we cause all sorts of problems. No doubt we should have to create a vast bureaucracy to ensure that all the money raised in that way was allocated and spent accordingly. The main reason why hypothecation should never be attempted in local government, which has been alluded to by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber, is that it specifically undermines local democracy.

Two principal divides take up much of the time spent on local government in the Chamber. The first is the quantum, and that subject will be with us for ever, whatever Government are in power. The other concerns the fact that local councils want the maximum freedom to make the choices that affect their local communities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: While my hon. Friend is talking about democracy, and the Liberal Democrats, does he recall the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) leading a campaign to get rid of area cost adjustment? Does he think that that campaign will be revealed by Liberal Democrat candidates in the London boroughs, or might the Liberal Democrats say one thing in the north of England and something entirely different in the south of England?

Mr. Field: My hon. Friend contributes, as always, a reasonable and practical point. The Secretary of State dealt well with area cost adjustments in his opening speech. Although there is antipathy in some parts of the Labour party for area cost adjustments, clearly London would have a problem if they were abolished.

If my hon. Friend thinks it rare for Liberal Democrats to contradict themselves between the north of England and London, he ought to come and see what happens in the Isle of Wight, where they contradict themselves between one side of the island and the other. That is a much smaller area than the United Kingdom.

One rather interesting result of our report was an article that appeared on the front page of the *Evening Standard* last Tuesday, arising from recommendation 9, concerning responsiveness to local circumstances. I have taken some soundings from my London colleagues on that recommendation. The Committee received evidence that the SSAs for

[Mr. Field]

London skewed the national SSA analysis and distribution, so we recommend that London should be taken out of the system for the rest of the country—or at least, that the Department of the Environment should consider taking it out, and evaluate the pros and cons of doing so.

I have been an officer of the Back-Bench tourism committee for some years and nobody knows better than I the problems that tourism creates in London. The House itself is a magnet for international tourists, and we have to work our way through groups of evil little French children who seem to block our way during the summer months. I remember that our dear old friend the late Robert Adley was always on about the problems of coach parking in London and the difficulties and traffic congestion that tourists created.

I believe that most of my hon. Friends think that the recommendations of the Select Committee give us the opportunity to take London out of the system. Judging by the soundings that I took, they believe that if we get the formula right everything else flows from that. Indeed, when we look at this year's settlement and see the damping that has been put into a number of London boroughs, because of the way that the formulas work this year, we hope that our recommendation will commend itself to Ministers and officials. Nowhere in our recommendation did we have the temerity as a Committee to make the point about the quantum, which is on the front page of the *Evening Standard*. Other things may flow from our suggested reform, but we certainly did not go that far.

In opening the debate earlier, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has probably almost dealt with the point about the reform of local government. I hover over it, however, because I very much hope that the Isle of Wight will be the first unitary authority under the local government reorganisation in the United Kingdom. I must make the point that any reform of local government structure will create considerable turbulence in the SSA in the short term. My right hon. Friend mentioned that he has already announced arrangements for the costs of reorganisation. With the greatest respect, that is a differernt point from the one that we make in our report, on turbulence.

One of my concerns has always been that the merging of three local authorities into one—there will perhaps be greater combinations of that elsewhere where recommendations have been made—might lead the system to believe that the pruning of bits of the SSA for districts, when they go into counties, or vice versa, could take place. That is rather worrying.

We homed in on the use of data and the census information. A number of us found that our population projections had been overstated in the interim. Once the census has taken place, there is a fairly dramatic effect once a decade. Although it is true to some extent that local government has a bit of a vested interest in over-egging the cake in the interim, and gets a holiday out of it, in this day and age, with the use of computers, it must be possible to try to keep the information more up to date. We hope that our officials will take that point on board rather than have that precipice at the end of every 10 years.

The point was made about year-on-year change in SSAs. I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend, who said that he hoped to keep them much as they are, and with as few changes as possible in the future so that the system could settle down. The Committee was concerned about how the cost of delivering a standard level of service could change dramatically from one year to amother. I have already alluded to the damping that has been made available to some London boroughs. We hope that the Department will carry out more research into the real cost of service provision and the additional educational needs factor, which has been alluded to.

This has been my contribution to introducing the Select Committee's report on SSAs. It is a dull subject and hardly bedtime reading. I hope that I may now be forgiven for introducing my own constituency interest in the matter.

The Select Committee met my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on 13 January, following a meeting with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), on 12 December about community care funding. We had a difficulty because of the huge distributional difference that arose between 1993-94—50 per cent. was based on local income support cases and 50 per cent. on the then current SSA—and the revised basis of the SSA in 1994-95.

We appreciate the fact that local authorities knew that the distribution system would change in 1994-95, but the only information that we had was that contained in the 1993-94 SSA data. No one in the Department or in local authorities knew at that time what the revised SSA would be. Further, there was no prior suggestion to local authorities that all the resources for community care in SSA and special transitional grant would be distributed on a 1994-95 new SSA basis.

The national resource total has been preserved, but the distribution in different years has changed by factors from a multiplier of 5·537 in the City of London to one of 1·206 in Sefton, with the Isle of Wight in the penultimate position, a multiplier of 1·435, and a national total factor of 2·254.

The delegation to the Department of Health on 21 September sought to persuade the Department to reconsider the distribution at least to the extent of agreeing that the excessive swing above and below the national average increase should be dampened. I am still waiting to hear the outcome of that meeting from my hon. Friend, but I remain concerned about the effect that it will have on the SSA for 1995-96, because it seems that next year's figures will set that figure in the future.

Another concern is much longer running. I thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, because when we met him with his officials on 13 January he said that we were the only local authority deputation he had seen who had raised with him the fire and civil defence SSA. He generously told us that he would take up the matter with the Home Office. I draw his attention to the fact that, on 24 May 1988, we took a deputation to the Home Office to meet the noble Lord Ferrers. There was a letter on 31 October 1991 to the Home Secretary from the chairman of the public protection committee about the problem. I wrote again on 23 January 1992. We received a reply on 18 February 1992 from Mr. Gilderoy at the Department of the Environment, which was referred to the Home Office.

We took another delegation on 5 March 1992 to meet the noble Lord Ferrers. We had a meeting on 5 March 1992 to discuss the matter and, on 6 December 1992, met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, who was then Minister at the Department of the Environment. On 4

February, we took his excellency the lord lieutenant for the Isle of Wight to the Home Office. When I met my hon.Friend the other day in his Department, he said that he could see our frustrations at having gone backwards and forwards between the Home Office and the Department of the Environment. We had a problem with the Department's definition of the SSA as

"the appropriate amount of revenue expenditure which would allow the authority to provide a standard level of service, consistent with the Government's view of the appropriate amount of revenue expenditure for all local authorities".

That is significantly at variance with the appropriate amount for a standard level of service as determined by Her Majesty's inspectors of fire brigades. Thus, in the island's case, two separate assessments of need by the same Department of State produced two totally different answers. Clearly, both those answers cannot be right. I ask that my hon. Friends do all in their power to put that right. Our archaeological curator on the Isle of Wight, when we were discussing coastal erosion and sediment transportation, likened the Isle of Wight to a giant Alka Seltzer which was dissolving into the sea.

I have given the long litany of deputations and meetings, involving Ministers at the Home Office and at the Department of the Environment, about the fire service standard spending assessment for the Isle of Wight. We can hardly dial 999 and expect the adjoining fire brigade in Hampshire to catch the ferry to help us put out the fire. That gives us great cause for concern. If we are not an Alka Seltzer dissolving into the sea, we are in this respect a ping-pong ball which has gone backwards and forwards between the Department of the Environment and the Home Office. I look to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary not only to ensure that there is fair play but to put the ball right out of court so that we can stop this administrative nonsense, which is quite unnecessary.

6.30 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The London borough of Newham has more than its fair share of problems. Its economy was based on port-related activities in the docks and on the railways. All that has gone, leaving a great void. Newham's docks, the Royal docks, are still an eerily empty moonscape. The promised development associated with the London Docklands development corporation has just not happened. Newham has suffered greatly from the recession. It has more than double the national average rate of unemployment, with all the damaging and debilitating consequences. Few of Newham's school leavers get jobs.

Much of the borough's housing was built at the turn of the century, and is in bad condition. The council has a huge waiting list, and it has 3,000 people in temporary accommodation. The most recent survey, conducted by the Department of the Environment and Manchester university, shows that Newham is the most deprived local authority in England and Wales. I am not proud of that; we want to get away from that. Many people in Newham are striving valiantly to improve things; they want the Government's support, not their hindrance.

One area in which progress is being made is education. There has been a big increase in good GCSE results in Newham. The one exception is Stratford school, where the results are abysmal and a scandal; that school has opted out. The education service is working against great difficulties.

I visited one comprehensive school and saw, in the reception area, a long list of more than 20 languages. When I inquired about it, I was told that it was a list of the home languages of pupils in that school. We have many refugees. I was told by the representative of one group that there were 7,000 Somalis in Newham. Not only are their children not fluent in English when they arrive, but, because of the war, they have not gone to school to learn to read and write their own language.

Some 50 per cent. of Newham's children have a home language other than English. Section 11 was a great help to us because section 11 grants paid for teachers to help with the teaching of English, but that money has now been cut. I led a deputation to the Home Office. The Minister of State listened to what we said, congratulated the deputation on its cases, and more or less said that he agreed with it. However, he then said that his budget had been cut.

Last year, Newham was aggrieved by its revenue support settlement, which allocated unfair standard spending assessments—the Government's estimate of what a local authority should spend to provide a standard level of service. The borough was short-changed by more than £22 million.

There were two main reasons. The first was that Newham's capital SSA was based not on the real amount that the council had borrowed over the years, with permission from the Government, to invest in houses and schools—£208 million—but on a notional amount of £109 million. Under that ludicrous arrangement, Newham received a capital SSA of only £18·5 million, while it was committed to spend £29·75 million to service its capital debt. That left a shortage of £11·25 million, which had to be taken from somewhere else, robbing other areas of activity.

The second reason is that Newham has an acute homelessness problem. It has a statutory obligation to house homeless families in priority need, using temporary accommodation if necessary. Last year, Newham had to spend £11·25 million and there was no statutory provision—no SSA recognition—for that. Once again, other budgets had to be raided. With a shortfall of more than £11 million for capital and another shortfall of more than £11 million for homelessness, Newham was short-changed by more than £22 million.

Newham, a deprived inner-city borough with multiple problems, had to spend under its SSA less than the amount that even this Government think we should spend on services across the board, including education. It was a nightmarish situation, and all our problems were made worse.

Out of concern for the damage that was being done and for the unfairness of the settlement, local people got together to form the Newham Needs Campaign. It consists of the Churches, voluntary organisations, local trade unions, the borough council and the local newspaper, the *Newham Recorder*. It arranged a deputation to the Department of the Environment to see the Minister of State. It organised a conference at the town hall and a rally in Trafalgar square.

The campaign—this grouping of local people—rejoiced and had high hopes and expectations when it was learned that the SSA methodology which had so penalised Newham was to be reviewed and changed. It was felt that, at last, Newham's grievances would be remedied. Here was an opportunity to give the borough a fair settlement.

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

The House can imagine the consternation, the dismay, the shock, the disbelief and the sense of betrayal when it was discovered that that new settlement and the new methodology were more damaging than the old, and that they gave Newham an even worse deal. Indeed, if the previous system had remained unchanged, Newham would have received £18·75 million more than it was allotted under the new arrangement. This year, a one-off reduction grant of £13 million is being paid to cushion the effect of that cut. Even that is guaranteed only for one year, and, if it is removed, things will be even worse in a bleak future.

The three Members of Parliament and the council leader came to see the Under-Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment. He told us that the settlement was formula-driven—that the formula was fed into a computer and that what came out was the settlement. It appeared that Ministers had no discretion: that we had government by computer. That proves to me that the straitjacket of a rigid formula does not meet the individual needs of each authority. The effect on Newham is perverse and appalling.

I can illustrate that point by comparing the borough with its neighbours. The SSA per head for Barking and Dagenham was increased by £42 compared with the figure for last year. For Tower Hamlets it was increased by £45 per head, and for Havering it was increased by £46 per head. For Greenwich it was increased by £73 a head, but for Newham there was a reduction of £31 per head. That is outrageous—it blights all our hopes, and sabotages all our efforts to improve life in the borough.

Do Ministers want a spirit of hopelessness to pervade the borough's affairs? Are they proud of the fact that we cannot spend up to our SSA on education, and that our teachers are expected to struggle with less than even the Government think we should spend on education? If our SSAs are reduced this year—we have had confirmation of that—will Ministers please tell us what else should be cut? I should like them to give us guidance today. Perhaps they think that we should shut the borough's swimming pools, or close even more of our libraries. How many more staff are they asking us to sack?

Ministers have a duty to tell us what ought to be cut. I want the Ministers to come to Newham to meet the people on the ground, to see the damage done by that settlement and to discuss with those people what should be done.

The Secretary of State, who is not present, came to a recent conference at Stratford town hall. He did not come to listen to any of the speeches that preceded his. He made his own speech and disappeared immediately, without any contact or discussion with anybody else. His theme was partnership.

After the financial stab in the back that we have just heard, a hollow laugh and much cynicism is likely to greet that theme. We feel let down by our partner, who is kicking us in the teeth. If any life is to be breathed back into that partnership, the Secretary of State should agree today that he will visit Newham to discuss on the spot in the borough how that settlement is to be implemented and what he thinks should be cut.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend witnessed the exchanges that I had with the Secretary of State on that word "partnership". Does he agree that the Secretary of State and the Government must explain why we are being short-changed by £20 million-worth of expenditure through an SSA calculation which they claim to be fair, but which is clearly fraudulent? It is breaking down local government in London, while their quangos and partnerships are able to provide patronage, and will do even more in the coming financial year.

Mr. Leighton: It is fraudulent. We saw the Minister about the fact that we were short-changed on capital financing and homelessness last year, and he did not dispute the point. If the old SSA methodology had remained, we would have received £18·75 million more than we have been offered under the present settlement. That cannot be right. Whatever formula was fed into the computer, it must have been defective.

Let us consider the future. If the £13 million reduction grant which has been allocated to compensate for the loss of £18·75 million is removed next year, we shall certainly be looking into a big black hole. The only glimmer of hope on the horizon is contained in a letter from the Minister for Local Government and Planning, which I received on 27 January. That letter said of the representations that the Minister had received from local authorities:

> "They raised many interesting issues, some of which we will want to look more closely at for future years."

I hope so. I also hope that the Minister and the officials in the Department of the Environment will carefully study the letter that they received from Drew Stephenson, the chief executive of Newham local authority, of 5 January.

There are four areas which I would like them to consider for the forthcoming year: capital financing, homelessness, the needs indices and the use of expenditure data. This year, there is a £10·7 million gap in capital financing in Newham. Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State will remember that he suggested that local authority associations supported what he had done.

I was able to point out that Price Waterhouse and Co. was supported by the Association of London Authorities and by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities when it proposed a different capital criterion, the non-housing credit ceiling for 1990, as opposed to the notional debt figures. We agreed. If that system was in operation, Newham would have had an extra £9 million in its capital SSA.

This year, there is a £10·3 million shortfall between what the council will have to spend on homelessness this year and the SSA that it will receive. I hope that Ministers and officials will consider that there should be a separate sub-block for homelessness expenditure.

Mr. Tony Banks: Before my hon. Friend moves off the issue of homelessness in Newham, would he draw conclusions from the fact that, in 1981, the borough spent around £50,000 a year on homelessness, and it now spends £10 million a year?

One of the big problems in Newham is the number of refugees who are attracted to the area. We are not objecting to the Government allowing people who are fleeing from oppression to come to the country, but they should not wash their hands of their responsibility for those people at the port of entry. Refugees put great stress on the services of boroughs such as Newham, Haringey, Camden and Islington, without those boroughs receiving additional resources to deal with the problem.

Mr. Leighton: My hon. Friend is right, although he underestimates the situation. We spend more than £10 million, and receive only a little bit of that back in the new

SSA. The gap is £10·3 million. My hon. Friend is right to say that, a few years ago, Newham spent virtually nothing on housing homeless families in temporary accommodation.

However, because the Government have prevented local authorities from building houses, the homelessness situation is worse. There is now a statutory duty on local authorities to house homeless families who are in priority need. Newham is obliged to spend that money, but it gets no recognition for it from the Government.

That money must be taken from somewhere else. It has to rob other budgets, such as the budget for education, to pay for homelessness, because the Government will not recognise the need. Only a small number of London authorities have that great problem of homelessness, and there should be a separate sub-block for homelessness in the SSA settlement.

Mr. Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend recall that the London group of Labour Members constantly pressed for a formula which would have enabled London boroughs to be properly recompensed for the legitimate needs of refugees in their communities, and to link it with the problems of severe homelessness, which are worst in the inner-London boroughs, of which Newham is one?

Mr. Leighton: It is true that we have a large number of refugees—some 7,000 Somalis, as I mentioned previously. I visited one primary school recently, where there were over 20 home languages in one class. I also mentioned Langdon school in my constituency, which has done extremely well. In its reception area, there is a list of over 20 home languages. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has said, no one can say that we are not willing to do our best for refugees, but that presents extra challenges, for which there should be some financial recompense.

Despite that additional difficulty, we have to spend less on education than the Government say we should in their SSA, because we have to spend more than £10 million on capital financing and more than £10 million on homelessness than we get in SSA. Can that be right? Can Ministers be proud of that? I want them to visit my borough, talk to the teachers and justify that situation. It cannot be right. I hope that Ministers will take that matter on board, and will be willing to discuss education with the borough's teachers.

We must have new needs indices, because they too penalise Newham. Newham has been relegated. The Secretary of State said that Newham was fifth in the country. That is not true. It was fifth last year, and it is now 10th. The Under-Secretary knows that his Department is drafting indices with Manchester university which put Newham first.

One of Newham's especial objections is that the lack of bathrooms or inside WCs, which was previously required in the all-ages social index, has been removed. That is an example of deprivation. Many houses in Newham do not have those facilities, yet the requirement is being dropped from the new index. Once again, that penalises us.

Expenditure data in the SSA are used to measure the need to spend. From 1990 to 1993-94, that measure was based on the 1987 expenditure data. However, that has been changed this year, and we are now going to use 1990-91. It is unjust to Newham to use that year, because, in that year, Newham cut its expenditure by £7·6 million in the face of anticipated rate-capping. That year is compromised as a basis because of the expenditure constraints in that year. I hope that Ministers will re-examine that.

I have mentioned the four areas which must be re-examined to give justice and a fairer deal to Newham. I hope that Ministers and officials will consider my comments seriously. I hope that officials in the Department will read what I have said and consider it for future years.

Newham has great potential. It is anxious to work in partnership, but the Government must prove to be a better partner than they are being at the moment.

6.50 pm

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): I hope that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) will forgive me if I do not follow his argument. We have heard rather a lot about Newham today, and perhaps it is time to move on to other parts of the United Kingdom.

No doubt the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), thought that he gave a very clever speech. All he proved was that he has excellent research assistants. His speech seemed to be composed entirely of quotations from other people. It was very short on Labour party policy—except perhaps that relating to removing the cap, with the typical Labour contempt for the problems of local council tax payers.

Over the years that I have been a Member of this place, I am afraid that I have had to make representations several times about central Government funding for local government in Northamptonshire. I have always done that on behalf of the county council. This year, the problem is somewhat different.

Hon. Members who represent the county find themselves in a difficult situation, and I would like to explain briefly why. As we all know, on 2 December last year, the provisional revenue support grant settlement was announced. It apparently became clear to the present county leaders that Northampton was going to be very badly affected.

Unfortunately, there was no communication from the county leadership to the county's Members before the consultative period ended on 10 January. Therefore, we as a group had no opportunity or information to enable us to intervene or make proposals during the consultation period.

None the less, the new Labour leadership managed to put a case together, and asked for, and obtained, a hearing on 12 January with the Minister for Local Government and Planning. I want to assure the House that the county's Members would have been willing, and indeed anxious, to take action at that time. Parliament had already resumed after the Christmas recess and alas, as we all know, we have been in almost constant attendance ever since.

It is also interesting to note that, on that same day—12 January—Northampton's education department issued a letter to all head teachers and chairmen of governors announcing that there would be a cut in the most sensitive area of all: the age-weighted pupil unit. That is the money given directly to schools on a per-pupil basis, and it was a cut of £3 million.

That cut seemed to run contrary to what the chairman of the education committee stated on that day. He said that his policy was one of protecting front-line services as much as possible. What was worse was that he then had the gall to

[Sir Peter Fry]

call on the county's Members to attack the core problem. At that time, he knew—or he should have known—that the details of that core problem had not even been communicated to us.

School governors were urged to hold meetings. They were told to write to their local MPs and to persuade parents to demand action. All that took place without any direct contacts between the county council leadership and me or my colleagues. Indeed, my first intimation of the extent of the problem occurred when I received a lobbyist, a member of UNISON, the county council's local trade union, on 18 January. That was six days after the papers were issued to head teachers and governors.

That trade unionist gave me a summary of the meeting that took place between the county leaders and the Minister on 12 January. Irrespective of one's political affiliations, I suggest that many people would agree that that was hardly an ideal way to conduct affairs between the leadership of the county council and those who have the honour to represent it in this House.

I have listed those events because, like some of my colleagues, I fear that we have been deliberately set up for purely party political motives. Historically, we have always supported the county leadership, be it Conservative-controlled or Labour-controlled, to do our best for the people of the county and to try to keep the tax at a reasonable level.

I want to make it quite clear that, although we may be angry about the way we have been treated, that does not prevent us from being concerned about the way in which the county's SSA has been calculated this year. To begin with, it is necessary to set out the county's basic case. That case is fairly simple.

If we consider the movement of population between 1981 and 1991, the latest year for which figures are available, we see that, while the population of England and Wales was virtually stagnant and increased by only 0·08 per cent., the population of Northamptonshire rose by 8·2 per cent. Our school population dropped by only 10·2 per cent., while it dropped by 15·9 per cent. in the rest of the country.

Perhaps even more significantly, in the zero to five age group, national figures show a rise of 10·9 per cent., while ours increased by 15·2 per cent. Therefore, I submit that, on population grounds alone, it is at least somewhat surprising to discover that our SSA shows a reduction of 0·3 per cent. for 1994-95. Ours is the only shire county in which there is a reduction.

It has been suggested that previous county councils were never over-generous in education provision. The current average primary expenditure per pupil in England and Wales is £1,632. Northamptonshire is spending £1,555. For secondary level, the national figure is £2,310, while Northamptonshire is spending £2,139. In the expenditure league tables, we are 32nd of 39 shire counties on primary school expenditure, and 28th on secondary school expenditure.

One does not have to be a public relations genius to be able to whip up strong feelings based on a presentation of the figures to which I have just referred. However, I will refer later to another issue that is very relevant to those figures.

Many people in the county are saying to themselves, "What's gone wrong?" My first reaction to what has happened was to remember the story of the lonely man who went to a dating agency and asked for a young, beautiful, exotic female with slim legs and red hair. He discovered to his horror that the computer dated him with a cockatoo. The problem with the system is that one can feed the information in, but one does not necessarily get the result one expects.

From my discussions with the Department, I now understand that other factors in the calculation outweigh our population increase. I understand that there have been changes in the weighting of payments to take account of the number of children of single-parent families and the number of families on income support and of ethnic minorities—quite apart from changes concerning homelessness, unemployment and long-term sickness.

It seems to me, however, that Northamptonshire may well be losing because it has become slightly more affluent. One accepts that a more affluent county should have to bear a greater proportion of its essential costs, but the increasing population, by causing a reduction of the allowance for sparsity of population, has resulted in a wider gap, and this has been very damaging in the current year.

I turn now to the one aspect of the county's current education spending that has been common to the Conservative and Labour leaderships in recent years. Northamptonshire is one of the counties that have for some years been educating all their rising fives. This has had a considerable effect on the primary-sector budget.

It takes about £10 million to make provision for all children to go to school after they reach their fourth birthday. Thus, the average cost per pupil is brought down, as under-fives expenditure is not recognised by the Government on the ground that it is purely voluntary, and no grant is forthcoming. That complication indicates a very crucial fact—that, no matter what the budget is, the county council decides its own priorities. If the county is to continue its policy of educating the rising fives, the next 12 months will undoubtedly be very difficult indeed.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I—like all my Northamptonshire colleagues, I believe—share my hon. Friend's plea for a fair deal. We are deeply concerned about this matter and are confused by the fact that a county with a rising population and an increasing number of children should receive a lower grant, even at a time of low inflation.

Sir Peter Fry: It is clear that, if the standard spending assessment were based merely on the number of schoolchildren, the result would be different. The SSA and the way in which the level of grant is worked out are now so complicated and so continually refined, and there are so many other factors—to some of which I shall return in a moment—that the increase in school population does not automatically ensure that funds come from central Government. That is the terrible truth that we in Northamptonshire have discovered this year. In a moment, I shall suggest how we might address it.

On the basis of all the discussions that I have had, I believe that, no matter how we look at it, the Government's calculation was absolutely correct. It may not suit Northamptonshire—we may be the odd one out—but there is not much doubt that the figures that were fed in and those that came out were correct. I should make it clear, however, that I do not regard the result as at all satisfactory —in fact, it is far from satisfactory.

For the reason to which I referred at the beginning of my speech—involvement only after the end of the consultation period—I regretfully accept that at this stage very little can be done about the amount of SSA, and therefore about the grant that we shall receive for 1994-95. I accept that any formula change at a late stage would affect not just Northamptonshire but all other local authorities, with the confusion and delay in settlement that would be caused.

I should like to deal with two matters at which I hope the Government will look carefully over the next few months—certainly before this time next year.

First, at present, the date on which we take the number of children at school for the purposes of grant calculation is 1 January. I suggest that that is far too early, and that it certainly does not take into account areas where the school population starts to rise. From the under-fives figures that I have provided, it is very clear that we shall soon have a considerable increase in the primary education needs of the county.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confer with the Department for Education to see whether the date could be changed to 30 September. That would have the very real advantage of including part of the school year in which the financial year starts at the beginning of April. The Government say that they want to use up-to-date figures. Here is a way in which that could be achieved.

The second matter at which I hope the Government will look carefully has been mentioned by the Secretary of State and by other hon. Members tonight—the area cost adjustment. To those of us who have been members of county councils since this adjustment has been in force, this is not a new Department of the Environment problem.

What we do not understand is why, no matter how worthy the adjustment, and however necessary it is in London and other inner-city areas, there should be such disparate figures for adjoining counties. Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire—the last two hardly less affluent than Northamptonshire—receive more than £20 million extra in grant. I do not expect the Government suddenly to give us parity with those counties, but there should not be such a stark contrast between adjoining counties with very similar standards.

Surely this allowance should be revised, the support varied or tapered, so that it is reduced as one moves further and further from London. Surely that would be better than the current sharp break. I submit that, nationally, it would be much more equitable. It would remove the grievance of my constituents about their being unfairly penalised. This is a matter that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department must consider over the next few months.

Because of the complications that have been introduced at such a late stage, we can only make these representations tonight. I shall not withhold my support in the Division Lobby, but the people of Northamptonshire would not forgive me if I were to fail to tell the Government that we feel that there must be some improvement in one or both of these areas before we come to next year's settlement. If there is no improvement, support will become more problematical.

In the meantime, the county council will have to live within the budget that has now been fixed. However, the arbitrary reduction of the age-weighted pupil unit is the worst possible option that the county council could have taken. It may lead to a number of redundancies in the teaching profession. When one realises that there may be a need for increased redundancy provision, one sees the weakness in the policy. The truth is that, because of the increase in the provision for redundancy, a cut in the AWPU figures will produce a much smaller gain than we had thought.

There is another element. When I suggested to the leader of the council that implementing some of his election pledges on extra expenditure could be put off this year, I was met with a refusal. In other words, the current council leadership are saying that they are prepared to see teachers' jobs sacrificed to their social doctrine or—dare I say it?—their own pig-headedness. That is the attitude of the county council, and I hope that the teachers and unions will take note of it.

Many other savings could have been made. I pay credit to the Conservative opposition on the council, who presented an alternative budget which would have reinstated the AWPU payment in full. It would have gone further than that—it would have reduced the level of the total council tax that is required, and the county would not need to spend up to the capping limit.

I suggest that, in the interests of both our schoolchildren and county taxpayers, it is a tragedy that the leadership of the council ignored that alternative strategy, refusing to consider even a part of it. I can understand the concern of many parents, teachers and governors, but we must make the point that it is the county council, not the Government, that sets the priorities within the budget available.

What I am asking for is a clear commitment that the present system, refined and complemented as it has been, is not perfect, that some change is desirable and that that will be considered over the coming year. In all local authority finance matters, there must be a balance between the level of service and the cost to the taxpayer. On both counts, we shall be losing in Northamptonshire in the coming 12 months.

The loss of grant, plus the political decisions of the ruling group, make for a bleak year. I am making a public plea today for a return to the traditional co-operation between the county's MPs and the county leadership, regardless of their politics. That would be a first and useful step forward. But an encouraging response from my hon. Friend the Minister tonight would do us much more good, and give us real hope for the future.

Our opponents have claimed that Northamptonshire has been punished for electing a Labour county council. Of course that is totally untrue, but the only way of proving it untrue by actions is in the hands of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I look to them to consider our case, and to make us somewhat happier when we debate these matters next year.

7.11 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I hope that my remarks will help to persuade the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) that he should use his vote in line with his conscience and what appear to be the wishes of his constituents and join the Opposition in the Noes Lobby. Certainly, it seems to be important that we should take real action now not simply to talk about this issue but to persuade the Government that none of the three reports should be approved.

[Mr. David Rendel]

The Government introduced the council tax originally to overcome their unpopularity over the poll tax. It was a fairly desperate move. I do not believe that it has worked, and it will be seen not to have worked even more this year as a result of the huge increases in council tax levels which are liable to take place in certain parts of the country at least. Such increases are due to the fact that transitional relief has nearly ended. In my authority, for example, the only places that will be left with any transitional relief are those houses in bands G and H—the top two bands. One might think that if relief is to be given to anyone, it should be given to the poorest members of the population. In practice, what is happening in my authority is that relief will be given only to the richest members of the population —those who own houses in the top two bands. That is a topsy-turvy policy if ever there was one.

External support for local authority funding will be increased, but not by as much as SSAs. Because SSAs are becoming not simply the maximum but the minimum amount of money to be raised and used by local councils almost everywhere, that means in effect that council tax payers will be paying much more in council tax. Certainly, the increases will be greatly in excess of inflation.

We must make it clear as far as we can to all and sundry that those huge increases are directly to the account of the Government, not local authorities. Especially hard hit will be those who are currently appealing against council tax bandings which are too high. The reason, as I found out in the reply to a written question that I put down recently, is that some of those people will still be waiting for their appeals to be decided three years after they started paying council tax. In some cases, when their appeals are decided they may be owed £500 or £600. If that is the case, that money will eventually be paid to them but without interest. It is interesting that the Government claim interest on unpaid national taxes after only a few months but refuse to repay overpayments of council tax with interest even after three years.

The Conservative party will suffer in the local elections this year as a result of the big increases in council tax. It is interesting that the special grants that the Government are making to reduce their losses will affect some of the largest and most notorious Conservative-run county councils and local councils. Of course, very few areas where the Liberal Democrats are in charge will gain anything from the special grants.

As has already been said, there is one interesting aspect of the Minister's statement which is welcome—his promise to review the area cost adjustments. There can be no sense at all in giving a much bigger area cost adjustment on the east side of, for example, the Dorset-Hampshire border than is given on the west side. There is no reason to suppose that teachers are more expensive one mile further to the east, so a review of that system will certainly be welcome. The sudden breaks that take place at present as one moves across the boundary of an area subject to an area cost adjustment are nonsense and should be reviewed.

Local Government financing is in a mess at present—I do not think that there is any doubt about that—and desperately needs to be reviewed. Perhaps one way to force a review is by voting against these three reports tonight. Too high a proportion of local government finance still comes from central Government. That is bad for democracy. Another thing that is bad for democracy is capping. By capping local government spending, central Government are inevitably using their power to take from local electors the right to decide on the level of local services.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I wonder whether I heard the hon. Gentleman correctly. Did he just say that too much of the money came from central Government? His colleagues in Cornwall are for ever saying that more money should come from central Government to help council tax payers.

Mr. Rendel: The two are not incompatible. What we need to do is to change to a system of local income tax. If we did that, it would be possible to reduce the proportion of local spending funded by the Government while at the same time reducing national income tax, which would allow us to make the two compatible. Unfortunately, we do not have such a system.

Mr. Gummer *rose*——

Mr. Rendel: I am sorry—I have been asked by the Speaker's Office to finish quickly and not take interventions. I have already taken one intervention, which is one more than I should have taken. The Secretary of State will have a chance to respond at the end of the debate. *[Interruption.]* I have been asked by the Speaker's Office to finish quickly, and I respect the Speaker.

I am unhappy to have to say that there is another reason why local government funding is in a mess at present: the grant system is too obscure. It is difficult for local people and, indeed, for local authorities to work out why they are receiving the level of grant that they receive. This year it seems that nothing is being allowed in total spending for increases for our teaching staff; yet we have been told today that increases will be given. It is hypocritical of the Government to say that no increases should be allowed in the total spending for local authority teachers and at the same time give teachers their increases.

Huge increases have been caused by the Government's decisions about what local government will receive to spend and what will have to be raised from council tax payers. That will also bring local government into disrepute. I believe that that is the wrong way to go. Sometimes local government funding is based on out-of-date figures. It is often unfair and it is always obscure. It desperately needs a total review. We know that there will be huge national tax increases in April. In addition, we now see the likelihood of huge local tax increases. I believe that the Government are set on a path to even greater unpopularity. If the Government want to avoid that path today the House should refuse to approve any of the three papers.

7.20 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) refused to take interventions, because he suggested that a local income tax might be workable. It is a fact that the man who devised the local income tax for the Liberal party, Dr. Truscott, is on record as saying that at the election the Liberal party seriously underestimated the effects of a local income tax.

Mr. Gummer: Is it not a fact that a local income tax under the present system would mean that there would have to be people in every town hall who would compute how much local people would pay? Would not everybody in those town halls know what each person's income tax was? How would that affect poorer people who would not like people to know how small their income was? Does my hon. Friend agree that this is the usual Liberal business of having a busybody in every town hall?

Mr. Pickles: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is right, but he should go further. Such a tax might prove to be quite expensive for poor people, who would have to pay a lot of money.

The hon. Member for Newbury also complained that no Liberal county council was receiving any of the dampening. The simple reason is that the dampening is designed to go to county districts, metropolitan authorities and London boroughs.

It would be churlish of me not to thank my right hon. Friend for the settlement, particularly as two authorities within my constituency received increases. Epping Forest received a 21 per cent. increase on its SSA and Brentwood a 36 per cent. increase. Those increases have been welcomed by all political parties within my constituency, and even on the pages of the much-quoted *Brentwood Gazette.*

The Conservative group at Brentwood stressed to me that the most challenging thing facing the council was its SSA. It was my view that serious underestimations had been made of the needs of the people of Brentwood. The truth is that the early versions of the SSA repeated many of the anomalies which existed in the previous grant-related expenditure. That is not a particularly tough criticism, as trying to find a system to distribute grants is extremely difficult. The local government information unit has commented that the

"difficulty of achieving fairness . . . is at a premium".

Many overseas countries have faced similar problems. I commend to the House two recent reports concerning SSAs which give an overseas comparison. The Audit Commission said:

"a more sophisticated system for equalising needs does not exist in any overseas system."

The much-quoted Tony Travers said that no overseas country appears to have a full grant system which goes so far in achieving full equalisation.

The changes in SSA are extremely welcome. I particularly welcome the changes in social services, with respect to the indicator of long-term illness among the elderly. I believe that the changes go a long way towards encouraging the Government's initiative of care in the community. In terms of the social index, I particularly welcome the recognition of the position of homeless households, children in rented accommodation and children with parents on income support

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman has welcomed the inclusion of homelessness as one of the indicators of deprivation or need. Does he accept that one of the authorities which asked for homelessness to be included was Westminster council, which happens to be the ninth-best gainer out of that inclusion, while Coventry, which anybody would have a hard job saying was less deprived than Westminster, comes 264th? Will the hon. Gentleman explain how that is a measure of social need?

Mr. Pickles: From memory, I note that Westminster city council last year rehoused 1,297 homeless people. Frankly, that record is far better than that of a number of adjoining Labour authorities, which spend their time leaving council houses empty and not rehousing homeless people.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) made some important and coherent points about ensuring that a number of economic factors, and unemployment in particular, were included in the calculations of SSA. I am particularly pleased that the words of the hon. Gentleman and of his colleagues in local authorities have been listened to and that unemployment has been included in the calculations of SSA.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The inclusion of unemployment and other health indicators is to be welcomed, as it has marginally helped the position of Sheffield in relation to other authorities. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, in terms of SSA distribution, the problem is that the year-on-year capping restrictions mean that Sheffield city council cannot use the extra SSA to spend on services for the public? Does not that mean that there is the nonsense of cuts in services and reductions in council tax at the same time?

Mr. Pickles: I may regret mentioning and praising the hon. Gentleman in my speech. I must remind him—I say this in friendship—that Sheffield council decided before the election that there was going to be a Labour Government, and that it was going to go for bust. There were one or two minor problems with the financing of the world student games, and perhaps that has more to do with what he says than the level of capping.

If the council decides that there are rules which will apply only to Sheffield and that it will look towards a Labour Government to bail it out, we should not be surprised if it has to face the consequences thereof. Nevertheless, I did agree with the hon. Gentleman on unemployment.

As someone who has moved from the north of England to the south, I am more persuaded about the need for area cost adjustment. The argument now with regard to employment costs in the south-east of England——

Mr. Betts: The hon. Gentleman has changed his mind.

Mr. Pickles: I have had more experience of the employment costs, which I recognise are much higher in the south-east. I hope that area cost adjustment will remain within the calculations of SSAs for the foreseeable future.

I was also particularly pleased to see that day visitors will be compensated for. We must recognise that the populations of many of our cities, towns and resorts artificially grow during the day. There are many extra burdens for authorities in those areas, ranging from litter to general wear and tear on the fabric of the city.

My right hon. Friend should recognise that there is need for a period of stability in SSAs. We must recognise that the census will have some effect on next year's figures, particularly with regard to the age profile of councils. Such changes in SSA can mask efficiencies and inefficiencies. A period of stability would give local taxpayers a better chance of comparison.

The standard spending assessment should be a living thing and it should adapt to modern circumstances. The changes which have been made are important. They have

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been broadly welcomed by local authority associations, academics and individual councils. We must not lose sight of the fact that stability is as important as resources.

The system places enormous burdens on those authorities that are winners. Those authorities must share the increases in their SSAs with their populations, and the most effective way to do that is to cut the council tax. I welcome the commitment given by many Conservative authorities to do just that.

I hope that in his reply to the debate my hon. Friend the Minister will take the opportunity to scotch a silly rumour that has been circulated in some councils that if councils do not spend up to their additional SSA, the Government will penalise them. That is clearly ridiculous. It is clearly not what is going to happen. It gives credence to the suggestion of the hon. Member for Blackburn that capping encourages people to spend up. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take the opportunity to nail that lie.

It is important that we do not have misleading information on local government finance. I was shocked to hear the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who is no longer in the Chamber, say on 2 December:

> "the Secretary of State has sought to distort the system so as to stuff grant the way of a few favoured Tory councils."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1993; Vol. 233, c. 1177.]

It is a matter of regret that that allegation was repeated this afternoon. It is clearly not the case that the system has been distorted. It has been checked by academics and the specialist press. The allegation has been found to be untrue. In the words of the *Local Government Chronicle:*

> "There is a myth of a political fix by Conservatives."

I hope that the hon. Member for Blackburn regrets his remarks. He has not made a good start by continuing to suggest that there will be job losses. He suggested that the settlement would cause thousands of job losses. That is a familiar tale. It is a tale that we heard last year. We were told that thousands would be put on the dole. I recall that in Birmingham——

Mr. Betts: Fifty thousand.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman talks about 50,000 job losses. With the figures for grant-maintained schools and further education taken out, we get down to a figure of about 30,000, or the part-time equivalent. Given the millions who are employed in local authorities, that figure hardly justifies the number of redundancies that people said would take place last year. I cannot find a better way of putting it than to quote the *Local Government Chronicle*. It said:

> "Last year Birmingham City Council grabbed the national headlines when it announced 3,000 jobs would be cut to find savings of £40 million, while tens of thousands more were said to be threatened across the country.
>
> A year later it is obvious many of the more vocal councils were crying wolf and their supposed job cuts have failed to materialise."

I believe that the figures produced by the joint staffing in December bear out that view. It is certainly my view that, if councils run their authorities in a prudent, efficient and sensible way, they should avoid compulsory redundancies this year.

The hard truth is that councils were expecting a much tougher settlement. I cannot remember a settlement welcomed by so many local government leaders at any time in my experience of local authorities. But there is still some room for savings. I noticed that the hon. Member for Blackburn fell into perhaps the worst sin that a politician can fall into by quoting himself. He quoted from this morning's *Tribune* article, in which he castigated Tory Brent for having the worst record for rent collection in the country. What he did not say was that for many years Brent was Labour controlled. The Conservative administration is trying to get back to the position of a normal authority. He did not mention that the top 10 authorities with the worst records for rent collection were Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham, Lambeth, Ealing, Southwark, Greenwich, Newham, Hackney, Haringey and Camden.

We have heard much about the London borough of Newham in these deliberations. The good people of Brentwood and Ongar do not have much experience of Labour councils—that is to say, except for the tenants of the estates run by the London borough of Newham. If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is looking for ways in which to judge the pleas that he has heard today, let him bear in mind the way in which that council mismanages the estates in my constituency.

That Newham mismanages its estates is the view not only of a Conservative politician but of the local citizens advice bureau. I have had a disproportionate number of cases from the London borough of Newham. People have been threatened with eviction. They are usually elderly. They have usually paid their rent. They are usually fairly confused as to why they have been threatened.

The cases follow a particular pattern. My constituents write to the London borough of Newham and ask why they are being threatened with eviction when they have paid their rent; they are ignored. They get their children to write to the London borough of Newham; they are ignored. Eventually the tenants either go to the citizens advice bureau or come to see me.

I have never in my years dealt with a more inefficient bunch than the London borough of Newham. Letters are lost. Care of the elderly people is ignored. If the London borough of Newham wants increased resources, the first thing it should do is look long and hard at the way in which its housing department is run. It might be good enough for the London borough of Newham, but it is not good enough for the people of Brentwood and Ongar.

There is sufficient room for increases in efficiency in local authorities. More savings are acceptable. Compulsory competitive tendering has proved to be a great boon to local authorities. It has challenged the way in which local authorities are run. It has given them much more commercial sense. I was pleased to see that Mr. Jeremy Beecham, the leader of Newcastle council and chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, recognises that many of the savings that have accrued under compulsory competitive tendering would not have accrued without it.

It worries me that much of the creative energy behind compulsory competitive tendering has been dissipated by local authorities trying to get around the regulations. Bristol made it impossible for a private company to bid for its contracts. It put out a single huge tender for refuse collection, street cleaning, public convenience cleaning and building cleaning. Not surprisingly, no private firm felt able to provide a contract.

Birmingham put out a 2 ft high stack of documents on the cleaning of just 364 buildings. One could virtually have stood on the stack to clean some of the windows. All the contracts had to start on the same day, thus making an outside bid unrealistic.

Mr. Betts: Would the hon. Gentleman like to comment on the case of South Oxfordshire council, which I understand is Conservative controlled? Without going out to tender, it awarded a computer contract to one of its own officers. That matter is now being investigated by the auditor there. As well as awarding the contract, the council awarded a lot of subsidies to that officer to set up a company, which has subsequently made substantial profits. Does the hon. Gentleman regard that as a proper way for local authorities to behave?

Mr. Pickles: We shall have to see the outcome of the police investigation, then I will comment on the case. I shall come back to the hon. Gentleman's specific point when I refer to Tameside.

Nottingham put its contract for road sweeping and refuse collection out to tender and awarded the contract to its own work force. In the process, it organised a party costing about £2,000 to celebrate.

Returning to the hon. Gentleman's point, I have been concerned of late to read articles in the specialist press about externalisation, which seems to be the latest fashion. We often see fashions move in local authorities. The latest idea is to provide services, but not by providing direct employment within the council. That obviously has an appeal to Conservatives. However, some of the articles suggest that the primary motivation for that is to get around the regulations and avoid compulsory competitive tendering. As I think I demonstrated earlier, if that is the sole motivation, it is likely to lead to disaster.

The hon. Member for Attercliffe talked about South Oxfordshire. I should like to talk about Tameside council, which is currently being investigated by Greater Manchester police fraud squad. It is investigating £2 million losses by Tameside Enterprises Ltd.—a company created by the council to look after old persons' homes. I shall not go into the various allegations because they are still under investigation.—*[Interruption.]* If I were the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), I would not be so confident because a lot of elderly people have had a poor deal out of the process. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House are prepared to admit it when things go wrong. I am prepared to give the Labour councillors the benefit of the doubt until the investigation is complete. It seems that a clever wheeze was thought up to get around compulsory competitive tendering and insufficient thought was given to the level of service that would be delivered.

Mr. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, since the trust and Tameside Enterprises took over the running of elderly people's homes in Tameside, the quality of care in those homes has been as good as anywhere else in the country? Does he further accept that the directors and the council asked for a full investigation into the sad misbehaviour of one of the employees, and the council, directors and trustees asked the police to investigate the matter? The investigation is not a criticism of the council. The council, the trustees and the directors sought to put right an unsatisfactory situation created by an employee who appears to have broken the law.

Mr. Pickles: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that information, but that is not my argument. If more thought had been given to the way in which the external trust was put together, many of the problems that have surfaced in the allegations could have been avoided. I commend to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State an article in the *Municipal Journal*, which bears close scrutiny. There is a disaster in the making unless the Government are prepared to offer guidelines on external funding.

The grant settlement is more generous than local authorities were expecting. It can be implemented without widespread compulsory redundancies across the country. I shall walk into the Division Lobby to vote for it with enthusiasm.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): A large number of hon. Members still wish to speak. May I make a plea for slightly shorter speeches?

7.42 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I shall be as brief as possible. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) spoke for only 21 minutes—it just seemed much longer than that. I shall try to be much briefer.

I put on record the fact that I am sponsored by UNISON, formerly the National Union of Public Employees. I used to be the union organiser representing local government workers, who are bearing the brunt of an awful lot of what the Government are doing to local authorities.

There have been many redundancies. Compulsory competitive tendering in local authorities has led to the awful sale of jobs every five years to the lowest bidder. The people who lose are part-time school meals workers, education helpers and school cleaners who work on disgustingly low weekly or hourly wages. They often have no job security and are unable to do a job properly.

Local government workers, whom I represented before I came to the House, used to be proud to work for the local authority, and proud that schools were clean and good places for children to attend. All pride in work disappears when there is no guarantee of job security and wages are lowered every time compulsory competitive tendering comes up.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar went on about the problems of compulsory competitive tendering and the way in which some local authorities have stacked the bid in favour of local authority direct services. But he should bear in mind the fact that, when a local authority's bid for a service is successful, there are nearly always job losses, a deterioration in working conditions, loss of training opportunities and trade union facility time and many other factors.

Working conditions are getting worse, not better, in the public sector. We should bear that in mind, because we all rely on the efficient work of refuse collectors, street sweepers, maintenance workers, school meals workers, social workers and social services centre workers. Instead of offering a constant stream of condemnation, Ministers should remember that.

I am also the chair of the London group of Labour Members, and I want to mention the problems in London. At present, there are 465,000 jobless people in the capital city. London's unemployment mirrors the national average for the first time in many years, and the position is getting

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worse. There are 39,000 homeless people in London living in hostels or bed-and-breakfast accommodation—some of them, tragically, living on the streets of the capital.

We have chaos in transport and planning, yet, overall, the settlement undervalues London by £600 million in local authority spending. If we want a decent, clean capital, we have to be prepared to fund it. Above all, however, we need to bring some sense to the way in which London is managed.

It is not surprising that London did not even have the opportunity to make the British bid for the Olympic games, and that London lost the chance to make the British bid for the Commonwealth games. Nobody will take seriously a city that has no unified form of local government. Who would one talk to if one wanted to bring the Olympic games to London? It would not be easy to arrange a meeting with the 32 London boroughs, the City of London and 25 quangos. It is not a sensible or good way to run the capital.

When the Secretary of State said that he wanted to hear what Londoners thought about such matters, he craftily sent out the questionnaire in copies of the *Evening Standard*. That questionnaire asked people to reply, but it was loaded with questions such as: "Do you like the parks? Do you like the open spaces? What do you like most about London?" He did not include in the questionnaire the fact that Government money has been taken from London and that the elected Greater London council has been taken away from us.

Across the river from the House, we now have the nonsense of European, Japanese and company flags outside county hall, which has been bought by a Japanese hotel chain. That building belongs to the people of London, and I hope that it will be returned to them, hopefully by compulsory purchase order by a future Labour Government.

The subject of urban deprivation is not a debate or a competition between the north and south of the country or between Opposition Members. We all have problems in our communities, and we all have problems of underfunding. The 1991 census's score list on urban deprivation shows that seven of the top 10 regions are London boroughs. The list is headed by Newham, Southwark, Hackney and Islington, with Haringey in 10th position. There are many arguments about how the score list is drawn up. If we consider the SSAs of those boroughs in the settlement, we find that Newham loses 6.9 per cent., my borough of Islington loses 5·1 per cent., and so it goes on.

The 1991 census was extremely inaccurate. It was plagued, as was the country for several years, by the appalling poll tax and by people fearing that answering questions posed by the census enumerator would lead to someone coming round and trying to make them pay the poll tax, even if they were staying at that address for only a short time. London has lost a lot through the poll tax. It is losing a great amount of council tax because of the way in which house prices are falling.

The Government propose that, from next year, there should be a unified regeneration budget for London. I cannot work out—I am still open to persuasion on the matter—whether that is a late admission by the Secretary of State that London needs unified local government to tackle its needs, or, as I suspect, yet another attack on individual local authorities in London.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) sent a series of questions to the Secretary of State about how the scheme would operate. The answers that were finally given to my hon. Friend showed that there would be a sort of Government gauleiter appointed to look after the regeneration budget for London. I understand that Manchester and Birmingham will also have such a scheme.

If the Government recognise, as perhaps they finally and lamentably have, that there are overall needs in a city the size of London, why cannot they honestly say so? They could then give us an authority that was elected by the people of London so that they, and not an endless parade of quangos, could decide what Londoners want.

The former Secretary of State for the Environment—he with the blond hair, who waves the Mace—said that he was going to kill the quangos in London. However, he and his successors have ensured that London is dominated by quangos—mostly filled with placemen nominated by Tory central office. Are those people fit to run a combination of estate action programmes, education and training support, section 11 grants, regional enterprise grants and business start-up and local initiative funds? They are the sort of people who will decide how that money is spent in London.

I hope that the House will at least recognise that the way in which the standard spending assessment operates seriously mitigates against inner urban areas of this capital. We want something done about it.

My borough has serious problems, and is not a wealthy area by any means. Unemployment in my constituency is around 22 per cent., and in some estates is as high as 40 per cent. and rising. There is a sense of desperation and misery, especially among young people and older pupils who are approaching school leaving age. They feel a sense of hopelessness about the future, and also deep frustration that their local authority cannot meet their needs in any way—through youth provision, social services, libraries and so forth.

I do not condemn the council, but simply point out the impossible bind that my local authority has been put in year after year. It has been told to make cuts, and on top of the £20 million in cuts last year, it will have to make more cuts this year.

While the capping level for Islington council's spending has increased slightly, it will not meet the increased statutory requirements that have been placed on the local borough because of the introduction of community care and the like. On top of that, every council tenant has been told that rents will have to rise by £2·90 per week, which is yet another attack on people in the poorest sectors of society.

I hope that the Minister will be able to deal with one issue when he replies to the debate. I understand that representations about housing benefit indicators were made to the Secretary of State during the SSA consultation period—in cases where the SSA goes to the landlord authority rather than the resident authority.

Only boroughs or councils which made representations to the Secretary of State benefited. Those councils which did not—like mine, which has a considerable number of City of London properties within it—have lost. I should be grateful if the Minister could tell us what attitude the Government will take. It is an important problem, and he should be aware of it, although I do not know that he is.

Mr. Tony Banks: Has my hon. Friend any knowledge of another practice which seems to have become common? Liberal-controlled Tower Hamlets has been putting homeless familes in the next borough—my borough of Newham—and leaving them there for some considerable time. It has then made them an offer that they can only refuse, thus rendering them homeless in the very borough that it put them in, which results in greater problems for Newham. It seems a deplorable practice, and one which is normally associated with Westminster, but it seems to have spread to Tower Hamlets.

Mr. Corbyn: I can confirm that. I have also had some experience of Tower Hamlets council and its treatment of homeless families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I am not surprised that the Liberal spokesperson gave what must be the shortest speech on record in a local government debate. There was no chance for anyone to intervene to ask what Tower Hamlets council was doing. If he wants to intervene now to tell me, I shall be happy to give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is right, and that problem underlines the importance of having a London-wide housing strategy. We have an appalling vista of local authorities trying to get rid of their responsibilities for homeless families, refugee children and anyone else. They are pushing them from one borough to another.

Surely to God we ought to care for those people who need a roof over their heads, rather than play ducks and drakes with the rules. The way in which central Government operate, however, encourages local authorities to play ducks and drakes, because they know that they will not get the money back at the end of the year for needs that they were totally unable to assess in the first place.

I shall be brief, because there is not a lot of time, and other hon. Members wish to speak. I have been given a copy of the briefing document from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities about budget reductions in 1993-94. I am sure that other hon. Members also have a copy and it makes very sorry reading.

For example, 184 job losses were achieved through redundancies in the borough of Barnet. The jobs were taken from special needs staffing in schools, from discretionary awards and from closing day nursery and elderly people's homes. Camden has lost 2,000 jobs, and borough after borough has been forced to make people redundant or lose them through natural wastage. That all adds up to an inferior service for people who desperately rely on local authorities to maintain some sort of standard of life, whether through social services, housing, recreation or other services.

Why are half the libraries in London shut most of the time? Why are swimming pools not open as often as they should be? Why are so many families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation? Why are local authorities encouraged to spend money lining the pockets of bed-and-breakfast landlords and private landlords, while the Government tell them that they cannot use their own resources to invest in decent housing for the people of this capital city?

I spent yesterday morning visiting one of a number of schools in my constituency. Highbury Quadrant school is a splendid school, with brilliant teachers and lovely kids—25 languages are spoken in the school, and everyone there is proud of that fact and proud of their cultural diversity. It is a lovely school. Ashmount infants school, which my son attends, is also a wonderful school, where many different languages are spoken.

All the schools are terrified about what will happen because of the cuts in section 11 funding. My borough is set to lose £900,000 in section 11 money because the Government have changed the formula. I hope that it can absorb the cut within the budget, but I doubt it. I suspect that some very good teachers will end up unemployed as a result of that cut, and a lot of very bright kids will end up short-changed by the education system because there will be no one to teach them English as a second language, or to give them the support they need.

These are desperate times to be in local government. I do not envy the lot of any councillor. The settlement is always used as a form of attack. The Government think that local government is the problem and must be attacked all the time, but without good and responsive local government, what sort of society are we?

I am fed up with the attacks on local government. I want a return to real democracy and an acceptance of central Government's need to give proper financial recognition for deprivation in inner urban areas such as my constituency.

7.56 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I shall do my best to comply with your request for short speeches, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning for his patience and understanding and for his unfailing courtesy, first at the meeting at which he met me—I was also representing my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway)—and secondly when he subsequently met senior officers and group leaders of Shropshire county council.

I do not wish to dwell upon the disappointment in Shropshire at this year's settlement, but people are disappointed about the changes in the settlements for area cost adjustment and sparsity. The 1994-95 reduction in sparsity weighting is estimated to have cost Shropshire's SSA £2·9 million and the area cost adjustment is clawing back around £5·4 million annually from the SSA.

For the record, during the period of the new rate support grant system Shropshire's SSA increase has been the lowest of all countries and the capping increase has been lower than 37 of the other 38 counties. However, I do not intend to dwell on that.

In his opening speech, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House how he and his colleagues had met deputations representing 58 councils. My contribution to this debate is set against the background of the annual round of representations and deputations resulting from decisions about local government finance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) queried the cost of that annual ritual of deputations. It is impossible to quantify that cost, bearing in mind the time, effort and energy that has been expended, but I

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suggest that it must be quite substantial. The time expended on those deputations and delegations is time not spent on more productive work in the shire and town halls.

The Government champion subsidiarity—the principle of allowing decisions to be taken at the lowest competent level. They also champion deregulation. As the House knows, the Second Reading of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill is next week. They also champion the reduction of the burden of public expenditure, and the House will have noted the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when he opened the debate. My proposals are deregulatory, thrifty and fully in accord with the principles of subsidiarity. I advocate an end to the sharing of responsibilities. Many of the difficulties that we have—and those difficulties produce the deputations and delegations with which we are all so familiar—arise from the fact that on so many scores responsibilities are divided between central and local government.

I further advocate an end to the separation of authority from responsibility. That is one of the cardinal principles of good management. It is impossible to run a business, a local authority or a Government if one separates the authority for carrying out a function from the responsibility. If one tells a manager in a business, "You are responsible for that function, but you must not make any decision without further reference to a higher authority", that is a great demotivation to the manager and the management of the company suffers accordingly.

I further advocate the vesting of total control for providing and funding of local government services in the same pair of hands. My recommendation is that those hands should be existing district councils as the new unitary authorities. I shall not regret the demise of county councils—that most remote and expensive tier of local government which is increasingly recognised by my constituents as the tier that we could do without. One of the three weaknesses about the present system of local government is that there are too many tiers, and the one most eligible for abolition is the county council.

If subsidiarity means anything, it means cutting the Gordian knot that binds local government so tightly to central Government. It means critically examining the functions that we intend local government to discharge in future.

There are three things to take into consideration if we want efficient local government. First, we have to consider how it is financed. We have had three different methods of financing local government in as many years: the rating system, the community charge and now the council tax.

Secondly, we have to consider its structure. We reorganised the structure of local government 20 years ago. My fear is that we are in danger of reorganising local government again and not coming up with the right answer. We shall then have a botched reorganisation of the structure.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The Conservatives reorganise local government and the National Health Service as frequently as the Forth bridge is painted. They do not even finish before they start again. In the past 20 to 25 years there has been a tradition of Conservative Governments expensively reorganising public services with little to show for it at the end of the day.

Mr. Gill: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I hope that he will listen to the rest of my speech.

Having attempted to put the financing of local government on to a proper footing and get the structure right, we have neglected to examine its functions under a microscope and decide exactly what we want local government to do. Having decided what we want local government to do, we must not hedge our bets by saying that local government should carry out part of a particular function while central Government do the other part of it.

I am advocating a complete demarcation between resonsibilities which can and should be discharged at local level and those which can be discharged only at central level.

There may be howls of anguish—even from the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay)—when I suggest that we might have to consider abolishing local education authorities, but there is some logic in that. As an increasing number of schools opt for grant-maintained status, it is clear that the importance of local education authorities will be diminished and ultimately one can envisage their demise.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that every local government reorganisation since the war has been carried out by the Conservatives? Why should people have any confidence whatever in any future organisation on which the Conservative party wants to embark?

Mr. Gill: The reorganisation that we carried out in the early 1970s resulted from taking off the shelf the blueprint left there by the previous Labour Administration. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I personally regret that my party took the blueprint prepared by the previous Administration and implemented it. I see that the hon. Gentleman is nodding in assent to what I have just said.

The gist of my speech today is that whatever we do in future must be in a form that we can all understand. It would be a brave hon. Member who pretended to understand all the intricacies of local government finance. I invite hon. Members to consider everything in the documents that accompany this evening's debate.

Undoubtedly, much of the system of calculating a grant for a local government settlement depends on arcane calculations and equations which I find difficult to understand. I am sure that local councillors have difficulty in understanding them, too. Frankly, we cannot expect good, efficient, economic local government if councillors cannot understand the way in which the whole operation is funded.

We have to have intelligible systems which essentially need to be simple so that we can all understand them and make a better showing of delivering services to the general public.

I was saying that I advocate the abolition of local education authorities. I also suggest transferring social services to district health authorities. Both those services —education and social services—are in effect funded not by the council tax but by the taxpayer.

Ministers have said more than once this evening that we do not have hypothecation of taxes in this country. However, let me illustrate my point. Education in my own county of Shropshire will cost £148 million in 1993-94. Social services in the same period 1993-94 will cost £33 million. The total of those two services is £181 million and the total external support that the county will attract in the same 12 months is £182 million. The two figures neatly cancel each other out, which proves that the two services could be removed from the local government equation and become a charge on the taxpayer, with all other services being deputed to the unitary authority.

Three things must be done. First, local authority functions must be scaled down to match the local revenue-raising potential of the council tax. Secondly, councils and councillors must be required to raise £1 for every 100 pence that they spend. Thirdly, they must be exclusively answerable to the electorate for the services that they provide.

The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) shakes his head, indicating disbelief. I apologise for not knowing his background, but what I am saying is predicated on a lifelong involvement in management and trying to motivate people to do a good job. One of the important lessons that I have learnt from that experience is that it is not possible to motivate people by giving them half a job, by giving them responsibility but ordering them to refer decision making to another authority or by facing them with an unintelligible system: they find that completely demoralising.

We can create transparency of both funding and efficacy by making councils responsible for all their functions—including raising revenue for their spending—making them wholly accountable to their electorates and by defining their functions precisely so that they can be discharged within the limits of local fund-raising capacity. That, in turn, will lead to increased accountability and economy, which I—along with the Government and, I believe, every council tax payer in the country—want to see.

There can, however, be no local accountability while there is doubt about who is responsible for which function: that is why it is so important to the Government to consider which tier should do what. Nor can there be accountability while funding remains a maze of arcane equations and calculations. Similarly, there will be no thrift while councils continue to spend ever-increasing amounts of other people's money. The figures speak for themselves: 75 per cent. of money spent by local authorities now comes from central Government, while only 25 per cent. comes from the council tax.

Last but by no means least, there can be no prospect of improving the calibre of councillors, or of involving the business community, while the current position continues. Ministers do not need a commission to tell them what to do; the answer stares them in the face.

8.13 pm

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): I am sure that most hon. Members will agree that local government finance is the most mysterious, arcane and complex subject in the political calendar. I suspect that, apart from council finance officers, few people—including national and local politicians—have any idea of the complexities involved.

Having said that, let me add that I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of St. Helens. I am sure that the Minister will not disagree when I say that St. Helens is one of the councils that have had a raw deal ever since the SSAs were established some three years ago. As he knows, a small group of northern authorities was heavily handicapped by the lack of any factor relating to unemployment or economic decline, although all had been affected by the rundown of the mining, steel, engineering and, in the case of St. Helens, glass and chemical industries.

For three years, those authorities—St. Helens, Wigan, Wakefield, Barnsley, Rotherham, Doncaster and Sheffield—have fought to right the current wrongs, constantly making representations to the Government. It is only fair for me to add that we are grateful to the Government for recognising the validity of our case and accepting that economic and social indicators should be included in the assessments; that has undoubtedly benefited St. Helens.

During the Secretary of State's speech, I suggested that he should consider giving some recompense to those authorities in recognition of the three years for which they were so severely handicapped. St. Helens borough council, for instance, has been forced over the past three years to spend its entire balance in cutting £20 million to set a legal budget. Last year, it was forced to take £10·5 million from a budget of £142 million. Even jobs in the authority disappeared, in a town that has lost 20,000 jobs over the past 10 years as a result of the decline in our traditional industries. It had to close a library, an elderly people's home, a day nursery, a family centre and a day centre, while increasing charges for home helps, school meals and meals on wheels. We were not just cutting essential services; we were cutting the authority's work to the bone.

It was with some trepidation that I heard today's announcement that the Government had accepted the teachers' 2·5 per cent. pay claim but that there would be no additional money. I doubt very much that St. Helens will be able to find the money to cover that increase without having to slash services further.

The people of St. Helens are mystified by some of the unfairnesses in the SSAs. Over the past two weeks our two local newspapers, the *St. Helens Star* and the *St. Helens Reporter*, have run a series of articles comparing St. Helens with the London borough of Westminster, whose population size is almost identical. They pointed out that, on the social index chart, Westminster ranks as a much more impoverished borough—as do Kensington and Chelsea, City of London and Kingston upon Thames, to name but a few.

Most people would be astonished to learn that Westminster is more impoverished than St. Helens. It is very peculiar, given that St. Helens is part of Merseyside, which the European Commission has just recognised as one of the most deprived regions in the European Union and has granted objective 1 status—which means substantial extra funds.

What mystifies people in St. Helens even more, however, is the difference between the grants that it receives and those received by Westminster. In 1994, Westminster is to receive £2,622 per primary school pupil, while St. Helens will receive £1851. In other words, it costs £770 more to educate a pupil in Westminster than it does in St. Helens. The figures for secondary pupils are even worse: Westminster receives £3,677 per pupil whereas St. Helens receives £2,590, so Westminster receives more than £1,000 more per pupil. For the care of the elderly, Westminster receives £18 million more than St. Helens, which works out at almost £1,000 per elderly person.

The Secretary of State said that the figures for London boroughs were fair. If he says so, I have to accept it but I

[Mr. John Evans]

should be grateful if he would write and explain how the figures are arrived at. I guarantee that his answer will be published in the St. Helens newspapers.

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: No, I shall not give way because time is getting on. The hon. Gentleman spoke for a long time and several of my hon. Friends still wish to participate in the debate.

I shall now complete the comparison between Westminster and St. Helens. Both councils have received the auditor's report. Most people will agree that the report on Westminster was rather damning. Indeed, some Westminster officers and councillors were criticised unmercifully. In St. Helens, the district auditor, Frank Kerkham, gave a special mention to the council's

"sound and business-like management".

He especially praised the way in which the authority collects and monitors the council tax. The district auditor said:

> "By the end of October 1993 the money owed in Council Tax was £4·9 million. This represents 3·9 per cent. of the gross debit for three years of the community charge's existence."

The council believes that that is a good performance, given that it has had to introduce and collect the council tax in tandem with the residual community charge. In other words, Westminster receives a great deal more finance from central Government than St. Helens but received a damning and damaging report from the auditor whereas St. Helens received praise.

I wish to raise a more immediate and pressing problem. As I said, the new SSA is beneficial to St. Helens and we are grateful for that, but the roof has fallen in on St. Helens council once again. A major road is being constructed, a link from the M62 to the town centre. It is vital for the economic regeneration of St. Helens, but the area through which the road passes contains almost 300 hectares of some of the most contaminated derelict land in the country. More than 180 hectares of the land have been identified as potentially excellent development sites. Indeed, a couple of years ago Pilkington decided to locate its UK5 and UK6 flute glass plants in St. Helens rather than on the continent or in southern England because of the benefits that would flow from the new road. The prospect of the new road has already begun to attract people to St. Helens.

The original tender for the main contract, which was awarded in May 1991 when the total cost of the scheme was estimated at £35 million, was for £19·2 million. The current estimate of the final cost is £53·6 million. I shall not go into all the details, but the increase in costs has been caused by problems over which the council has no control. They include hitting unknown dumps of highly toxic waste which have had to be removed to the ends of the country because of the new environmental protection legislation and hitting deposits of coal which have also had to be removed. Gas mains were discovered which no one knew were there, public utilities have also had to be removed at considerable expense and a serious problem arose with British Rail over the new bridge that had to be constructed as part of the project. The costs and delays have added to the council's problems.

As the problems arose, the council notified the Departments of Transport and of the Environment but, out of the blue, the Department of Transport informed the council at Christmas that it would receive no assistance with the additional costs. That was a considerable bombshell to be handed to the council as a Christmas box. The council must now attempt to fund the project out of revenue which, as I am sure the Minister of State will accept, is utterly impossible.

This morning, I led a council delegation to the Departments of Transport and of the Environment. We are grateful for the sympathetic response that we received from both Departments and I pay special tribute to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry). Ministers were courteous and sympathetic, but I do not know whether they can help us to solve the problem. I want the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport to understand the problem and accept that St. Helens council is in a catch-22 situation.

If the council attempts to fund the scheme out of revenue, it will not only have to slash education and social service provision once again—they have already been decimated in the past five years—but will undoubtedly have to overspend and be capped. The alternative, which some people in the town are beginning to demand, is for the council not to complete the road, although 80 per cent. of it has already been built. If it were left unfinished, the centre of the town would be in utter chaos and look like a first world war battlefield. It would mean that the main contractor and many small contractors would face a financial crisis, to say the least.

I suggest that no council should have to face problems of this nature involving the construction of a major highway. I appeal to the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport to ensure in the coming three or four weeks that St. Helens receives assistance to solve the short-term problem.

8.25 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans), because the contrast between the problems facing his local authority and the problems with which I shall deal later could not be greater.

I wish to speak about the Isles of Scilly. The mention of the Isles of Scilly in the same breath as St. Helens highlights the fact that local government has to meet very different needs in different parts of the country. I am also pleased to see sitting next to the hon. Gentleman the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), with whom I sat for many years on the Greater London council. I mention that only because I do not share his view about the demise of that authority, a view which is supported by some other hon. Members.

I look back on the GLC with great nostalgia. I was a member for eight and a half years, and in those days it had a role to perform. That role largely disappeared because of the fact that services such as sewerage were taken over by the boroughs. The GLC's role was rationalised, and in the end it was left searching for something to do.

Mr. Tony Banks: I shall be brief because I do not want to prevent the hon. Gentleman from talking about the Isles of Scilly. Is it not odd that London is the only capital city in the world that does not have a single authority or an elected mayor to speak on behalf of its population? If such a system works in every other capital city, why not in London?

Mr. Harris: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but to return to that huge bureaucratic structure would be a retrograde step. I have read all the opinion polls that are trotted out on this subject and, despite their findings, I do not sense among the people who live in London a great longing for a return of the GLC. I, too, spend the week here, and return to Cornwall for the weekend.

I am still recovering from the remarks of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). I pay tribute to him for sitting patiently through the debate. He said—I intervened to ask him about it—that he thought that less money should be provided by central Government, albeit in the context of the local income tax and the raising of more money locally to fund local services. I pointed out that that was not the view of his colleagues on Cornwall county council.

I think it is fair to say that the Liberal Democrats who now control Cornwall county council—the chairmen of its various committees—virtually have season tickets to come up to London on delegation after delegation to plead with Ministers for more essential Government money to meet the needs of Cornwall. They cannot really lose. The Liberal Democrats come up to London and say, "You Ministers must give us more money." If the Ministers do not give them more money, they blame the Government, but if they do give them a bit more money, they say, "Liberal Democrats are wonderful people, because we have got more money from central Government for the needs of the people of Cornwall."

The hon. Member for Newbury should have a word with his colleagues at county hall in Cornwall, and try to get the party line clarified on that aspect of policy, as on so many others.

Mr. Rendel: Obviously, I did not make myself clear. There is no incompatibility between local people now calling for greater Government intervention in terms of providing money towards local costs at a time when local costs—and SSAs—are increasing, but unfortunately the Government are cutting the grant.

A policy of local income tax—which would allow whatever rate was set by the Government under the present system for grant from central sources to decrease gradually, while more and more of the rate was taken on to a local income tax—would mean that national income tax was decreasing, while local income tax was increasing. Taxation would remain at the same level, but more of the local tax would be raised locally. That is the important argument. That is why the two principles are compatible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I remind the House of the 50 minutes available before the wind-up speeches begin. Five hon. Gentlemen are hoping to catch my eye. Long interventions do not help.

Mr. Harris: I will not pursue that point, but I could pick many holes in the hon. Gentleman's argument.

I want to use the time allotted to me to discuss the special problems of the Isles of Scilly in my constituency. The contrast between the Isles of Scilly and many of the local authorities that have been mentioned in the debate could not be greater. The Isles of Scilly council is unique in local government. It is a unitary authority with a population of slightly fewer than 2,000, but it has all the responsibilities, at all layers, of local government. The difficulty is that any small change is therefore greatly magnified. I shall illustrate that by outlining the difficulties that the Isles of Scilly council foresees in the current settlement.

There are three problem areas. The first is education. The standard spending assessment for education has been cut by £59,000 for the Isles of Scilly—a minute amount compared with the expenditure of other authorities that have been mentioned, but large in proportion to the budget of the Isles of Scilly. That has come about simply as a result of a factor mentioned by Conservative Members—the fact that the figures on which the formula is based are already out of date. There are 22 more pupils in the Isles of Scilly than there were when the figures were collected. That is a minute number, but it has big funding implications for the Isles of Scilly.

There are other factors. Several of the pupils who account for the increase live on the off-islands. They have to be boarded on St. Mary's, the main island. That adds to the cost.

Another factor is that the formulae do not take account of the fact that there are no educational facilities for pupils aged over 16 on the Isles of Scilly, so they have to go to the mainland, which means that the Isles of Scilly council pays about £75,000 every year in boarding and travel costs to take those pupils to the schools on the mainland, mainly in Penzance in my constituency. The formula takes no account of that factor, and it adds to the difficulty. There is, therefore, a significant shortfall in the spending on education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field)—perhaps the Isles of Scilly and the Isle of Wight are similar in some respects—mentioned the costs of providing the fire service on an island. Those costs and those difficulties are compounded on the Isles of Scilly, because all five inhabited islands need some fire cover. Yet, as I understand it, the money that is made available to any local authority that is a fire authority depends in part on the number of calls and the number of false alarms that are made during the year.

Fortunately, very few people cause a false alarm on the Isles of Scilly, but if one adds all those factors together, there is a big shortfall in the funding of fire services. It costs £91,000 to provide fire services on the Isles of Scilly. The SSA for the islands is only £57,000.

The third factor is the revenue that is handed over to local authorities to recognise to some extent the extra expenditure they incur as a result of dealing with tourists. That is done on a national basis, as I understand it. There has been a decrease in that revenue, because the feeling is that surveys have shown a decrease in tourism in the past year. That, fortunately, is not true of the Isles of Scilly, where there has been an increase.

Those factors add up to a cut in the SSA for the Isles of Scilly council of 2·9 per cent. In fact, its SSA has been reduced this year from £2,556,000 to £2,482,000—a decrease of £74,000. Incidentally, the reason why the council has apparently so large an SSA in relation to the population is that, as I mentioned earlier, it is a unitary authority providing all services, and with large extra costs because they are provided on an island.

I understand from the documents and from the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the special grant to take account of decreases in SSA will apply when there is a reduction of 2 per cent. As I said, the SSA for the Isles of Scilly has decreased by 2·9 per cent. I ask the Minister of State whether he can throw any light

[Mr. Harris]

on the situation when he replies to the debate, because the Isles of Scilly are not mentioned in the document as qualifying for that special grant. I hope that he will consider that. If he cannot give me an answer tonight, I know that he will provide one later.

However, my plea to the Minister of State and his colleagues is to reconsider the special features of the Isles of Scilly. We all go in for special pleading in a debate such as this. I make no apology for doing just that for the islanders I represent, and I hope that my arguments will be considered—not only seriously, as I know they will be, but sympathetically.

8.39 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I shall be as brief as possible, and I intend to talk about the standard spending assessment and capping criteria. As we know, the Government are now trying to use the capping criteria to get local authorities to spend exactly to their SSAs.

You will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of my opposition in previous years to the methodology used in calculating standard spending assessments. They use out-of-date census data and inadequate indicators that take no account of need, unemployment, social deprivation, or the need for health education. They use inadequate ethnicity factors, and they make too much use of proxies, rather than direct indicators.

I am pleased to be able to say that the Secretary of State has at last taken on board many of the complaints that have been made in the House, especially by people representing areas covered by the Webber-Craigh authorities, such as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans), and has altered the SSA calculations to take account of those complaints. I especially welcome the economic index, which takes account of unemployment and long-term illness, both of which are prevalent in my constituency.

The resulting standard spending assessment per head of population for my local authority shows an increase of 6·9 per cent.—the second highest increase for any of the metropolitan districts. I believe that our new level of SSA under the new methodology totally vindicates our complaints in the House against the previous SSA. Had the changes been implemented earlier, my local authority would have been spared the losses that it has suffered over the past three years, and would not have been capped in 1990.

However, even with a 6·9 per cent. increase Barnsley is still 32nd out of the 36 metropolitan authorities. The gap between the highest and the lowest SSAs has closed, but it is still quite large. Last year, I used the example of Manchester, and then the difference between my local authority and Manchester was more than 60 per cent. That gap is still 47 per cent. Manchester has an SSA 47 per cent. higher than that of Barnsley to provide a standard level of service. Hon. Members have already referred to Westminster; last year its SSA was 102 per cent. higher than Barnsley's, and this year it will be 79 per cent. higher.

As I shall explain, the increase in SSA has been completely overshadowed by the capping criteria that caused the existing lower level of SSA to be capped. The changes to the SSA methodology are welcome, but further review will be necessary. All the problems with the SSAs cannot be addressed in one year alone, and in future years we shall need further fine tuning.

The capping regime had an impact on the levels of SSA for previous years, which were artificially low. That means that we shall have a low level of spending in the forthcoming year, despite the increase in the SSA. The losses from the past are never likely to be made up. As I have said, the Government want to equate spending to the SSA, using a form of what may be called permanent capping.

The SSAs will never be the fairest method of dealing with local government finance, and further work is still needed in examining the methodology. Barnsley's SSA has increased, giving a possible increase of £8 million, but the authority cannot spend anything like that. Its revenue support grant has been increased by 18 per cent.—£11 million—but that will serve only to reduce the level of local council tax.

I am sure that many of my constituents would be happy for the council tax to remain the same if some of the services that we have lost over the past three years were restored—for example, the excellent music tuition centre, and all the other local government services that have either had charges imposed or been removed altogether. I should especially like to see more funding for special needs education, and the residential care homes that have been closed over the past 12 months in Barnsley being reopened. I should also like to see the reintroduction of the discretionary education awards that were ended last year and have still not been restored. I am sure that the people of Barnsley would like to keep council tax levels as they are and retain those services.

Because of the capping criteria, there will be a shortfall of £8 million in the local authority's budget. The council is meeting now to try to draw up a budget to avoid capping while maintaining as many services as it can, and it is under extreme pressure in trying to achieve that.

I must also mention council tax transitional relief, which was intended to last for two years. I referred a constituency case to the Secretary of State involving a household which on the specified date for the measurement of transitional relief contained an artificially high number of people—four. When the household was reduced to two people, although their home was in a high council tax band, the family could not take advantage of the transitional relief. Could the relevant date be changed or, even better, could there be some sort of appeal in the mechanism to allow a family who did not qualify for transitional relief when it had more people in it on the specified date, to go back to the local authority and show that their circumstances had changed so that they could take advantage of the relief?

Representatives of the South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority came to meet Ministers at the Department of the Environment and the Home Office. During that meeting, the chief fire officer admitted that the steps that the authority were taking to save money, difficult though they were, would not prevent it from falling below the Home Office accepted minimum standard. That authority is, therefore, facing a difficult situation. It cannot maintain Home Office standards on its present funding. The SSA for the authority has increased by 5·7 per cent., but it has been capped at 1·75 per cent., despite the fact that the budget has been reduced substantially over the past two years.

Fire stations in my area have been closed to accommodate a five-year rolling programme and to facilitate the building of a brand-new fire station to serve the area and improve the service. Unfortunately, that plan is now under threat because of the difficulties that the authority faces. Its balances have been reduced to £200,000—substantially below the balances recommended by the chief finance officer.

The authority has suggested three possibilities, but even if it maintains its current freeze on recruitment it will still be £1·1 million short of adequate funding. It is £1·38 million short of what it needs to maintain Home Office minimum standards, and £1·77 million short of what it needs to restore its balances to the minimum recommended by the finance officer. It is falling below the minimum standard.

The Minister was asked whether, due to the difficulties with pension payments by the fire authority over the past year, those could be capitalised for this year and the authority given permission for supplementary credit approvals to borrow the money to meet that capitalisation. If permission is given to capitalise that sum, but no credit approval is given, the capital would have to come from existing programmes and the new fire station proposed at Tankersley would be stopped. There would not be enough money in the capital programme to maintain the building and to meet the capitalisation of the pension commitment. The two go hand in hand. I am looking to the Minister to give some sign today that South Yorkshire will be allowed that capitalisation and given the authority for supplementary credit approval. I hope that he will consider that request seriously.

8.48 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The background to the debate is the Government's 1987 claim that they would make local government finance simpler and easier for people to understand. Against that criterion, they have created three major problems for local authorities. First, they have made money more difficult for local authorities to collect. It is amazing to hear Conservative Members go on about local authorities' failure to collect, because they do not recognise that many of the problems were created by the Government. The rates were a simple way of collecting money and most local authorities had a good level of collection. First with the poll tax and now the council tax, the Government have made collection much more difficult.

The second problem that the Government have created is in dramatically reducing the tax base for local authorities. Before the Government started with the reorganisation and changes, local authorities raised about 55 per cent. of their income by local tax, the remainder being made up by the Government. Now local authorities raise about 20 per cent. of their income. The result is that, for a small cut in Government grant, local authorities have to put up their charges by substantial amounts—the ratio is about 1:4.

Thirdly, instead of bringing clarity and understanding to local government finance, the Government have made it even worse. There is no way that individual electors can make a judgment about their councillors and their effectiveness in the way that they spend the money on the basis of this extremely complicated formula. It seems to me that it is against that background that we must judge the Government's record on local Government finance. It is pretty terrible.

I was disappointed with the Minister for Local Government and Planning who, when he came to the Select Committee, did not accept that most of the decisions on the standard spending assessments are political. He kept trying to claim that they were somehow objective and fair, based on the figures. I do not complain that he makes political decisions, but he should defend them rather than claim that there is some statistical validity in them. One particularly blatant example was the original introduction of extra money for overnight visitors and then, as a result of the outcry from that, the extra money for day visitors. In his introduction, the Secretary of State suggested that, by my objection to day visitors being included, I wanted to take money from London.

I certainly do not. But I want to take money away from Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea and ensure that it goes to places such as Newham, because the money for day visitors simply means that some central city places and seaside resorts do very well out of it. I cannot see any justification for the idea that day visitors automatically add to a local authority's costs. Stockport is one glaring example. It maintains Lyme park, which is within Cheshire. It costs each of the council charge payers in Stockport £5 a year. It is good value, but Stockport gets no compensation from the grants scheme for maintaining Lyme park. The people who benefit are in Cheshire.

Many of my constituents like to go to Alton park. It is good value. It is a fun fair. Staffordshire will now benefit from that facility, yet it is almost totally self-contained. It will cost Staffordshire very little to maintain the tourist facilities there, whereas Blackpool fun fair, which is nothing like as self-contained, may well cost Blackpool. The idea about day visitors is nonsense. Some will be a source of revenue for a local authority through parking charges and other aspects from which it can benefit; some will be a serious drain on its resources. To say that it has anything to do with fairness is a myth. It has to do with where the Government want the money to go, which in this case, sadly, tends to be towards Tory authorities.

Another example of the way in which the system is particularly unfair is the SSA for schools. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) compared Manchester and Barnsley. I do not begrudge the money that goes to Manchester. I have been into the schools there and think that they need the money. But it is amazing that, at the Reddish and Denton end of my constituency, where it comes up to Manchester, there are schools within about a mile of each other: one in Manchester, one in Denton within Tameside and one in Stockport. I cannot see any justification for the difference in the allocation of money to those schools. The Manchester school gets £2,214 for the primary school; the secondary school gets £3,106. In Tameside—within a mile—the primary school will get £1,826; the secondary school, slightly further away, £2,556. The primary school in Stockport will get £1,776; the secondary school, £2,484. Those primary schools are within a mile of each other. The secondary schools are within some three miles of each other.

I am perfectly willing to concede that, between my constituency and somewhere like Moss Side in Manchester, there is a big difference in the problems of teaching children, but there are not those problems between those areas within a mile of each other. Because

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

of the local management of resources in schools, Manchester schools get so much more than those in Tameside or Stockport. As teachers' salaries are fixed nationally, the small amount over which an individual school has discretion is a substantial problem for the Stockport and Tameside schools. They are badly underfunded. I can see nothing fair about that. I would argue that the Government must look at the weighting that they give to extra educational needs, to make it fairer.

Other hon. Members referred to the area needs cost. I make no complaint in arguing that, compared to London, schools in the north of England need extra resources. I do not want to take funding away from London schools, because they need the resources, but I cannot see how schools in areas such as Stockport and Tameside can cope with the present level of funding.

If the Government believe in democracy, they must take away the process of capping. Let the electors make the choice—either pay for higher services or not do so. At the moment they are caught in this situation. The financing is difficult to understand. They are not able to make a judgment about whether local councillors or the Government are failing to provide the service that they want. Let us get rid of capping, let local authorities make their decisions and let the electorate make the decision on that. If we want a healthy democracy, we must return democracy to local government. That means that local government needs a bigger tax base. Local councillors should be able to make decisions about the level of tax raising that they impose. The electorate can please themselves whether to support them or not. The present situation is a farce.

8.59 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) has gone for a pie and a pint, partly because he is a good lad and was right on Maastricht, but also because he said that he was looking forward to the abolition of the county councils and a future of secure and more clear government.

Before the hon. Gentleman left, I handed him a copy of the reply that other colleagues and I have had from the Secretary of State about the court judgment on the Local Government Commission guidance notes, in which we are told

> "The Government is not appealing against the court ruling . . . The Government believes that unitary authorities will often be the best way of achieving these objectives . . . They will therefore often provide the best form of local government . . . However there is no national blueprint and the Government does not rule out consideration of two tiers in particular circumstances, with or without changes to the status quo".

I thought that the hon. Member for Ludlow would be interested in seeing what sort of monster is shambling towards Jerusalem to be born. I bet, that as he has an outside chance of retaining Ludlow at the next election, during the next Parliament he will see that what is proposed will have to be undone, with consequent complex financial ramifications.

I obviously have a strong interest in Lancashire, both as a Lancashire Member and as a former county councillor. I am well aware of the problems of fishing in local government revenue support figures and of the ease with which anybody can come up with an old boot. I am also aware that one can hardly make the case for a particular authority being hard done by without appearing to wish to disadvantage another authority. Comparisons are odorous, as someone once said.

The only way in which the position in Lancashire can be illustrated is by comparison with authorities of similar size —1·5 million people. The three other counties in that category are Essex, Hampshire and Kent. My main concern is that Lancashire's financial allocations have been deteriorating steadily since 1989-90, during which time Lancashire's standard spending assessment has gone up by 23·7 per cent.; the average shire increase is 29·4 per cent. That is a considerable disparity.

This year, Lancashire's SSA has gone up by 1·43 per cent., whereas the SSA for Essex has gone up by 3·35 per cent., the SSA for Hampshire by 2·97 per cent. and the SSA for Kent by 3·09 per cent. In 1989-90, Lancashire, Essex, Hampshire and Kent had virtually the same grant-related expenditure, as it then was. In 1994, after a period of steadily widening graphs, Lancashire is way lower than the others—£100 million less than Kent. From 1990-91 to 1994-95, Lancashire's basic credit approval has gone down by 41 per cent., whereas the average county reduction has been 13 per cent. At the same time, Lancashire's budget increased by 58·9 per cent., whereas the county average was 62·1 per cent. Those are general figures against which this year's allocations and this year's difficulties must be seen.

I know that the Minister for Local Government and Planning has looked at the figures, because we discussed them at a meeting with a deputation a few weeks ago. He assured us that he had no ideological or theoretical objection to changes in the methodology of allocation and that he was open to persuasion about the mechanics. Lancashire can show itself to be underfunded on at least six counts: the area cost adjustment, the special transitional grant, interest receipts, the education of under-fives, capital financing and the further education transfer. Lancashire estimates the total shortfall to be about £56·2 million. I am talking not about a wish list but about significant, punitive or partial calculations. I shall pick up three aspects of that.

As the Minister knows well enough through his knowledge of his own local authority's finance control—he comes from the right half of the country—the area cost adjustment is a major source of justified complaint among authorities outside the south-east. About £1·6 billion this year is skewed south-eastward by that device. After all the vigorous representations from local authorities and their associations over the past few years, it came as a slap in the face to find that this year the ACA has been increased by 15 per cent. The Association of County Councils has argued for its redistribution among all authorities; pro rata, that would mean £15·9 million extra being allocated to Lancashire.

I listened carefully to the exchanges earlier today between my hon. Friends who represent London constituencies and the Secretary of State. Anyone in Lancashire—I am sure that my hon. Friends the Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike) agree —can understand the need for extra provision for London because it has extra and special problems. However, no one could persuade people in Lancashire that Kent, Sussex, Berkshire and some of the other leafier areas around London required the same provision——

Mr. Bennett: The Isle of Wight.

Mr. Pickthall: Or the Isle of Wight. I cannot believe that they require that skew.

The element allowed for the pay of higher education teachers, police and firefighters should be assessed by reference to London weighting allowances which are actually paid rather than by reference to a new earnings survey. The Department's own paper, No. 93/51, which was considered by the SSA sub-group last summer, described the ACA approach to those worker groups as dubious. It recommended actual London weighting, the incorporation of which into the SSA would make the ACA factors correspond more closely to the real world. It was the Minister's own Department which said that.

Authorities disadvantaged by the ACA are, therefore, especially aggrieved by the inclusion of areas around London that they believe should not be included. I can quote a specific example of the effect of that exclusion by reference to primary and secondary SSAs in 1994-95. Each primary child is worth as follows: in Essex £1,972, in Kent £1,961 in Hampshire £1,929 and in Lancashire £1,867. A Lancashire primary pupil is allocated £94 less than a Kent contemporary. Annually, a typical school of 100 pupils in my constituency receives £9,400 less.

In secondary schools the same thing applies, but on a greater scale. A Lancashire secondary school student is allocated £145 less than an Essex contemporary. That means that in a typical school of 800, a Lancashire school receives £116,000 less than it should. Schools in each of those four authorities face similar costs, certainly in wages, and no one can possibly imagine that such disparities are remotely fair.

I shall cut my speech short because my hon. Friends are dying to speak on similar matters and I shall mention only briefly the standard spending assessment funding for under-fives' education. In view of the Prime Minister's recent discovery of the importance of nursery education and the fact that the Secretary of State for Education grudgingly agreed with him not too many days ago, it is absolutely preposterous that the SSA element for under-fives' education is judged on the population of an area rather than on the provision. That basis specifically discourages good providers such as Lancashire from improving and it specifically discourages bad providers from improving their performance. That could be changed without, in the first instance, any implications for the overall allocation. It is a matter of adjustment. I shall allow somebody else to jump in.

9.6 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I shall be brief because my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is straining at the leash in his desire to get into the debate. The settlement is a bad one for local government. We were told that there would be a 2·3 per cent. increase, but the figure represents a 1·2 per cent. cut on the current year's local authority budgets.

The Secretary of State said that the teachers will get a 2·9 per cent. increase. How will that be paid for? The *Evening Standard* headline said that it was "an inflation busting increase". As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, it will be paid for only by employing fewer teachers, by having fewer local government employees and by having bigger classes.

The Secretary of State also said that the predictions of massive job losses this year would not materialise. That is wrong. On the authority of the Local Government Management Board, 50,000 fewer staff were employed in local government up to September in the past year. The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), who is not in his place, talked of motivating people in local government. One does not motivate them by sacking them. The Secretary of State, as always, has dealt in assertions, just as he used to assert that the poll tax was a fair tax and that there was no way that a property tax could ever be fair.

In 1988 or perhaps before, I remember the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who was then the Secretary of State for the Environment, likened the system of local government finance to stumbling about in a bog in a fog. The report of the Select Committee on the Environment, which came out a couple of weeks ago, said that the system of local government finance was difficult for the expert to understand, hard for the councillor to follow and almost impossible for the non-expert voter to use to make judgments. That is certainly true.

In north-east Lancashire, there is a feeling of absolute bewilderment at the savage nature of the settlement. We met the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), a few weeks ago and he listened politely enough, but we got absolutely nothing at all from our discussions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) touched on nursery provision. We were told in November by the *Daily Express* that the Prime Minister was committed to a drive to give every three-year-old a place in a nursery school. That message was plastered across the front page of all the Tory-inclined tabloids.

The reality is that Lancashire county council already provides more nursery provision, but it is discrimated against because the SSA formula is based on the under-five population and not on the under-five population in nursery schools. Lancashire is doubly discriminated against. It has a much better record than North Yorkshire, which includes the constituency of the Minister for Local Government and Planning. However, North Yorkshire receives more money than Lancashire.

My hon. Friends the Member for Lancashire, West and for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) referred to the massive injustices in the education SSAs. I have two examples to underline those points. Why should a primary school child in Lancashire receive £119 less than a primary school child in East Sussex? Why should a secondary school pupil in Lancashire receive £208 less than a secondary school pupil in the Isle of Wight? People are bewildered by that.

In my district authority of Pendle, the SSA per head has slipped from 70th to 150th. The unviersity of Bristol tells us that we are 55th out of 366 districts in the university's deprivation index. Our SSA is declining from £9·1 million this year to £8·4 million from April. That is a 7·1 per cent. reduction.

A similar story can be told in respect of all the local authorities in my neck of the woods. There is a 11·5 per cent. reduction in Blackburn, a 9·6 per cent. reduction in Burnley and an 8·6 per cent. reduction in Hyndburn. However, Lancaster's SSA is to increase by 11·7 per cent. Now we know why the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) was gyrating at the beginning of the Secretary of State's speech.

People in Pendle do not understand why our SSA is dropping from £106 per head to £98 while it is rising in Bath—with all the deprivation there—from £102 per head

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to £106. That is an increase of 4·5 per cent. On the social index, to which other hon. Members have referred, Pendle is ranked 92 while Bath is ranked 72. Bournemouth is ranked 40, but Bournemouth is receiving an SSA per head of £114. I do not know how the figures are calculated. A basket of measures are used which are not an accurate reflection of deprivation. We must change that process.

Pendle has the second-highest Asian heritage community in the county. The changes to the ethnic definition impact adversely against my local authority. The factors must include reference to social class. In Bournemouth, 19·9 per cent. of people are skilled manuals while 27 per cent. are skilled manuals in Pendle. Twenty per cent. are class 4 in Pendle while 14 per cent. are class 5 while 4·5 per cent. are class 5 in Bournemouth. The construction of the social and economic indexes must be placed under the microscope once more.

I welcome the Secretary of State's assurance today that he will examine the SSA reduction grant. He said that the grant may not be a one-year one off and we may have to return to it. My authority will receive £726,000 next year, but if the grant vaporises the year after that, the impact on our council tax payers would be severe indeed.

In addition, our transitional relief has been cut by 70 per cent. It has collapsed from £1 million to £300,000. That will have an absolutely cataclysmic effect in Pendle where we have so many of what were previously low-rated properties. No one in band A to band C properties will receive any help from the transitional relief scheme and 77 per cent. of the properties in my constituency fall within bands A and B.

I will finish now because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West wishes to speak. However, the settlement is bad for north-east Lancashire and it is bad for the country. It is another of the sleights of hand that we have come to expect from the Government.

9.14 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) for giving me six or seven minutes to cast a few pearls before the Conservative Benches.

My hon. Friend ought not to worry too much about the fact that all of this does not make sense. I do not think that anyone—even Ministers—understands how the system works. When one allows civil servants to come up with formulae that are punched into computers, all the discrepancies and all the injustices are churned out. We could have spent the entire night demonstrating the inconsistencies and the unfairness in the system. This is the price that we are paying for a Government determined to centralise everything and unwilling to allow local authorities elected by local people to raise their own funds to meet their own needs. Only we—I refer to people on all sides—really know where the shoe hurts, and it should be possible to deal with the matter through local accountability and local democracy. But local accountability and local democracy are being dismantled—destroyed, indeed—by the Government, as also happened under their immediate predecessors.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State met a deputation from the London borough of Newham and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) indicated, we put the case to the Minister. It is difficult to know what more we could have said. We came on behalf of a united community—a community represented or supported by local businesses, through the chamber of commerce, the *Newham Recorder*, the local Conservative party and the local Liberal party—and we put the case to the Minister, but he did not give us any satisfaction. He was polite. I was fascinated by the great fat Waterman pen that he was using, and even more fascinated by his big, fat gold cufflinks, but in the end I was not pleased at the fact that he gave us nothing. There was no fat reward from the cerebral Minister. I suppose we ought at least to be grateful that he listened to us before throwing us out of his office.

We in Newham have appalling conditions brought about by circumstances well beyond our control. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Minister will look more carefully at our needs if the urban conditions index being developed by his Department in conjunction with Manchester university is accepted and puts Newham at number one—a position that we do not want to be in—in the league of deprived local authority areas in the country, and I hope that he will be far more sympathetic next time Newham Members go with representatives of the local authority to see him.

I appreciate the fact that Opposition Members now seem to understand the problems in London as a whole and I address my remarks essentially to my own colleagues when I say that Members of Parliament, especially those representing constituencies outside London, regard the capital in terms of its centre. They work in Westminster and go to their flats in Dolphin square or wherever else they can scrounge a bed for the night—all well above board, of course, as I know that there is no hanky-panky from Opposition Members. Non-London Members do not see just how bad the situation is in places like Southwark, Haringey, Islington and Newham. They are showing more understanding, but it is still far from complete. Even in Tory-controlled Brent, the problems are just as bad as those elsewhere.

Today, there are 30,500 families in temporary accommodation. That represents 62 per cent. of all homeless families in England. London has nearly 500,000 unemployed people—the largest concentration of unemployment in the United Kingdom. Of all refugees, 90 per cent. ultimately settle in London, putting enormous strains on the services of our boroughs, whether Tory, Labour or Liberal.

I know that my non-London hon. Friends have some understanding of London's problems. We are dealing not just with the Westminster area. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) once talked about the bars and brothels of Westminster, causing considerable offence to those who know where neither the bars nor the brothels are and who, despite assiduous questioning, have not been able to find out. I do not know whether people were offended because no one had told them or because that is not what Opposition Members do. At any rate, it must be understood that the capital city has enormous problems.

I know that the standard spending assessments with regard to highway maintenance in London have been increased, but they are still woefully inadequate. Have hon. Members—Conservative or Labour—seen the chaos on London's streets at the moment? People are calling it "Polo City" because in the middle of every street there is a bloody great hole. It is appalling. There are almost more cones on the streets of London than there are people walking around. Why are Ministers not able to co-ordinate the way that undertakings are simply digging up the roads willy-nilly? It is probably easier to get out of Sarajevo than the east end of London at present. Someone is working on the Rotherhithe tunnel, so they have decided to work on the highway that links to it, and they have coned off the A13, the Commercial road. People can see this happening all over the place. Albert bridge is closed and Lambeth bridge is about to close.

Who the hell is co-ordinating all this? The answer is no one. But someone should be doing something about it. If Minsiters had to travel in rush hour in London, whether on a bus or in a private vehicle, they would do something about it. However, they live in their ivory towers with chauffeur-driven cars to take them from one reception to another at most convenient hours, where they drink champagne, eat caviar and show no regard whatever for the people of London.

9.20 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): As someone who gets caught on the bridges of London when coming to the House in the morning, I cannot but agree with all the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Does not this debate demonstrate again to the British people that the Government have lost their commitment to improving our public services? The Government will be shown to have misled the British people about council tax levels. They are both unwilling and unable to dissociate themselves from malpractice and corruption in Tory-controlled boroughs. They are torn apart internally by their own contradictions. They are devoid of new ideas and direction. As will be shown in May and June this year, the Conservative party has lost the trust of the British people.

We have had a good debate today. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed strong views about both the system of financing local government and the amount of finance that is available to councils. In a speech of the highest quality, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made a number of important points, the central one being that, even with all the reviews that have taken place, standard spending assessments are not being used for their original purpose. They were originally intended to distribute the amount of local government grant. However, they are now being used to limit the amount of local authority resources, and that offends any sense of democracy.

Another important point that my hon. Friend made was that there is little use in introducing the capping system because it does not control the level of expenditure. Councils that face a cap inevitably spend up to the capping limit. Therefore, examining the matter from an aggregate point of view, there is little saving. The impact of the capping regulations on constituencies was expressed forcefully by my hon. Friends the Members for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) and for Newham, North-West.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) gave considerable emphasis to the potential cuts in his constituency arising from this settlement and to the threat to important local authority public services such as swimming pools and libraries. Although the Government agree with his local authority that more money should be spent on education, money is being diverted from the education budget to meet the council's statutory obligations to the homeless. That is a ridiculous situation. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) said that in his local authority there would be cuts in the discretionary grants available for education because of the impact of the settlement.

Tory Members made some points with which I think my hon. Friends agree. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) was pleased that the level of unemployment was a more important factor in the calculation of SSAs. It was not a matter of north and south —it was something that could affect the whole of the country. Many of my hon. Friends agree with that and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central said so. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) believed that there should be more openness and transparency in the SSA system. I think that few of my hon. Friends would disagree with that.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) said that he supported subsidiarity. There is considerable support for that among my hon. Friends. I am not sure whether my hon. Friends agree with the rest of the hon. Gentleman's speech, but I always say that we should be satisfied with the little that is good. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West said, after the hon. Member for Ludlow left the Chamber, that he could not address the hon. Gentleman directly, as he seemed to have gone for a pie and a pint.

I cannot address the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) as he is not in his place. As the hon. Gentleman was wearing a dinner suit before he left the Chamber, we can only assume that he is having his pie and pint in more salubrious surroundings. I use dinner suits only for official occasions.

The hon. Member for Ludlow said that teachers had been made redundant in his constituency. If the hon. Gentleman had been in his place now, I would have been able to say that my hon. Friends and I agree that that is damaging to his community.

The Secretary of State made a lengthy speech and I must congratulate him on being generous in giving way. I cannot extend those congratulations to the generosity of his responses, but I can say that the right hon. Gentleman did try. It was noticeable that he made little mention of the impact of the overall settlement and what it would mean for local authorities throughout. Perhaps that is not surprising, as the House will appreciate the difficulties that the Department of the Environment has in persuading the Treasury each year of the efficacy of its submission on the financial settlement.

Successive Secretaries of State have trooped along to the Chancellor to make their case. Some have been known to flag up the occasional victory, but that is not the case this year. I have sympathy for the right hon. Gentleman. Not only has he been spurned by the Prime Minister on the local government review, he has now been spurned by the Chancellor on the financial settlement. The only flag flying this year at the Department of the Environment is a white flag.

It is interesting to compare the approach of the Secretary of State with that of his predecessor. I remind the House that the previous Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and

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Hythe (Mr. Howard), wrote to the Chief Secretary in May 1993. I am fortunate enough to have a copy of that letter, which stated:

> "You asked me to let you have my initial views on the forthcoming Settlement, as a preliminary to this year's Survey discussions . . . In aggregate, it suggests that an increase of 5·2 per cent. in TSS for 1994-95 is needed in order to protect local authority services."

The same correspondence contained the Treasury's response, which shows that a level of settlement of around 3·5 per cent. is as far as it was prepared to go.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman showed some skill as a negotiator. He knew when he was beaten and he was prepared to recommend that level of settlement. However, where are we now? In a statement to the House, the present Secretary of State said:

> "my proposal provides for a 2·3 per cent. increase in local authority spending year on year."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1993; Vol. 233, column 1173.]

The settlement that has been accepted by the right hon. Gentleman is less than the Treasury deemed was necessary last May.

In the correspondence between the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe and the Treasury, the right hon. and learned Gentleman gave a dire warning of the consequences of the settlement falling below 3·5 per cent. He said in the same letter:

> "local government should not be singled out for specially harsh treatment . . . A TSS settlement for next year which was lower in cash terms than local authority budgets in the current year would, in my view, be impossible to defend."

Is not that exactly what the Government are asking the House to support tonight? Is not that what is contained in the settlement?

That is why the Secretary of State and his hon. Friends have been so quiet on the overall impact on local government services of the settlement. Are not we being asked to defend the indefensible? Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that he is asking the House to vote through measures that will lead to a 1·2 per cent. cut in local authority resources? Does he understand that those calculations are based on a local authority pay bill freeze and that, if cuts in services are to be avoided, substantial council tax increases could result? If the Secretary of State understands all that, is not his advocacy of this year's settlement abject surrender to the Treasury?

Perhaps the Secretary of State should listen to the Minister for Local Government and Planning, who seems to be developing a section on the needs of local authorities of all colours. The Minister wrote to all English Members of Parliament on 2 December saying:

> "The Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 1994-95 is necessarily challenging . . . I recognise that a number of authorities will be disappointed with the outcome."

It is clear from the debate this evening that more than a small number of authorities are disappointed with the outcome.

Mr. Gummer: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is widely thought by people in local government circles that the settlement is considerably better than they feared and something that they can work with? I refer him to the comments in most of the local government newspapers and magazines, which say clearly that people thought that it was going to be a darn sight worse. In those circumstances, could not the hon. Gentleman be grudgingly generous to us rather than so universal an opponent?

Mr. Henderson: People throughout the local authority world believe that this is a very bad settlement. They expected a dreadful settlement. Once the impact of the pay increase is felt, they will probably revert to their original assessment of the settlement. That takes me rather neatly on to the matter of local authority pay. I am indebted to the right hon. Gentleman for leading me in that direction.

I am surprised at the apparent complacency of the Government, especially in the light of further statements by the Treasury today on pay. The Treasury says in its announcements that it assumes that public sector pay bills will still be frozen. Yet, at the same time, sources in the Government say that substantial increases will be acknowledged for certain groups of workers. A figure of 4 per cent. has sometimes been mentioned for the police.

Today the Secretary of State for the Environment said that a teachers' settlement of 2·9 per cent. would be permissible. Is not there a contradiction between the two positions? First, the original financial statement announced in December last year assumed a pay bill freeze, with increases in pay coming only from productivity agreements. Then the settlement compels local authorities to increase the level of remuneration for those categories of workers. Is not there a contradiction, as my hon. Friends the Members for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) and for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) suggested? If the settlements become a reality, will they not blow a gaping hole in the assumptions on which the financial statement is based?

Is there still an expectation that the pay increases can be funded by productivity? If so, do the Government accept that redundancies of police officers and teachers are necessary to pay for the increases? If the Government do not believe that, how else do they think that productivity improvements of the order necessary to finance the pay increases can be achieved? Police and teachers will be made redundant just when the Government are saying that their main priority is to protect the community, fight crime and improve education.

The Government have to look again at how effective the settlement can be. Do they seriously expect that productivity gains can be achieved? My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) referred to the trouble and pressure that had been put on loyal local authority workers such as school cleaners. If the Secretary of State continues with the settlement, is he prepared to ask school cleaners, home helps and swimming pool attendants to accept a pay cut or to take redundancy to finance an increase for a teacher or a policeman? That would be unacceptable and unjust, and it should be discarded.

The reason for our difficulty is that the country is in an economic mess. The Government have accepted and, indeed, celebrated a low-capacity economy with high levels of unemployment. The impact of a vicious stop-go cycle, which the Government's economic mismanagement has created and aggravated, means that the economy cannot meet public expenditure obligations because so much money is wasted on financing unemployment. We raise insufficient tax revenue because of under-employed resources. Is not the settlement the price that we have to pay? We cannot meet essential expenditure on improving education, training and capital projects, which could help the recovery and secure our future.

The settlement is not only about the level of grant and council tax. It is also about the assessment of the needs of communities. There can have been no doubt that the previous system was flawed—it calculated Huntingdon as more deprived than Chester-le-Street and Cambridge as more deprived than Hartlepool. The new system has some improvements. The inclusion of an economic index that includes unemployment and morbidity factors is one improvement—that argument has been advanced by some of my hon. Friends—but there are still many concerns. The reduction in the additional-needs index is one, as that undervalues the link between deprivation and educational under-achievement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn was right to say that, even with the improvements in the SSA system, there are still many shortcomings in the all-ages social index, which claims that Hove is a region of greater need than Liverpool, and that Runnymede is a region of greater need than Wolverhampton. Anyone who travels in those regions knows that that is not the case.

Many councils have suffered substantial losses from adjustments in the SSA. The arrangements for lessening the impact are called "dampening". When I first heard that phrase introduced by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, I wondered what it meant. I thought that it was a rare new initiative by the Prime Minister to restructure his Cabinet, but it is the Department of Environment's term for assisting councils that have suffered from a change in their SSA. Those councils that have marginally benefited from the abatement this year will want to know how long the abatement will continue and whether it will be applicable next year.

The Government claim that the system is fair, but it is no coincidence that the revised system shows that the shire districts have fared best. The Secretary of State may have thought that he was doing himself a political favour when he ensured the achievement of that result, but if last year's county council election results are anything to go by, he is working from an old text book. It did him no good last year and it will not do him any good this year.

The Minister for Local Government and Planning has also taken a special interest in the SSA system. He said in an interview with the *Local Government Chronicle* that the system is so sophisticated that he could work out the SSA for Leningrad. Many authorities in this country think that he has worked out the SSA for Leningrad. In this age of perestroika, the system in St. Petersburg, even with all its shortcomings, is probably more democratic than the system in this country and the system that the Minister wants.

We have the most centralised system of local government finance in the western world. That undemocratic system is based on the draconian practice of capping local authority budgets. Capping denies a local community the right to decide on the level of service that it wants and on how resources should be raised to pay for it. Capping has been condemned as inappropriate in a modern state if the balance of influence and democracy is to be retained between central and local government.

In justification of the financial settlement, the Secretary of State said that the proposal

> "represents a package which the country can afford."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1993; Vol. 233, c. 1176.]

That is not a widely held view. The country cannot afford a package that ties down resource allocations exclusively to the statistical whims of officials in Marsham street. The country cannot afford its democracy to be undermined by the evils of capping; it cannot afford to accept a capital programme for local authorities that will not rebuild our crumbling schools, repair our leaking roofs or re-equip our aging transport systems and that leaves our roads in decay [*Interruption.*]—as well as those of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes)—and does nothing to renovate and build homes for rent.

The country cannot afford a revenue settlement that undermines our teacher-pupil ratios, damages our fire-fighting capacity, threatens our ability to combat crime, puts the vulnerable more at risk and deprives us all of a sound and safe community. The country cannot afford its public services to be endangered any longer by this clapped-out Government. The House should reject the orders. I say to the Government what Oliver Cromwell said to the Long Parliament:

> "You have sat too long here . . . In the name of God, go!"

9.40 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Mr. David Curry): The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) began and ended with a peroration and there was nothing in the middle; it was like a meal which started with a soufflé and went straight on to the meringue.

The Labour party would like to say that the system is rigged. Labour Members hint at that all the time and occasionally say so. They say that it is the invention of some demonic civil servant, but they should look at the figures and at what the Select Committee said. They know that they cannot sustain that case.

Let me demonstrate—the local authorities with the highest spending assessments are almost uniformly Labour, with the odd sprinkling of Liberal Democrats. The top 10 authorities with the highest damping grants are predominantly Labour controlled.

If I wanted to rig a system I am bright enough to be able to do so, but the system is not rigged, it is scrupulously fair. When I am asked where I use my judgment, I answer, "In as few places as possible." In every case where a choice was laid before me in which analysis had demonstrated a clear indicator, I took that indicator. It would have been convenient for me—representing North Yorkshire—to say that we do not want the area cost adjustment because we cannot sustain that.

Mr. Gummer: We did not do so.

Mr. Curry: No, we did not take that course because the evidence showed that the opposite was true and Opposition Members should make up their minds whether they like it or not, because they cannot face both ways simultaneously.

The Select Committee made an interesting and helpful contribution to the debate and its report was studied. It began by saying that the discussion had been open and it was. Throughout, our intention had been to tell everyone —I tell the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North the same—that we can argue about the amount of money available as that is perfectly legitimate and the stuff of political argument, but we ought not to argue about how we distribute the money. We have a common interest in trying to ensure that that is done in a way that is as up to date and fair as possible. Of course, we must make continued improvements and one cannot say that one has reached the definitive point—the system will evolve from year to year. However, I want the argument where it belongs rather than concentrating on the attribution of Machiavellian motives to a genuine attempt to deliver the best possible formula for redistribution.

Mr. Kilfoyle: In that case, can the Minister explain why there was a further cut after the delegation from Liverpool met him? No one in the city of Liverpool understands why another £100,000 was taken from the support grant.

Mr. Curry: I do not know whether Liverpool is one of the cities from which the overpayment of previous grant has been clawed back. If that is the case, it has had an interest-free loan for a couple of years and we ought to have had it back.

Liverpool has some difficulties because of its relatively low ethnic population. Newcastle upon Tyne has a similar characteristic. There is a strong weight for ethnicity in the indicators.

I know that the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) has intervened. Coventry wishes me to use a certain form of sampling to identify children who came from families on income support. We have sampled at 1 per cent. and we have recently changed to 5 per cent. sampling. We now have two quarters at 5 per cent. and two quarters at 1 per cent. sampling. Coventry would have benefited had we moved straight to 5 per cent. sampling. I did not do that, because I do not consider that we can base our sampling on only two quarters.

Had I exercised the judgment for which people had asked, the consequence would have been a £2·5 million further cut for Liverpool. That shows how the indicators can work and their possible impact.

Where I have to exercise a judgment, of course I am conscious of particular needs of communities.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Is it not the case that Coventry has pointed out for two years now that the method of counting the children of claimants is absolutely wrong? The Minister's own officials accepted that it cannot be right, yet for two years he refused to do anything about it.

Mr. Curry: That is not correct. Until recently, the available statistics have been based on a 1 per cent. sample. A 5 per cent. sample will be more accurate and a 50 per cent. sample will be more accurate still. We are now incorporating statistics based on 5 per cent. for two quarters and 1 per cent. for the other two quarters. Next year, the statistics will be based fully on a 5 per cent. sample and I have no doubt that Coventry will benefit. However, the swings and roundabouts of the system mean that Liverpool, because of its characteristics, may be penalised by that methodology. There cannot be winners all the way round.

Several hon. Members mentioned area cost adjustment. The area cost adjustment is in the index because it is justified and because it stood up to analysis. However, I am not yet satisfied with parts of it, particularly the way in which area cost adjustment plays out towards the borders of the south-east region. Of course there are anomalies at borders. For example, one can find schools within a mile of each other, one each side of a village. We do not yet have the information to consider effectively how it should be tapered, but we will accumulate that. I have asked authorities to join us in carrying out further analysis on area cost adjustment.

I am already committed to explore with the Department for Education the extent to which we can update the statistical information about children in school. It is collected in January now; therefore, it is 15 months behind the statistics. If we collect it in September we shall bring it much more up-to-date. I want the most up-to-date statistics available. That will give us a more contemporary account and make the figures more relevant. It does not mean that the previous system was not fair; it means that we shall be using more up-to-date figures where they stand up to analysis.

I should like to say a word about London because there have been some suggestions that we should take it out of the system. I welcome the explanation from my hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) of what the Select Committee had in mind when it made those points in its report. The Select Committee asked me to declare where there is a judgment to be made.

If we were to take London separately, I would have to make an enormous judgment before even beginning the process of how much money to take out of the system to dedicate to London. That would be a political judgment which I do not want to make.

I should prefer a universally applied system that seeks genuinely to define where councils have to spend money. That would be much better than having a London index, another for the north-east and another for Merseyside, which also has special problems. Before we know where we are, we would have fragmented the system, and it would no longer have the integrity of universal application.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I understand the problems that would occur if London is separated out and no arrangements are made scientifically to determine the distribution between London and the rest of the country. My hon. Friend would need a formula for distributing between London and the rest of the country. That does not undermine the case that if we vary any part of the London distribution, we shall end up with huge swings in the rest of non-metropolitan Britain and that is the real problem.

Mr. Curry: I take my hon. Friend's point. As with all the Select Committee's recommendations, we are willing to examine the options. The Committee identified a number of aspects that, in its view, should be investigated further; it is only fair to add that the Committee itself found it difficult to come up with positive alternatives.

Work will be necessary on major issues such as the police and the fire authorities this year, as well as on the problem of sparse education provision. The five matters that I have mentioned—along with the counting of pupil numbers and the area cost adjustment—constitute a significant menu. I do not intend to engage in the sort of radical review that has just taken place; people need stability, and they cannot cope if the system is tossed in the air every year. We must, however, ensure that there is a constant process of modernisation.

A number of Newham Members spoke. It was suggested, for instance, that the capital financing SSA should be based on the actual pre-1990 debt, rather than the notional debte. That, however, would penalise authorities that had used capital receipts to repay the debt, and reward those that had spent those receipts. The system is currently based on the principle of notional amounts, and I think it better for that arrangement to continue.

Newham's SSA for 1994-95 was £1,143 per head, way above the average for the outer London boroughs: it was the fifth highest in London. Newham also receives £13·3 million of reduction grant. I understood what the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said about homelessness, and I am willing to give a detailed explanation of the way in which the homelessness indicators are calculated. That would, I think, be more helpful than an abbreviated explanation now.

This year, we have introduced indicators relating to unemployment and morbidity, or ill health. I pay tribute to the Webber Craig authorities, which have pressed for such indicators for some years. They convinced me: the case stood up to analysis, and then to further analysis. However, certain people cannot congratulate us on introducing economic indicators, and then complain about adverse effects on other authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) made two points, which I think I have answered. I am sure that he will subsequently wish to raise the question of what I understand to be between 12,000 and 13,000 surplus school places in Northamptonshire: he suggested that there was a debate to be had with the county council.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) made a speech that I can only describe as sub-charismatic. He supplied his own excuse, suggesting—if I understood him aright—that Madam Speaker had said that it would help the House if he did not speak for too long. If that is true, it is one of the rare occasions in recent parliamentary history of a mercy killing. This was not a dance of the seven veils—the Liberal Democrats usually have seven policies to correspond with the broad economic regions of the country. Here was not even a single veil, but a gossamer thread. Boiled down, Liberal Democrat policy amounted to adjusting the area cost adjustment for West Berkshire. That is what will be laid before the people of Britain: "We shall adjust the area cost adjustment for West Berkshire, and that will solve our problems." I am grateful for brevity at least.

The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said that although the housing benefit case-load figures had been adjusted to take account of dwellings owned by another authority, adjustments had been made only for authorities that had made representations. We have made such an adjustment, in response to the strength of arguments advanced during consultation; we did not have enough information to make an accurate adjustment for all authorities, and we therefore produced estimates for the authorities that were most affected. We have, however, said that the issue will be discussed with local authority associations with a view to gleaning better figures for 1995-96.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Curry: No, I shall not give way because the hon. Gentleman was not listening to the greater part of my remarks.

I now wish to respond to the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) who compared St. Helens with Westminster. The truth is that parts of Westminster are socially deprived. A feature of much of the housing in the north of England is that it is more solid than that in parts of the south so housing conditions are sometimes better in the north. Westminster is fourth on the revised social index and St. Helens is 241st. However, if the economic indexes are included, the figures are turned around and St. Helens becomes 39th whereas Westminster is 83rd. If one takes into account the number of households sharing housing and the number of householders living in rented flats, overcrowding, ethnicity and homelessness, it is clear that there is a very good case for considering Westminster as socially deprived. If that is what the system reveals, we abide by it because we must have an objective system. I am not going to tweak it here, twist it there and bend it the other way.

I shall,of course, respond to the invitation issued by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and write to him about the Isles of Scilly. As he knows, the Isles of Scilly have an especially high SSA per head. It is £1,231 which is almost double the national average, but I am perfectly willing to discuss specific issues with him in detail.

The hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) mentioned education for the under-fives. The provision of such education is not a statutory duty and it would not be right to base the SSA on the number of places for the under-fives because that would lead local authorities to write their own cheques——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am having great difficulty hearing the Minister. Members of all parties are chatting away. I should be grateful if the Hosue would settle down and listen to what the Minister has to say.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who opened the debate for the Opposition, committed himself to two things on Labour's behalf. We can say that he committed himself because he made his commitments in the House and, according to the dictum of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), they count as pledges, unlike off-the-cuff remarks which I understand constitute the other category of pledges made by the Labour party.

The hon. Member for Blackburn made two promises. First, he said that he would abolish capping. He did not say over what time scale or for whom. Would it be done all at once in the first year? He was not quite sure whether it was linked to the introduction of elections by a third, a third, a third. I know that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has made that connection. He wants to have that control of a third, a third, a third and he would intervene in the election cycle to obtain it. In any event, the hon. Member for Blackburn would abolish capping. In other words, there would be a series of very large tax increases under Labour. All council tax payers will wish to know that that is what would happen.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Curry: I have three minutes left. I shall give way when I have dealt with the second pledge.

The hon. Gentleman's second pledge was to abolish compulsory competitive tendering. Does the House seriously believe that, given the choice between putting services out to tender and building town hall bureaucracies, Labour authorities would opt for CCT? We should soon see local authority employment going through the roof and passing the 2 million mark.

Mr. Straw: I have two questions for the Minister. First, will he explain where the completely bogus claim that the abolition of capping and CCT would cost £800 million came from? Secondly, why is he rejecting the policy of not having capping and not even counting local authorities' self-financed expenditure which the Prime Minister proposed in a White Paper when he was Chief Secretary? It is still our policy, although he has changed his mind.

Mr. Curry: Even for someone as mathematically challenged as the hon. Gentleman, the idea that one can liberate capping without tax increases is incomprehensible. I do not think that council tax payers will agree with him. He should consider the impeccably Social Democrat Governments in Scandinavia—in Denmark—and in Holland, where local authorities are being brought under tighter control because local authority expenditure is part of public expenditure.

We know what the Labour party would do in Government. We will find that Labour's ten commandments are tax, tax, tax, tax, tax and tax again. The taxes will not be collected and the rents will not be collected and the council tax payer will suffer. That is Labour's policy. The hon. Member for Blackburn is the Wilfred Pickles of local Government. "Give 'em the money, Mabel" is his policy —"Give 'em the money and the council tax payer will pay." The council tax payers had better beware if that is what they get.

I commend the reports to the House.

Question put:

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 261.

Division No. 107] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael

Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1994-95 (House of Commons Paper No. 179), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1994-95 (House of Commons Paper No. 181), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Resolved,

That the Special Grant Report (No. 9) (House of Commons Paper No. 180), which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

South Crofty Tin Mine

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

10.15 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): This is my third Adjournment debate on the subject of tin mining. My first, in 1988, started at 2.26 am. The second, in 1991, started at 1.22 am. This one is at a more reasonable hour, and we may get a better attendance than we have had previously for this subject. I notice that the three Adjournment debates come at almost exactly three-year intervals. The object of this debate and of the all-party pressure for further support for what is now Cornwall's last tin mine is to ensure that there is still an industry to debate in another three years—when I hope, if there is an Adjournment debate, it will be to congratulate the mine on record profits.

I have no doubt that during this debate, the Minister will argue that, over the years, the Government have invested £23 million in Carnon Consolidated. That is true, and it is the best reason why Government support should not be cut off now. However, let us remember how we got here.

When the International Tin Council crashed in October 1985, it plunged the tin industry into crisis. When the tin price fell as stock-piled tin was released on to the market, mines worldwide were threatened, not least our own deep mines in Cornwall. Mines worldwide continue to operate at below the break-even level. Ours are not the only mines threatened by the present low prices.

The uprising of support in Cornwall was spontaneous. The miners took their case to London. The support of my much-missed predecessor David Penhaligon is still well remembered. Here in Parliament, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry investigated the tin crisis. Its report in March 1986 contained a number of conclusions, of which the most important, contained in the final line of the summary of conclusions, was that it believed that the Cornish tin industry was worth saving. I believe that that view is as correct now as it ever was.

Moreover, the work force more than ever deserve saving. They have met every target for productivity and cost cutting that was set. They have taken wage cuts and they have even worked without reward at times. Twice, however, the Government have let them down. In February 1991, the Government reneged on a commitment to invest the final £1·6 million of the £25 million originally promised. That was despite the fact that the company had met every target that the Department of Trade and industry had set. Indeed, it had far exceeded the cost reductions originally demanded. The result was the closure of the Wheal Jane mine in my constituency. It is entirely due to the efforts of the management and work force that the South Crofty mine and the Wheal Jane plant are still working.

I was fortunate enough to win the Adournment debate at that time. I hope the Minister has read it; it contains some points that are relevant now. First, then as now, the costs of support were far less than the costs of closure. I said then:

> "I refuse to accept that it saved the Treasury money in any respect. It may save the Department of Trade and Industry money, but it simply costs the Department of Social Security and other Departments money."—[*Official Report,* 6 March 1991; Vol. 187, c. 432.]

The company now employs almost 200 fewer people in what is still one of the worst unemployment black spots in the country. The jobs have just not been replaced.

Taking into account the costs and benefits and the loss of tax payment to the Treasury, that alone costs about £1·8 million a year—more than the DTI saved overall. The pollution disaster that followed is costing many millions of pounds more. The decision in 1991 broke a promise and wasted taxpayers' money.

Now that we have reached 1994, the Minister may like to comment once again on the costs of possible closure. We know what the thoughts of the Minister were immediately before refusing the company the £200,000 it believed it needed to keep going. We know that he believed the decision, because the leaked letter from him to another Minister used the words

> "effectively close the last tin mine in Cornwall".

The Minister believed that he was closing the mine. Not surprisingly, news that he was planning that on the day that the announcement was due, produced the reaction that the Minister predicted in his letter as people sought to change his mind. Presumably the Prime Minister and other senior Ministers thought that that was a sensible decision, since we know that they were consulted.

I raise that matter because I have a specific question for the Minister. Given that the sum asked for amounted to £800 per employee, it was clearly less than even the short-term cost of the redundancies that the Minister predicted. Taking into acount the knock-on effect on job losses in supplying companies, the Government were being asked only for the equivalent of £400 per job at stake. Do the Government seek a cross-departmental cost-benefit analysis for decisions such as that?

In 1991, I asked the Minister at the DTI the same question, and I was told that the DTI's job was to manage its own budget. We know that the decision cost the Government far more than the DTI saved. In that case, it seems that the Minister decided to take the same risk. I do not understand why, and I think that the House deserves an explanation.

In 1991, the former Conservative Member of Parliament for Falmouth and Camborne, David Mudd, made the same point in the *Truro Packet* when he said:

> "They have committed what in my opinion is the bleakest act of betrayal in the history of industry in Cornwall . . . The amount involved, £1·6 million, works out at a miserly £3,800 for each of the 420 jobs forfeited. The effect of those skilled jobs on the Cornish economy and on Cornwall's unemployment, which already stands at 13·2 per cent., is too horrendous to visualise."

Mr. Mudd made the same point then that I am making now, and the question still has not been answered.

Once again, there is also an environmental impact. While the South Crofty mine is less likely to cause the scale of pollution that arose at Wheal Jane, the Minister's leaked letter suggested that there was room for concern. Has there been an environmental impact study this time on the risks of closure? Has the potential of the environmental costs been assessed?

Since the continuing Wheal Jane clean-up depends on the tailings at the processing plant, what is the impact on the National Rivers Authority clean-up programme there? I asked the Minister yesterday, and he was not even aware that there was an impact on the NRA clean-up programme at the Wheal Jane plant. Yet today, I contacted the NRA and it confirmed the impact. It said:

> "If South Crofty closes and the tailing supply is cut off, the NRA's operation at Wheal Jane would continue, but there would be a cost implication caused by the loss of tailings material."

Has no one in the DTI thought to work that out? Who will make the dam safe when it is no longer used by the NRA? Who will meet the bill? There will be no company for that operation to do it, and the cost will presumably fall on the NRA as a result of the Government's decision.

I raised similar points about costs in the Adjournment debate in 1991. Then as now, I invited the then hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne, Mr. David Mudd, to take part. He opened his comments by saying of the points that I made:

> "I endorse his every word and sentiment."—*[Official Report*, 6 March 1991; Vol. 187, c. 434.]

He could not accept the Government's willingness to sacrifice jobs then to save so little. We stood together for the mines and for the work force.

This time, the DTI's calculation of "savings" is even more ludicrous than last time, as figures that I gave in my opening remarks more than illustrate. Fortunately, the Minister may yet be proved wrong; we may yet have a chance to save the mine and the jobs. I know that the management and the work force will do all they can to achieve that.

The day was saved by the one thing happening which the Department appeared to predict would not happen, and that was the increase in the price of tin since the company asked for the £200,000. As a result, the crisis point has been postponed. However, it has not gone. As we all know only too well, the company is still losing money, and new sources of funding are still required.

The company remains on a knife edge. The Government still have the mine's future in their hands. We now have time to work to persuade the Department to offer that help, and, we hope, time for the company to find new sources of investment.

The Minister will be aware that hon. Members from Cornwall from both sides of the House are in the Chamber today. I hope that he will recognise the united concern for the mine among people in Cornwall, which is reflected in the case that I have made today. That is why I have invited, as I did before, the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne to participate in the debate. The mine is in his constituency while the processing plant is in my constituency.

The Minister has said no to financial aid. I hope, for the reasons that I have already outlined, that he will reconsider. Although the issue has been raised over many years by the company and by hon. Members, it seems that the Department is finally looking at ways to remove the tremendous burden of Government debt that hangs over the company. That is crucial, because, if the company is not to receive Government investment, it must have private investment to survive for more than months. Who will invest, given that balance sheet? Who will invest if the first call on profits in future will be the Government? Who will give the mine a chance if the Government will not?

The mine's future rests with the Minister. The miners and Cornwall hold their breath. The Minister told me yesterday that he hoped for a decision by the end of this month. Many in Cornwall will wonder why there should be a delay. After all, if nothing is done, even the Minister does not hold out much hope of the mine staying open. However, if it closes, the Government loans will be lost anyway. By writing them off now, the DTI would be at

[Mr. Matthew Taylor]

least no worse off than it would be if the mine were left to close. At best, the mine would be given a real chance of survival. Why the uncertainty?

At the DTI yesterday, I was told that the Department was worried that it might be held to have acted illegally if it made funds available; that the Public Accounts Committee might be awkward and embarrassing if loans are written off; and—it is rather ironic that the DTI should worry about this—that the company might make it work and actually turn a profit.

I have already referred to my 1991 speech on this subject. Let me refer the Minister to the speech made by Mr. David Mudd, the former Member for Falmouth and Camborne, in that debate. He referred to the same claims and worries that have been transferred to me. He said:

> "For reasons that have still not been explained to my satisfaction or that of many other people, two tin mines, more than 400 jobs, countless small enterprises and the communities that lie between Camborne, Redruth and Truro are under a death threat because, if I am correct, the DTI is scuttling away from what it fears could have been an embarrassing squeeze between the Treasury and the Public Accounts Committee.—[*Official Report*, 6 March 1991; Vol. 187, c. 435.]

There we have it once again. If that is the case, I hope that Ministers will overcome their fears and that he will address that fear when he replies, so that we can be clear what he believes is happening.

There are jobs and a traditional industry to be saved. The councils in Cornwall, particularly the county council, are negotiating with the mine to discover whether there are ways in which they can help by buying land around the mine for purposes in which they are already engaged—for example, economic development, the tramways project and other similar projects.

However, anything that the county is allowed to put in cannot meet the needs of the mine for very long. The Minister can help to save the mine, irrespective of what may have been decided just a week or two ago. The opportunity is there now, because the miners are working hard in the mine, because the management and the people of Cornwall are doing all they can to help, and because politicians on both sides of the House from our part of the country will do what we can to keep the mine open. I hope that the Minister will be able to give some hope to those people who are looking for a response, in the hope that their jobs will be saved.

10.29 pm

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): [illegible] am grateful to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) for his courtesy in allowing me to make a brief contribution to the debate. I also recognise that he has a genuine concern for tailings dam in his constituency, as I do with the nub of the debate: the future of South Crofty in the Falmouth-Camborne division.

South Crofty is the last working tin mine in the United Kingdom. It is one of only two remaining mines in Europe —there is a similar one in Portugal. The hon. Member for Truro has described the lead-up to the events, particularly the 1985-86 crisis, as well giving a few asides, some of which lacked a little accuracy—I am sure that there could be a debate over that.

We seem to be talking about previous public money that has been invested in saving jobs and the mine as wasted money, but it is not. I fervently believe that that money has laid the foundations for a commercially viable operation. At the heart of today's debate is the volatility of the international market and of the international price for tin. That is the agenda that management and Department of Trade and Industry officials have set themselves.

As the hon. Member for Truro said, the main issue on that agenda involves loans. The issue does not merely consist of writing off previous debt: it also involves existing commercial contracts. Writing off Government loans in this case would mean writing off other loans from previous tripartite agreements. Those subjects are not to be debated tonight, but they require detailed discussions. I recognise that Department officials and management are tackling the problems.

Why do we seek for the loans to be written off? Simply because the price of tin is so volatile. There is no forecaster at the London metal exchange or in the commodities market who is prepared or able to put his finger on whether the price is likely to continue to rise. The price has risen £300 in the past week, but no one is able to say whether it will continue to rise or, as the market finds another level, fall back.

The importance of the removal of those loans is that it would allow Carnon Consolidated to develop third-party commercial relationships. They could bolster the industry and constitute the foundation of a commercial relationship to see the industry through the volatility that will certainly exist in the market for the next year.

The mine is a viable business. It has already been said that management, work force and trade unions have all worked extremely hard to reduce overheads and operating costs. It is one of the most economic mines in the world. I recognise the volatility in the international market—Malaysia, China and Brazil are suffering similar problems —but when the price rises, as it will, I want to ensure that we maintain not only a commercial operation, but the strong psychological links that mining has for many of my constituents and on a Cornwall countywide basis.

The agenda that has been set by management and is being met as quickly as possible by Department of Trade and Industry officials should not be left hanging in the air. A decision has to be made quickly. If the management view is crystallised and it believes that public funding is officially at an end and loans can, at the very least, be reduced or, at best, be taken off the balance sheet, we must ensure that the industry can stand on its own two feet. We must ensure that it has the support of the work force, management and unions and develops fresh relationships in new pastures. We must maintain full-time, meaningful employment in the Falmouth-Camborne district.

10.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): I must first apologise for the absence of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry, who is in attendance upon the Council of Ministers of the European Community. However, it is not entirely inappropriate that I should answer this debate, as my parents-in-law are constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who is present this evening and in whose constituency I was married.

I am a frequent visitor to Cornwall and I know the area extremely well. I am aware of the difficulties that the tin mining industry in Cornwall has been going through in recent years, and I have the greatest possible sympathy with those who are currently suffering the turmoil that the changes in international markets for tin have caused.

Of course I understand the concern that has been expressed by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on behalf of those who work in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe). I am aware of the importance of this mine to the local community. The concern is shared by all my colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry. I understand also the problems that inevitably arise in close-knit communities when events such as these supervene and cause the difficulties that the tin mining industry in Cornwall has endured in recent years. I know that at the mine and the treatment plant there are workers from all three constituencies—those of my hon. Friends and that of the hon. Member for Truro. It is understandable that all three of them should be here and taking such a keen interest in the debate.

I was very disappointed at the rather negative approach of the hon. Member for Truro, which contrasted with the approach of my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne. I refer in particular to the emphasis that the hon. Gentleman laid on the confidential letter which had been leaked by someone unknown and to which much reference has been made. If the hon. Gentleman were seriously interested in ensuring the survival of this commercial enterprise, he should not have placed such emphasis on gloomy prognostications that were never intended to be made public.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No. I am sorry, but time is very limited.

I hope that, on reflection and in the light of local comment, the hon. Member realises that his comments and the demonstration that was staged outside South Crofty by him and other members of his party, for reasons that may not be too obscure, have been neither helpful nor wise. In fact, it is appalling to play politics with people's jobs, as he has done, and to betray confidences.

I gather that this was also against the wishes of management and the trade unions, and that it has been the subject of much local comment. I have probably said enough about it.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman has had an opportunity to make his speech. I am now making mine, and I want to answer the debate. I shall not give way.

Mr. Taylor: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is very unusual for a Minister to refuse to give way to a Member who has raised a subject on the Adjournment. However, more relevant is the fact that the Minister has made a personal attack on me. Surely that is not acceptable under the rules of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): The hon. Gentleman is fully aware of the fact that it is for the Minister to decide whether to give way.

Mr. Hamilton: I am not making a personal attack on the hon. Gentleman; I am expressing great regret at the consequences of his actions in respect of those whose interests he purports to represent in this debate.

Regrettably, the gradual exhaustion of Cornish tin and the discovery of new deposits across the world—often in alluvial deposits rather than higher-cost deep hard-rock mines—has seen a decline in the industry, so that today, whereas Cornwall was once supreme, Brazil, China, Indonesia and Malaysia now dominate.

Even as recently as the mid-1980s, there were three functioning tin mines in Cornwall—at South Crofty, Wheal Jane and Geevor. Regrettably, the last two have now closed. As the last working mine, South Crofty remains as the inheritor of the long tradition of tin mining in the county.

The importance of tin mining to the Cornish economy has always been recognised by the Government. This recognition can be highlighted by the assistance given to tin mining projects in Cornwall over the years. I regret the hon. Gentleman's remarks, which were intended to give the impression that, over the years, the Government had failed to give proper recognition of tin mining in Cornwall.

South Crofty is a case in point. It is worth spending a few minutes on the history of DTI support for South Crofty. In 1986, assistance was offered under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 to Carnon Consolidated Ltd, a subsidiary of RTZ Corporation which then owned two mines in Cornwall—Wheal Jane and South Crofty.

Assistance was offered in the form of an interest-free loan of up to £15 million, together with Government guarantees of commercial loans of up to £10 million. That finance was to assist RTZ in undertaking a £30 million capital development project over the years until 1991, with the object of reducing costs at the mines, and without it the company's future would have been in doubt. The commercial loan and the Government loan were to be repaid from the profits generated by Carnon Consolidated if the project was fully successful.

During 1987-88, Carnon Consolidated Ltd again faced serious difficulties because of the severely depressed tin price. As my hon. Friend said, that is the problem today. Agreement was reached in March 1988 for RTZ to sell Carnon Consolidated to a new company, Carnon Holdings Ltd, owned by the management and employees. RTZ made an interest-free loan of £10 million.

For their part, the Government agreed to convert their guarantee of £10 million commercial loans under the 1986 assistance into an interest-free loan to Carnon Holdings Ltd, in addition to their original £15 million interest-free loan, which remained in place. This finance, together with RTZ's finance, was to help to secure the continuation of tin mining and employment in Cornwall and enable the main elements of the modernisation programme begun in 1986 to be completed. As before, the loans were to be repaid from profits generated by the company if the project was fully successful.

The form and amount of the assistance reflected the risks inherent in embarking on the project in the market circumstances prevailing at that time, the serious consequences for west Cornwall if the mines closed—640 jobs were then secured by Government assistance—and the difficulties in the wake of the collapse of the International Tin Council to which the hon. Member for Truro referred.

During the period 1986 to 1990, the Department of Trade and Industry advanced loan instalments to the value of £23·4 million to Carnon out of the total of £25 million which had been offered—a significant sum relative to the

[Mr. Hamilton]

size of the company. However, in 1990, because of the continuing very low price of tin, the Department formed the view that the project was in jeopardy, and no further drawings of the loans were permitted.

Under the terms of our offer letter, we would have been within our rights to ask for our loans to be repaid immediately. The fact that we have not done so fully reflects our desire to help the company as far as possible.

At this point I pay due credit to the management and work force at South Crofty, who have made strenuous efforts recently to improve productivity and reduce the costs of production. Those involved in the management buy-out in 1988 prevented the closure of the mine then and have kept it going since. The company has been successful in reducing its break-even figure significantly since Government assistance was first given to it. Nevertheless, there is no escaping the fact that it is unrealistic to expect the company to be able to reduce its production costs much lower than the current level.

The ultimate success of tin mining in Cornwall—and, indeed, anywhere in the world—is predicated upon two factors which are outside the control of any mining company. First, tin is a globally traded commodity, the price for which is set by the London metal exchange and in Malaysia. As with all commodities, the price fluctuates on a daily, or even hourly, basis.

Because of its use as a raw material for industry, the tin market, like other metals and commodities, moves in response to the forces of supply and demand, and the associated economic situation in the main producing and consuming countries. Prices are also affected by speculative activity. As a consequence, prices are notoriously difficult to predict with any certainty.

The second key factor is prevailing exchange rates. Because tin is priced in United States dollars, the dollar-sterling exchange rate is also a vital factor for tin mining in the United Kingdom. A rise in the tin price can be negated by a change in the exchange rate. Exchange rates are similarly difficult to forecast, so tin mining has a double dose of uncertainty to contend with.

The tin price has yet to recover from the tin crisis of 1986 when the price dropped from over £9,000 per tonne to just over £4,000 per tonne. Although there was a brief rally in 1989, when the price climbed above £5,000 per tonne, prices have remained around £3,500 per tonne, and last year the price reached a 20-year low.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman must know that I have only seconds to go as a result of a spurious point of order which delayed my response to the debate.

At the end of 1993, the directors of the company approached my Department with a request for new Government funding for the mine. After considerable thought, we regretfully had to conclude that we could not properly advance any further public money to the company.

Although the company believes that the tin price will rise significantly, it is by no means certain when that will happen—or, indeed, whether it will happen at all. The Government cannot get into a position where they are spending taxpayers' money on a continuing basis—a point to which the hon. Member for Truro did not allude—to fund the running of the mine until such time, whenever and if ever that might be, as the tin price and exchange rate factors meant that the mine no longer operated at a loss. It is not proper to continue to risk taxpayers' money on the assumption that the price of tin will increase in this manner.

Looking to the future, I am pleased to see that the company is still trading. I note that the directors believe that the mine still has a future, and that they are continuing to strive to ensure its survival.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 4 February 1994

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Energy Conservation Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I have never been very good at winning raffles; even the talcum powder and oven glove which are usually the 32nd prize in one's constituency raffles usually elude me. The same is true of the ballot for private Members' Bills, which many people outside the House do not realise is also in the nature of a raffle.

I have been a Member of Parliament for 20 years and this is the first time I have been successful in the ballot at any level, let alone the No. 2 slot. So accustomed had I become to my lack of success that I had taken to telling people who wrote to me before the ballot to ask me to take up various causes that their requests were academic, that there was little point in my making any commitment, because I had never been successful in the ballot. This year, however, I won second place and was very pleased to do so.

I have received the usual shoal of inquiries and importunings from hon. Members and from friends in organisations pursuing various causes, but I quickly concluded that having the second slot meant that it was worth trying to introduce a measure that had a chance of being passed. However, having the second slot, and therefore a reasonable amount of time, meant that it was possible to try to put on to the statute book a measure about which there was some controversy rather than one which was so innocuous that even the Government would welcome it with open arms.

I shall discuss later whether the Government welcome the Bill with open arms or with a limited blessing. All will become clear when we hear from the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry). I hope to encourage the Government to believe that the Bill is so much in everyone's interests that they should be enthusiastic about it.

One of my first thoughts was to try to legislate for the payment of debts to small businesses. The late payment of debt is such a serious problem that I offered the Government the opportunity to pursue it. It had been mentioned by the Chancellor in the Budget, but the Government wanted to take the issue to wider consultation, which I fear may make them more reluctant rather than more enthusiastic to do something that I still hope they will do. It was clear that any Bill would be blockable on those lines, so I felt free to introduce a Bill for which there is extremely widespread support.

Few Bills have had such widely declared support. Three hundred and twenty-seven hon. Members have signed an early-day motion in favour of a Bill of this type, and 167 local authorities have called for it. As local authorities will be directed to act under the Bill, that is both surprising and welcome, and it proves how important they believe the issue to be.

I have received letters from a number of hon. Members who could not sign the early-day motion because they are members of the Government and from some who could not be here today. I do not want their absence to console potential opponents, because many will be here during the day to support the Bill.

Some hon. Members who have been associated with the matter have also written to me. For example, the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) who is a member of the Government, has a record of supporting energy conservation, and introduced a Bill to that effect. The right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) is one of many who have expressed their support.

The Bill has the support of the Association for Conservation of Energy, Neighbourhood Energy Action, the Institute of Environmental Health Officers, Age Concern, Mencap, the Spastics Society and many other organisations that represent the disabled and believe that it is especially important to help the people for whom they care, whose need for warmth is sometimes greater than we realise because they are often trapped in their homes.

The list includes Greenpeace, Help the Aged, the World Wild Fund for Nature, the Gas Consumers Council and the Body Shop. The list of organisations and commercial concerns which have given their support is large, and I am grateful for the support of hon. Members of all parties, not only those who are among the Bill's sponsors but those who have arranged to be present today in case there is a Division and the many who have written to assure me of their backing.

The Bill is about energy, and there is a cruel irony in that fact because, as I speak, a meeting is being held about Ellington colliery in my constituency. It is the last pit in the north-east, and we fear that the meeting may lead to a closure announcement while we are debating the Bill. Closure would be a bitter blow for more than 1,000 families in my constituency and neighbouring constituencies, and it would be a betrayal by British Coal of the loyalty shown by the Ellington work force.

It is only weeks since we were told that there was a plan capable of allowing the pit to continue to operate for some years. With the prospect of a private buyer taking it on because of its close link with Alcan, anything that might jeopardise that prospect worries me. I know that the Minister will convey that view to his colleague in the Department of Trade and Industry with whom I discussed the matter late last night.

The aim of the Bill is to enable people to keep warm in their homes affordably, by reducing the amount of energy that they need to use, thereby securing reduced emission of greenhouse and other gases and conserving natural resources. Energy conservation makes sense, whether one views it from the perspective of global warming or from that of pensioners struggling to keep warm.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

With greater energy conservation, we could cut fuel bills and fuel poverty, and that is all the more important if the application of VAT to fuel goes ahead. We could reduce cold-related illnesses. More than 7 million households are affected by fuel poverty, and it is estimated that 40,000 people die each winter because their homes are not adequately heated.

The domestic sector is responsible for about a quarter of carbon dioxide emissions. The country is pledged to reduce those emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Energy conservation work is especially valuable in promoting local employment. It promotes self-employment and small businesses because of the nature of the tasks involved. It can be a valuable agent of local economic regeneration, for energy conservation work provides jobs, and work for small local businesses, which, as we all know from our constituencies, are of immense importance to the local community and the large economy.

The Bill, as a private Member's Bill, does not make large open-ended commitments to public spending. It ensures that we take an essential first step to work out what the energy efficiency of our housing stock is, both public and private, and where resources could most effectively be channelled to improve it.

The requirement that energy audits be carried out by local authorities is the heart of the Bill. There is also a provision for timetables to be set for work to be carried out as a result of the surveys, but the collection of the data is the vital first step, because that will reveal how cost effective investment in the field could be—cost effective for investment not only of public funds but of private funds, by owners of rented housing and by owner-occupiers.

We need to know where money can most usefully be spent. It is quite easy—perhaps fatally so—to misdirect resources in that field into expensive measures that may have a disproportionately weak effect on energy conservation when compared with cheap and effective measures.

We need to know more about the housing stock to know where the work should be directed. If that information is produced, it will guide not only local authorities in dealing with their housing stock but private owners of housing. It will also provide guidance to the Government, and will help us to use resources effectively.

The Bill gives the duty to local authorities because they are the people who already have responsibilities and expertise in the field. The duties will rest on district and borough councils under the present system—it would be unitary authorities, wherever they are created, in future.

It is rather a tricky task at the moment to define local authorities in the statute when they are being changed significantly in England, Scotland and Wales. The Government have thought up some rather intriguing definitions in legislation that they have brought forward. The object is understood, however; the powers should rest with the authorities that take over the housing function, currently mainly exercised at the district level.

Under the Housing Acts, local authorities are obliged to consider housing conditions in their districts annually. Under the housing investment programme, the Under-Secretary of State has announced that local authorities should

> "take fuller account in their Housing Investment decisions of the need to improve the energy efficiency of their stock and to reflect this in their annual HIP submission."

Local authorities want to do that job and they have shown that it need not be expensive. Two pilot studies have shown that it could be done at modest cost. Newark and Sherwood district council showed that it could be done for a set-up cost of £46,000, with annual costs of about £4,500. The city of Derby produced a set-up figure of £48,700, with annual costs of abut £8,000. That is in a city with a total housing stock, public and private, of 93,000 dwellings, so it is a substantial authority. That shows that, especially with the aid of modern computer technology to assemble information, it can be done efficiently at a relatively modest cost.

I have said that local authorities are keen to do that, and they are, but I nevertheless believe that it needs to be a mandatory requirement, not a permissive power as the Government seem to be suggesting.

The Secretary of State went to Newcastle on Wednesday and opened offices for Neighbourhood Energy Action, an excellent organisation which has done some good work in my constituency and others in insulating pensioners' homes especially, and I commend its work. I am glad that he supported it in a radio interview while he was there. He said that he supported the idea of the Bill because it was a good idea, but preferred it to be permissive rather than a requirement on local authorities.

It is important to place the requirement on the local authorities. In these times of stringency, things that are not statutory obligations are the first to go under budget pressure. Any hon. Member who has taken part in, or observed, budget discussions in a local authority knows the position in which a committee chairman so often finds himself when he has to make cuts or contain expenditure. The statutory services and statutory requirements are protected, so he has to consider anything that is optional. The local authorities want to be given the lead by being told it is something they have to do, especially when it is so small in financial terms in relation to their overall budget.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned £46,000 in Derby as a cost. Is that a one-off cost in the first year? Would it be an on-going cost? It sounds as though three people would be in charge of the audit. For the audit to have value, it would have to be monitored over a series of years. Has the right hon. Gentleman extrapolated from what the costs would be in Derby to what the costs would be nationwide, if that were to become a statutory order?

Mr. Beith: The figure that I quoted for Derby was about £48,000 for the set-up costs, with an annual cost, which I also quoted, of £8,000. The set-up costs include the costs of setting up all the necessary computer software. I have not done an extrapolation for the country, because the figures are based simply on two pilot studies. It was a serious and effective attempt to give an idea of what it would cost in an authority of that size.

Not only is it important that local authorities should be under the obligation, because of the budget pressures on them, but the idea of the Government's setting a timetable and requiring plans to be submitted goes with the grain of what the Department of the Environment is doing in other fields. In relation to waste management, for instance, the Department tells local authorities that they must by a certain date submit a plan to improve their waste management to reduce landfill. That technique seems to be effective, and one which can lead to a proper discussion of how the work can be carried out.

Our former colleague the noble Lord Moore, who chairs Energy Saving Trust Ltd., said in a letter to the Secretary of State:

> "As you know, my usual inclination is to favour 'advice over duties' and certainly there are a number of councils which will perform the activities described in the Bill of their own volition. However, previous experience suggests that these councils will be the exception rather than the rule. Without some form of 'stick' being applied, we could again end up preaching to the converted and therefore I support the relevant clause."

That is a pretty good political pedigree of support for the mandatory nature of the Bill for Conservative Members, and it comes from the noble Lord, with his understanding of the need to get some action in that field.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I tend to agree with the right hon. Gentleman that, unless local authorities are given a pretty good steer in that direction, the duties will be discarded at some stage. Does he agree that the Government's Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill might have potential for relieving local authorities of some of the fussy duties that especially their environmental health officers have undertaken in recent years? I find in my dealings with them that they are so busy going around messing about with shops and small businesses that they cannot even ensure that neighbours can live in peace and be protected from the noise and havoc of next-door neighbours that make their lives agony.

Mr. Beith: I have much sympathy with the idea that we should get rid of the unnecessary regulations that local authorities have to enforce. One of the problems with the mechanism proposed in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill is that we are not convinced that it will enable authorities to distinguish between necessary and unnecessary regulations. There will be quite an argument about that aspect of the Bill, but I support its objective of cutting unnecessary regulation. The Institution of Environmental Health Officers takes the view that the work described in the Bill is important, and it wants to get on with it.

I can offer some support to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson). I have never known anything so absurd as constituents of mine being threatened with prosecution because they weighed out nuts in bags measured in pounds and ounces before customers arrived in the shop. Environmental health officers were required to threaten them with prosecution because nuts can be sold in pounds and ounces only if they are weighed in front of customers. Otherwise, they must be sold in grammes. We have allowed such absurdity into our system.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Before the hon. Gentleman goes too far down that road, may I suggest that the Bill is not a quid pro quo? Whatever the circumstances of other legislation, the benefits of implementing the Bill would be so widespread that it stands on its own merits.

Mr. Beith: Of course. The Bill is not regulatory at all; it does not impose massive requirements. It merely makes local authorities carry out the feasible activity of assembling data and producing a plan for the most efficient use of resources in energy conservation. It proposes no new powers to interfere with people's lives, and no new means of extracting information from anybody who does not want to give it. It relies on existing, available and adequate means of collecting information on the subject, most of which already exists and more of which can be put together and obtained by fairly simple processes of inquiry with the help of outside bodies such as estate agents and voluntary organisations. There is tremendous scope for voluntary co-operation on this work.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The other great benefit of the Bill is that, in placing duties on local authorities, it establishes what is important. If local authorities are persuaded of the importance of energy conservation, that will transfer to the community at large. I hope that my right hon. Friend regards that as one of the key consequences of the Bill's placing a duty on local authorities, rather than an option or something about which a local authority could say, "We would love to do this, but we will not do so."

Mr. Beith: Absolutely. What a privilege it is to have my speech improved as it goes along.

The Bill contains much that was in the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) in the last Session. I pay tribute to the effort that he has put into this matter, and to his continued support. I look forward to hearing him speak later in the debate. I have encouraged him, given his knowledge of these matters, to speak towards the end of the debate to deal with the more complicated inquiries that might arise during it.

The Bill does not include provisions that were in the hon. Gentleman's Bill—for example, the system of regional boards or the levy system, which his Bill proposed. We should concentrate on the immediate task of securing information, carrying out audits and making plans as the basis for moving energy conservation work forward rather than creating an elaborate new apparatus for the work.

The means of doing the work is more readily to hand than the assembling of information. I am filling in what I think is the gap, and I am sure that existing mechanisms are adequate to do the work once we have indentified what it is and have built up the commitment that will be necessary at all levels to ensure that it is made a priority.

Clause 1 defines energy conservation and the local authorities that will be energy conservation authorities.

Clause 2 is the meat of the Bill. It gives local authorities the duty of preparing a plan or statement of the works needed to achieve various levels of energy saving in the various types of public and private residential accommodation in its area. It requires the authority to determine how priority can be given to householders suffering from financial hardship. A specific provision in clause 2 requires a local authority to indentify how priority could be given to those suffering from financial hardship.

Clause 2 requires an estimate of financial savings that could be made by energy-conservation measures, which of course will be of particular interest to tenants, owners or occupants of properties, and it requires an estimate to be made of the CO_2 emission reductions that could be achieved by given energy savings. There will be a wider national and international interest in what emerges.

Clause 2 requires consultation with interested organisations and the public. It tries to build on some of the experience of inner-city initiatives, which have shown the merit of building local consensus as the basis for an energy-saving strategy. The energy action cities during the

[Mr. Beith]

Energy Efficiency Year of 1986 were, in part, the model for some of what is in the Bill. They included Cardiff, Edinburgh and Norwich.

I hope that the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who was personally involved in the initiative in Norwich, will tell us about that. Much good experience came from it; one of the things it showed was that a co-operative approach can be taken, drawing in all sorts of bodies and organisations to achieve positive results.

Clause 3 places on the Secretary of State a duty to set a timetable for plans to be submitted and to make timetables to encourage the completion of the works proposed. It gives him the power to contribute to the cost.

Clause 4 is a money clause. I was advised by the House authorities that it had to be included, even if the Bill were confined to clause 2, which requires only a limited amount of local government expenditure, apparently because of the high proportion of local government expenditure that now derives from moneys voted by Parliament.

It appears almost impossible to get by without a money resolution these days, but I trust that the Government, in accordance with normal practice, will provide us with the appropriate money resolution to enable us to discuss all these parts of the Bill, even if they try at some stage to trim any part that has financial implications. The clause is included because I am advised that even the most limited parts of the Bill make it necessary.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I support the Bill, but it may have some financial implications in the sense that we shall have to take a long-term view of the design of domestic, commercial and other buildings. It may be appropriate for the Secretary of State to have some small function—perhaps offering a cup of tea and a biscuit—which may incur some expense to encourage architectural organisations to consider the design of buildings in the long term.

Scandinavian countries use a different design from us for residential accommodation because of their weather conditions. The part of the world that the right hon. Gentleman and I represent, and Scotland, experience different weather conditions from other parts of the country. Buildings in my constituency that have been constructed according to the Swedish design are working efficiently in terms of energy conservation.

Mr. Beith: Far be it from me to add to the Government's burgeoning entertainments bill, which has been the subject of much controversy, but the hon. Gentleman is making the important point that the Government should do all in their power to encourage energy efficiency in new building. I know that they have taken a number of initiatives for some of their own buildings, but it is a much wider issue.

I have regularly visited Sweden and Norway over many years, and have always been amazed by how far behind we have been in the normal standards of construction. Perhaps those countries were impelled to adopt such standards because of the generally lower temperatures, but temperatures are cold enough in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson), my constituency neighbour who shares my concern about Ellington colliery. In our part of the world, it is plenty cold enough for such things to have been justified years ago, before rises in energy prices and VAT on fuel. Much could be done with the architectural profession and the construction industry.

Energy conservation sometimes means higher capital costs for buildings. We have often made mistakes—this is fairly true of Government and public buildings—by trying to make savings in the initial capital cost of buildings, which have led to enormously higher revenue costs in terms of heating. That has often led to faster deterioration because the deficiencies that lead to inadequate energy conservation also contribute to water penetration of a building or other damage, thereby shortening its life.

Clause 5 extends the Bill to Northern Ireland. I am grateful for the support for the Bill that I have had from Northern Ireland Members on both sides of the House and for the interest in energy conservation that is being shown in Northern Ireland, where it has strong backing. I am glad that the Bill will extend to Northern Ireland.

Those are the broad terms and objectives of the Bill. It is fairly straightforward, and a little time in Committee will iron out some of the details. I am willing to discuss with the Government how the provisions can be cast in a form that will make the job as straightforward as possible for the Department and for local authorities.

It is essential, however, that the Bill retains the requirement that the work be done. We do not want such matters to dribble along for years. We are so far behind in the work that we must take the initiative now. I hope that, if recovery eventually comes, we shall enter a period when more of the work can be undertaken and the private and public sectors will have the means to carry it out. Let us be ready with the information, knowledge and clear guidelines on how resources can be best used.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that, although the audit is important, it is action that counts. Does he accept that one of the great difficulties is that, in drawing up their budgets, local government and Departments of central Government tend to consider a project worth while only if it produces some tangible benefit for them? That is why it is so important to have a strategic approach that takes into account the benefits for the country and individuals.

Mr. Beith: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The Department has opportunities, which it has used in the past, to build in an advantage for local authorities when it comes to calculating how work can best be done. It can give encouragement by providing special help to regions that come up with particularly good schemes. The Department has taken that approach widely to spread good practice. Assistance can be given—even where there are a few pilot projects—which will be to the advantage of those authorities that take a lead.

Many such ways have been developed. A great mixture of carrots and sticks can be employed. One problem is that, sometimes, those who need to make the capital expenditure are not those who benefit directly from it, and those who most desperately need energy efficiency and warmer homes are in the weakest position when it comes to achieving that.

Some tenants on low incomes living in poorly insulated housing do not have the money to make improvements. Sometimes, the local authority, the housing association or the private landlord do not give such matters high enough priority and do not see a direct revenue benefit for themselves.

The problem therefore persists; the tenant remains cold in the property, the amount of energy used remains higher than necessary and the property probably deteriorates quicker as well. We need to change that process. The sort of information that we can assemble under the scheme will make that possible.

The Bill is an essential step towards cutting the amount of energy needed to keep people warm in their homes. It will show us how to use resources effectively for that purpose, helping in particular those in greatest need. It will help us to save our precious and threatened environment. I commend it to the House.

10.3 am

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in the debate on a subject in which I have tried to maintain an interest during my 10 years as a Member of Parliament. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on using his winning place in the raffle to introduce the Bill.

I sympathise with the right hon. Member's reference to raffles and lotteries because I went through the first 35 years of my life without ever winning a raffle. It was only when I became involved in Conservative politics that I discovered that I was able occasionally to win raffles. Since then, I have occasionally won them—sometimes to my embarrasment. Unfortunately, I have never won the private Member's Bill raffle or had a Bill highly placed. I doubly congratulate the right hon. Gentleman: first, on winning the raffle and, secondly, on choosing to introduce the measure, in which I have a genuine interest—one which I have tried to maintain since becoming a Member of Parliament.

The good news for the Bill is that there clearly is a high level of all-party support for its main objective. I suspect that that will be reflected in the speeches during what I hope will be an interesting debate today. After all, Fridays often generate the best debates in the House of Commons. People talk about the standard of debate in the House and the quality of the work of hon. Members, but I only wish that the press in the Gallery would report more fully our Friday debates. Those debates are worth while, and I make no apology for taking up a few moments to say that Friday debates are worthy of more and better coverage. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that I have the support of Members on both sides of the House. I shall not be tempted to talk about the Jopling report, which I also support, because I should be straying from the subject of the Bill.

There is all-party support for the Bill. That has been proved by the large number of names that have been put down in support of various early-day motions and other measures. I am pleased to see in his place the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis). Although his Bill was not identical in every respect to the one that we are debating, I think that he would be the first to agree that it was a precursor of the subject of today's debate. I am pleased that he is able to be with us, and I am sure that he will speak later.

During what I hope will be a not-too-lengthy speech, I shall not talk about the Bill clause by clause in detail, because, as I have learned during my time here, my lack of experience in the law has singularly disqualified me from taking a Bill apart clause by clause. I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not discuss the Bill in that sort of detail. I want to show why I support the Bill and why an energy strategy for this country is so important. I regard the Bill as a step on the road to a long-term energy strategy in the United Kingdom. I want to base my remarks on that argument.

My support is obviously based on my interest in science and engineering. As a physicist and during my earlier academic career teaching sixth forms in schools, I spent a great deal of time talking about the conservation of energy. It was probably the most important principle that I tried for 20 years of my life to impart to pupils in classrooms in Manchester and Norfolk.

I remember discussing in great detail the way in which various forms of energy can be converted from one to another. Hon. Members may think that I am getting carried away and am going to give a physics lecture, but I shall not do so. My experience is relevant because the importance of conserving energy is even clearer to those of us who have studied physics or science than it is to other people.

I remember talking about the way in which mechanical energy can be converted to an equivalent amount of heat energy. It is remarkable how much physical energy one has to put in to obtain what appears to be a comparatively small amount of heat. A lot of energy is needed to provide what might appear, on the surface, to be a smallish amount of heat. I remember discussing how heat is the most chaotic form of energy and I remember discussing the work of James Prescott Joule and how he established the equivalents between heat and energy. I promise that the physics lesson will end shortly. However, I noticed that the European Community has a programme of support for research and development and I was delighted to learn that it was called the Joule programme, until I discovered why it was called that.

I have a total abhorrence of acronyms and even the excellent Select Committee report, which is relevant to the debate, but from which I do not have time to quote in any detail, mentioned the Joule programme. I was horrified to discover that there are so many acronyms, even in this area. I kept reading about HEES, EST and EEO and having to look up what they were. I discovered that, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will know, that EEO is the Energy Efficiency Office. To my horror, I discovered that the Joule programme is an acronym for the joint opportunity for unconventional energy. I must protest at the absurdity of acronyms such as that. The Joule programme should have been named after the work that James Prescott Joule did for physics and energy, not because it is an acronym for the joint opportunity for unconventional energy. I hope that the House will support that despairing appeal for a reduction in the number of ridiculous acronyms.

My membership of the Parliamentary Group for Engineering Development links to the work of the Engineering Employers Federation and others. The federation has recently pressed for a balanced energy strategy leading into the next century. I see the Bill as part of such a strategy and that is why I clearly think that it is worthy of full support in the House and beyond.

In putting forward the strategy, the Engineering Employers Federation gave figures for population growth and energy requirements in the coming year. I was

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horrified to learn that there will be a doubling of the energy requirement in the world by 2020. The figures have Government backing so perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister may wish to comment on that later.

To that, one can add the projections of the fuel mix. At present, 74 per cent. of our energy is produced by carbon dioxide-producing fuel. That is bad enough, as I am sure that will be mentioned later. According to Government figures of present trends, which I hope will not be continued, by 2020, when the energy requirements have doubled, the proportion of energy produced by carbon dioxide-producing fuels will have risen from 74 to 92 per cent. The implications of that for global warming and other issues which are of concern do not need to be spelled out.

I remember saying in a debate on global warming that it was basically benign and this is my opportunity to say that I was certainly misunderstood by certain characters in the Gallery. As a physicist, I was trying to make the point that we needed the greenhouse effect or we would freeze to death. To that extent, it is benign, but, clearly, not in the sense in which we normally debate it in the House. Ever since, I have been saddled with the quotation that global warming is benign and have been castigated in the *Observer* and elsewhere for not being green in my attitudes, so I shall take the opportunity to say that global warming is benign, but only to the extent to which it keeps us all warm, and not if it goes too far.

The point of the strategies proposed by the Engineering Employers Federation and others is the need for a long-term view, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said. I am sure that my hon. Friend will pick that up. I agree with the EEF that there are three components of that strategy.

First, but not to be debated this morning, is the review of the nuclear industry. Nuclear power is not carbon dioxide producing. I hope that my hon. Friend will take on board the urgency of concluding that review in discussions with his colleagues. I do not need to spell out the implications, but it is an important point which be cannot evaded by the House.

Secondly, there is the question of the diversity of fuels and, thirdly—and what the Bill is really about—there is the question of energy conservation and increased efficiency. The EEF says that a long-term strategy, the conservation of energy and energy efficiency are important.

The EEF conducted a poll of Members of Parliament. I am suspicious of polls and whenever anybody telephones to say that they are conducting a poll, I say, in the nicest possible way, that I never take part. Apparently, most of my colleagues do the same, so I am baffled as to how even the worthy EEF has managed to get a sensible sample of Members of Parliament. Most polls of MPs are totally nonsensical and in preparation for an equally nonsensical article in some tabloid or more serious newspaper.

As there was a poll, I shall share the result with hon. Members and they may decide whether to take it seriously. It said that seven out of 10 Members of Parliament wanted the Government to take a more strategic approach to energy. I hope that my hon. Friend will take that seriously.

The only realistic way in which to achieve energy efficiency is by the systematic insulation of the nation's buildings, to which the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred, and by the systematic education of the occupants of those buildings. On 17 June last year, Viscount Mersey rightly talked about the boring truth of energy efficiency. We all get excited about wind power, to which even the syndrome of NIMBY applies. I shall be careful what I say, but, in Norfolk, people are beginning to protest because windmills are erected next to their houses. Concepts such as wind power, wave power, hot rocks and fuel cells are exciting, but, as my noble Friend said, the truth about energy efficiency is that it is boring, as it really only concerns property insulation and design.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is worth mentioning the developing furore over wind power? One of the reasons for objecting to the development of wind power in Wales is that we do not have the proper energy efficiency policy in place. Does he not accept that that kind of development will not be attempted unless the Government show that they are serious about energy efficiency? If we accept that, set it up and take it seriously, it will be more possible to obtain public support for development in other directions.

Mr. Thompson: That is one of the debates in which everyone seems to agree. The hon. Gentleman's remarks seem only to be common sense and I that hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State takes the point about the need for a long-term strategy and policy so that there can be proper discussion about wind power and other forms of energy production.

Mr. Brandreth: I disagree with my hon. Friend about energy efficiency being boring. I find that when I talk to people in my constituency about cost savings, they recognise that it is a case of enlightened self-interest and that they can help save the world, while improving the quality of their home life and enhancing their bank balance. Far from being boring, it is exciting.

Mr. Thompson: I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) is a convert to the view that energy efficiency is exciting. If he, as a communicator, is excited by it, we can all become excited about it. That is what we have been waiting for; it is very good news indeed. I am making a serious point here, because energy efficiency and the insulation of buildings —I may even refer in passing to the imposition of VAT on fuel—are most important. My hon. Friend is right that those who are concerned about the cost of their fuel will get excited about better home insulation. I agree with both hon. Members who have intervened.

The Bill is a vital step towards returning our emissions of greenhouse gases to their 1990 levels by the year 2000, which is a commitment that we have made, while ensuring sustainable growth and safeguarding our economic interests. If the Bill is enacted, it will be the start of a real commitment by local authorities and Government to back up with co-ordinated action and funding the education and advice that are already being given. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed made that point in his speech.

The ten-minute Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Ceridigion and Pembroke, North was similar in many respects to the Bill that we are debating this morning. Interestingly, it included a fuel levy—a concept which has sometimes been the subject of somewhat more controversial debate. I have no difficulty in supporting the concept of some kind of taxation on fuel and energy in the interests of encouraging conservation, although the manner in which it is done is a matter of greater controversy.

The hon. Gentleman included a fuel levy in his Bill, with all that that implies in terms of the Government's policy of imposing VAT on fuel, while ensuring that anyone who has difficulty with heating bills gets the appropriate help. I am delighted to say that the Government have provided adequate support. I have even had letters from pensioners' organisations saying that they are pleased with the measure of help that the Government have provided to people who are likely to have difficulty paying their heating bills. The concept of a levy on energy or fuel to encourage efficiency and home insulation is good, and it is interesting that the right hon. Gentleman included it in his Bill.

I had a letter from the president of the Norfolk Energy Forum on 11 October last, which stated:

> "Having considered the question of VAT on fuel, it is the view of this forum that this is acceptable provided a significant part of revenue raised was devoted to the implementation of energy saving measures."

I suspect that that is common ground between the parties —and the Norfolk Energy Forum clearly has support from all the political parties. It is fine for the Government to raise money in that way if, at the same time, serious consideration is given to investment in energy saving and energy-efficiency measures.

The Government have made good progress in energy efficiency. It would not be right for me to go into too much detail. After all, my hon. Friend the Minister will have an opportunity to spell out the position. If, reverting to my old profession of schoolmaster, I made out a report on the Government's progress, it would not be a eulogy—I would not give them an alpha-plus or anything like that.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister would be satisifed if, as one of his supporters, I talked in terms of a beta or a beta-plus. *[Interruption.]* Clearly, he is not wholly satisfied with that, but I assure him that there are many worse marks that I could give—beta-minus, gamma and so on. The Government are taking the issue very seriously.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thompson: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman, especially if it gives me a further opportunity to expand on my point.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is marking the Government somewhat generously. Intentions may have been good, but practice has been poor. The best example that one can cite is that when the Government set targets for their own buildings, energy use increased rather than decreasing. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not be too generous, because that might encourage the Government to think that they can ease up and not be too tough on themselves. They need to be tougher on themselves in their own interest, just as we hope that people outside will be tougher on themselves in their own interests.

Mr. Thompson: Bearing in mind the fact that the Government have made more progress than any previous Government and are improving all the time, I shall stick with beta-plus, in spite of my feeling that they could do even more. We at least agree from our different vantage points that the Government need to be urged even more strongly in that direction.

I praise the efforts and cost effectiveness of the Energy Efficiency Office of the Department of the Environment and the intention behind such initiatives as "Making a Corporate Commitment". The downside—the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will understand this—is that that initiative, which is a good one, has achieved savings of only 0·2 per cent. during the past two years. I think that we would all agree that more energy needs to be put into the campaign.

Mr. Brandreth: Does not that illustrate the central concern that some hon. Members have about the nature of the Bill, which is that it takes a top-down approach? The Government have already done an audit. They know that they wish to reduce energy use by 15 per cent. in their own buildings. But, despite great expenditure and an understanding of the problem, they have still only achieved a saving of 0·2 per cent. The Bill says, "Here is the problem and the audit," when what we really need is action. Perhaps we should concentrate more on delivering the action than on analysing the problem, which is already quite widely recognised.

Mr. Thompson: Once again, my hon. Friend for City of Chester has provided me with great encouragement. Rather than taking a top-down approach, we must get across the idea of people wanting to make commitments. I do not think that anyone would disagree with that. Once again, if my hon. Friend could help to communicate that message, it would be most helpful. I am not sure whether that is a criticsim of the structure of the Bill—I said that I would not analyse the Bill in great detail—but, no doubt, the Standing Committee will have the opportunity to go into that point. I am sure my hon. Friend will understand that I am seeking to get right behind the basic principle of the Bill, which is to achieve the objectives that I know we both support.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will recognise that one problem for the Government is the whole question of departmentalism. I have come across it before in connection with deregulation and the Government's desire to make a bonfire of regulations, which we are not debating this morning. Problems arise because communication between Government Departments is sometimes not as good as it should be. That has a bearing on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester.

There is a resistance to progress because the Government Departments are not communicating adequately with each other. We need more co-ordination between Government Departments to overcome bureaucratic departmentalism. I know that I am not alone in thinking that: a Select Committee report last year made the same point.

I welcome the doubling of the home energy efficiency scheme grants as a response to the imposition of VAT on domestic heat and fuel. That is very good news and is an example of the Government acting quickly and rightly along the lines that we all want. The home energy efficiency scheme should be extended to cover cavity wall insulation and heating controls, again in line with the Select Committee's recommendations in its report of 3 November last year.

[Mr. Thompson]

I was interested in the remarks of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, who is promoting the Bill, about building design and regulations. My father was an architect, and therefore I have an interest in good building. I am glad to see that the right hon. Gentleman has returned, because I want to pick up on his point about design, architecture and so on. I support all his remarks, and those of my namesake the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson).

Proposals for the reform of building regulations were put out to consultation by the Government a year ago. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take the point that the result will be—I hope—an improvement in building regulations on insulation. That should be given priority in any revised proposals. I hope that my hon. Friend will refer to that point.

Section L of the building regulations needs serious upgrading with regard to energy considerations. Although I studied thermal conductivity during my time as a physicist, I never had time—the House will be pleased to know, otherwise my speech would have been longer—to study U values in the building regulations. The good news for the Chamber is that I have not done so and therefore cannot elaborate on them. But I am reliably informed that the present system leads to unsatisfactory energy efficiency levels. Again, there is agreement that something should be done on the building design and regulations front.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support, and the fact that he has been able to spell out the matter much more thoroughly than I was able to do. I hope that he will accept my apology for having to leave early when he was speaking, because the pit closure, of which I warned in my remarks at the beginning of the debate, has since been announced, with the loss of more than 1,000 jobs in my constituency.

Mr. Thompson: I shall stick to the subject of the debate, but I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman was able to return just in time to hear my remarks on building design, the role of the architect, building regulations and so on, as they are of vital importance. I am sure that he will accept that I rest my case on that point.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the Norwich energy action programme. I want to say a word or two about the local aspects of it. Local authorities generally have responsibilities in that area. The good news about the Bill is that it will confirm and extend, as I understand it, these responsibilities. That is good and is one of the reasons why I feel that the Bill is on the right lines.

In the late 1980s, Norwich was one of the forerunners of the programme. The Bill is relevant to Norwich, because my constituency and other parts of Norwich have large council estates, which need—for good reason, not least for the occupants—good insulation. One of the activities of that programme, which was supported by the Governments of the day, was to improve home insulation. As a supporter of that programme, I remember going around my constituency and I was involved in physical acts of insulation, whether it be draft proofing, loft insulation and so on. I suspect that many other hon. Members quite rightly involved themselves at that time.

It is important to those housing estates that building regulations, home insulation and energy efficiency are taken seriously. Norwich has usually been in the forefront of that and certainly was during the period of the energy action scheme. That scheme came to an end towards the end of 1989. It was so successful that it was extended for an extra year. Out of it was born a reorganised Norfolk Energy Forum. The forum has had to rely on the remaining funds of the energy action scheme and sponsorship and help from the Energy Efficiency Office.

The forum is doing as good a job as can be expected in the circumstances. I should like to thank its secretary, Peter Coward, for providing me at short notice with an outline of the activities that it is currently involved in, such as the promotion of energy efficiency and conservation by holding seminars on efficient lighting, domestic heating, energy use in business and industry, labelling of buildings, participation in the Royal Norfolk agricultural show, attending schools, preparing a conference centred on the Rio agenda and so on. It is engaged in good, worthwhile activities. I pay tribute to that work.

Unfortunately, the forum is having some difficulty with its funding; it is piecemeal. I mentioned the support that it gets from the Energy Efficiency Office, but it does not appear, if I am informed reliably, to have much support from local authorities. I hope that, if enacted, one of the effects of the Bill will be to get local authorities once again more involved. I am not making a party political point, because Norwich city council has been good in this respect in the past, but I was a little surprised by its lack of knowledge of the present work of the Norfolk Energy Forum. If the Bill does nothing else, I hope that it will get the local authorities on board on energy conservation and efficiency. They need stimulus.

I have indicated my support clearly enough and do not wish to take up the time of the House any further. However, I do not often quote Jonathon Porritt in support of a speech, because, on occasions, he has taken views with which I have not agreed, but in a recent article he said that the benefits of the Bill would be very great indeed and that it would create

> "Tens of thousands of new jobs, massive reductions in carbon dioxide, huge savings on consumers' energy bills (particularly among the less well-off), lower maintenance costs for local authorities and private householders, and dramatically lower health-care costs. Only a small proportion of the projected revenue from VAT on domestic heating would be required to make it all work."

Even allowing for some slight exaggeration there, that sums up well why so many hon. Members, on both sides of the House, support the principle of the Bill.

I close by saying that I hope that the Bill is successful, not only in the votes in the Lobbies today, but in its progress through Committee and beyond. I wish the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed every success with it. I must say to my hon. Friend the Minister that, in spite of the beta-plus, which he felt was not quite as much as he might expect from one of his loyal supporters, the Government have done a lot of work in this area. They do not get all the credit that they should. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that the Government are doing, and hope that the speeches that he hears this morning will give him extra energy to proceed further.

10.37 am

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I shall not detain the House long in supporting the speeches of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr.

Thompson). I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his success in the ballot. I won the first ballot that I put in for in the House. It is probably the only raffle that I have ever won. Because I shall never win again, I thought that I had better come in and support measures such as his, which are thoroughly worth while.

I shall reiterate some of the right hon. Gentleman's points. I hope that I shall not go over too much old ground, but it is important that both sides of the House make clear their support. There is extraordinary cross-party support for the measure. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) in his place, because I know that he was the starting point for the measure. Besides cross-party support, the support throughout the country, and the support of organisations such as the Association for Conservation of Energy, I have been contacted—as I am sure have many hon. Members —by my local authorities, not only Leicestershire county council but Blaby district council and Harborough district council. They actively promote and support the Bill, which says a great deal for the measure. They wish to see it receive a Second Reading. They will have to implement it and find the funds to implement it, but they and everyone who studies the cause of energy efficiency and energy conservation want the legislation.

I remember the ten-minute Bill of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North. If he will forgive me, and if the House will forgive me for the pun, I do not believe that this Bill will set the world alight. It is remarkably unrevolutionary. It will not change the spendthrift energy habits of our society overnight, but it will be an excellent step in the right direction.

It is extraordinary how uncontroversial the Bill is and I hope that there will be no opposition to it. It is also remarkable how inexpensive it seems to be. We have heard the estimated cost to district councils. I hope that it will not create a great bureaucracy or a mass of regulation or legislation. I believe that it will not do that.

In 1992, the Government made major commitments at the Rio conference. The threat of climate change hangs over us all. Last week at the Banqueting house the Government set out their plans for dealing with the threat of global warming. Again, the Government's proposals are not revolutionary. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ensure that we can edge up to an alpha-minus if all those measures are put in place. The proposals comprised good housekeeping and good sense.

The Bill is in the same vein. It reinforces the Government's proposals, commitments and measures and I hope that it will go some way towards changing the attitudes, culture and—dare I say it—climate of attitude in this country. I hope that it will go some way towards changing our views in relation to energy efficiency.

Hon. Members may have missed the fact that last week scientists from the university of Alabama produced evidence that the planet's temperature did not increase between 1979 and 1993. That information was based on satellite readings of global temperature and it is claimed that they are the most accurate readings ever taken. I am not a scientist or a physicist. I am an historian. I believe that I see global warming. An article in the *Sunday Telegraph* last weekend was entitled:

> "Scientists pour cold water on global warming"

It suggested that we may be making too much fuss about global warming. The debate will rage, but I bet that global warming is taking place. In relation to the Bill, however, it does not matter one way or the other. Should we discover that global warming is a myth, as some people are suggesting, and it is never proven, the Bill will still be very worth while.

The Bill will reduce energy use and therefore cut pollution and pollutant emissions, power station emissions, acid rain and all the damage that that causes. It will reduce long-term costs. Thrift and good housekeeping are values which not only the Conservative party, but every party in the House, promotes. They are valuable in themselves. To encourage and assist all households to make better use of energy must make good common sense. Furthermore, we are using up finite reserves of fossil fuels. Surely we must all try to reduce the use of such resources.

At the same time, the Bill can make a great contribution towards the health and comfort of all. It is always those on low incomes who can least afford fuel. If the Bill contributes to their health and comfort, it must be supported by everyone. Who could argue against such a measure, especially if it does not increase bureaucracy?

The Bill is but one step in the right direction. As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North said, it is going down the right road. We are talking about a decent energy strategy. I want to tie that in with the measures to reduce the waste of fuel in other areas, such as inefficient motor vehicles and inefficient use of such vehicles. That point was referred to last week at the Banqueting house. We should also control pollution in that respect.

Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North, I am not a physicist. However, I support common sense and good housekeeping. I am also vice-chairman of the parliamentary alternative energy group, which may or may not be renamed the parliamentary group for renewable energy and the good use and conservation of fuel. I am the vice-chairman of that group because I wish to pursue policies of global and national importance. We need everyone's support. This is a national policy with global implications. Surely that is what the Government's campaign, "Helping the earth begins at home" is about. The Bill supports that campaign.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North referred to the more controversial issue of VAT on domestic fuel. The Government have been accused of imposing VAT on fuel purely to raise revenue. Of course it will raise revenue, and of course we need that revenue. However, I support the proposal on environmental grounds. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed and his party have been known to support energy taxes for that reason. Surely it is right to use carrots and sticks in such circumstances. We should and must be more energy efficient.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is heartening that in our policy on VAT on fuel we have essentially adopted the policies proposed by the Liberal Democrats, at least prior to the last general election, that a combination of VAT on fuel and a comprehensive package to protect the more vulnerable is the way to tackle the problem?

Mr. Robathan: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The concept of energy taxes should not only be uncontroversial; it should be supported by all parties on this country. Indeed, I suspect that within the next decade

[Mr. Robathan]

or two it will be supported by all factions and parties not only in this country, but throughout the European Community and the world.

Mr. Beith: For the avoidance of doubt, the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) was right to say that my part is on record as having supported energy taxes. However, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) led him astray by suggesting that we agreed that VAT was a good tax to use for that purpose, when in fact we clearly and publicly decided that it was not and that a carbon energy tax on European lines was the much better way to proceed.

Mr. Robathan: The right hon. Gentleman defends his party, but if we are talking about energy taxes, VAT sounds like an energy tax to me. It seems to be a pretty sensible one because it goes to the root of the problem and ensures that every individual takes care of his or her own energy efficiency as part of a national policy. Currently, 30 per cent. of our carbon emissions come from energy used in domestic housing stock. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said, that is a reflection of our poor housing stock design and poor insulation.

The Select Committee on the Environment published a report last November entitled, "Energy efficiency in buildings". The Chairman of the Select Committee who, with me, is a co-sponsor of the Bill, sadly cannot be present today. However, the Select Committee stated that it was

> "deeply disappointed that such little progress had been made in implementing energy efficiency since the Energy Committee's Report on the subject in 1991."

That might be less than a beta-plus for my hon. Friend the Minister. The report recommended that emission reduction targets should be made for the year 2000 and beyond. It also recommended that the Government should urgently adopt some recommendations of the Energy Saving Trust. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred to that trust, which is chaired by a well-known former Conservative Minister.

The Select Committee considered the imposition of VAT on domestic heat and power. It also considered more extensive use of combined heat and power and energy labelling of buildings. The latter point relates to the Bill. The Select Committee also recommended increased use of the home energy efficiency scheme, better involvement in building regulations and a public sector campaign. All those recommendations tie in with the Bill. This Bill supports the Committee's recommendations and, indeed, the home energy efficiency scheme. Hon. Members will recall that in the Finance Bill, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor doubled the amount for the home energy efficiency scheme.

We are going slowly—sometimes painfully slowly—down the right road. The measure proposed by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed will be valuable to the country. The long-term benefits will be felt by every individual. This uncontroversial measure pushes society, the country and individuals in the right direction. It should be part of a wider energy strategy—once again, I tie this in with the Government's announcement last week—and a change in our culture and the way we look at energy efficiency.

For more than 20 years, we have had the Save It campaign. We all remember the little stickers by every light switch and tap which said "Save It". Frankly, that campaign has not had a dramatic effect on the use of energy. I support the campaign and its principles, and I support the principles of the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to know that I often disagree with him, but on this occasion I whole-heartedly support him. I support the principles of the Bill and I commend the Bill to the House.

10.50 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate on what I think is an interesting and useful Bill, although I shall raise some questions about it. I join those hon. Members who have spoken in congratulating the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on winning this particular raffle and having this opportunity. It is a pleasure to follow the powerful speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) and for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). They are both very knowledgeable on this subject and made outstanding contributions.

I believe in giving credit where credit is due. The Bill is an interesting and timely piece of legislation. Knowing the pressure that is on right hon. and hon. Members to sponsor legislation when they come high in the ballot, it is a credit to the right hon. Gentleman that he has made this choice.

I hope that he will not take this as too much of a backhanded compliment, but it is pleasant and refreshing to have such a serious contribution on this issue from the Liberal Democrats, rather than the empty sloganising on value added tax on fuel, which many of us endured until the recent announcement of the Chancellor's package. It is good to see that contribution, and I do not want to sound churlish in failing to welcome it.

Speaking of churlishness, I was surprised to see the article in *The Daily Telegraph* on 29 January by Mr. Jonathon Porritt, which has already been mentioned. The general tone of that article was grudging, especially his suggestion that, despite widespread support—widespread support for the Bill has been shown in this debate by hon. Members on both sides of the House—some Tory Members

> "will try and talk the Bill out at its Second Reading".

That is a disgraceful suggestion. We have had, and will continue to have, an adult, responsible and interesting debate on the Bill. People like Mr. Porritt would do well to drop that grudging and carping approach to the Government. In many ways, the Government are leading the arguments on energy saving and energy efficiency. Undoubtedly, we will hear from the Minister that the Government welcome with open arms ideas and suggestions from all parties in the House on this important subject.

The whole issue of the Rio summit has rightly been raised in the speeches we have heard so far. Undoubtedly, we are all in favour of energy conservation and energy efficiency. The central question at the heart of this debate and similar debates is: which is the best route to achieve that object? I have some questions about the Bill which may well lead to discussion and possibly amendments being tabled in Committee—I hope that the Bill will reach Committee.

In fairness to the right hon. Gentleman, he foreshadowed that there would be some interesting and lively debates in Committee on certain aspects of the Bill, and made it clear that he was open to suggestions for amendments to the Bill, whether from the Government or, indeed, Back-Bench Members.

The other great question is what can be achieved in this area. What is the prize that this Bill or similar legislation is aiming to reach? The Department of the Environment —this may have been mentioned by one of my hon. Friends—estimates that 20 per cent. of the United Kingdom's annual £50 billion spending on energy could be saved in some way by energy efficiency and saving.

We have already heard about the Government's target of a 15 per cent. saving in public buildings and so on to 1996. As part of that campaign, I assume that we can include the somewhat sinister lighting arrangements in certain corridors in this place, whereby one activates the lights by walking along the corridor. There is something slightly Orwellian about it, but if it saves energy, so be it.

There has been criticism and an attempt to mark out of 10 or 20 the Government's performance on their efforts to, as it were, clean up their own buildings. We know that, as part of the "Making a Corporate Commitment" campaign, they have made a commitment to saving energy in Government Departments and the like. In a written answer last June, we saw the progress, if that is not too ambitious a word, that individual Departments have made in this field.

Overall, Government Departments have invested a total of more than £9 million on energy efficiency, although, to quote the words of the Library briefing on this subject,

> "progress towards the 15 per cent. reduction appears to have been at best slight".

The figure of 0·2 per cent. has been mentioned. That is disappointing, and I dare say that no one will be more disappointed than my hon. Friend the Minister. But at least we are moving in the right direction, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby said. We simply need to pick up speed. I do not know whether it is a question of a beta-minus or a gamma-plus, or simply a matter of "Stay behind and see me later". I do not want to be drawn into that sub-debate on which we seem to have embarked.

It is important for the Government to set an example. I am sure that they will redouble their efforts to reach that target. We all know, because we are so aware of it these days, the effect of CO_2 emissions on global warming, and so on. The Government have made a commitment to cutting those emissions by 10 million tonnes per annum by the year 2000. We also know that one quarter of those undesirable emissions come from domestic buildings. Therefore, a reduction in those emissions is a large part of the prize for which we are aiming. Other benefits will be a better environment generally and, indeed, a more competitive British industry.

I make a plea—this has already been referred to in the debate—for those in our community who are most likely, all other things being equal, to benefit from energy-efficiency measures. In my constituency of Eastbourne, some 30 per cent. of the population are over retirement age. It is often precisely those people who live in older, more draughty and more difficult-to-heat homes who need the sort of attention that this Bill and other programmes might produce.

Energy efficiency is important for all of us, but it is dramatically necessary for the retired and the elderly in our community because the sort of savings on the domestic budget that are within their grasp with a bit of help, whether it be advice or money, is staggering and completely dwarfs matters such as VAT on fuel and the like. It may help to review some of the existing schemes for residential and other properties, and indeed the schemes for industry and commerce.

One of the questions to which I will return is whether we are in danger of having too many schemes, projects and legal requirements. The Bill rightly raises the central issues again, and that cannot happen too often, but I wonder whether we should be looking to beef up what is there already. I will return to that point, which could be developed in Committee.

We have heard about the climate change programme which was published on 25 January and which set out the Government's plans for reducing the output of carbon dioxide. We have heard also about the Energy Saving Trust. I believe that Mr. Porritt, and those like him, have been unnecessarily grudging about the trust.

The trust was established in November 1992, and it is a joint venture involving the Government, British Gas, the 12 regional electricity companies in England and Wales, Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-electric. Its function is to propose and develop new energy-efficiency programmes, particularly in the domestic sector. It is a bit early, and a bit rich, to be severely critical of a body which was formally set up only in November 1992. These things do take time.

Some of the things at which the trust is looking are financing the reductions of gas consumption in housing, smaller-scale applications of combined heat and power and the provision of grants. That is important for home owners who wish to change their central heating boiler. It is said, rightly, that some of the schemes are small, but when they are added up across the country they will make a significant contribution.

We have heard also about the Energy Efficiency Office's programmes, and how those are being strengthened. We have heard also of the advice and information that the programmes are providing. The Energy Efficiency Office has been significantly beefed up. Its budget for 1994-95 is now more than £100 million—17 times the levels of expenditure on it in 1979-80.

Hon. Members—in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North—have spoken of the long-term importance of the changes in building regulations to ensure that all new properties are as energy efficient and as insulated as we can make them.

I will touch on non-domestic energy-efficiency schemes, although I appreciate that that is not the thrust of the Bill. There is the energy management assistance scheme which, among other things, subsidises consultants' fees for identifying opportunities in this field.

The House has heard about the "Making a Corporate Commitment" campaign. More than 1,600 organisations have already signed up to the campaign which seeks to increase management commitment to energy efficiency in both the private and public sectors. The Government and other public bodies have given their support for that campaign. There are also the 11 regional energy efficiency officers who encourage energy-saving programmes.

On the domestic side, we have touched rightly on the "helping the earth begins at home" campaign. That campaign is trying to increase the awareness of the link between energy use in the home and the threat of global

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

warming. The campaign's broad aim is to make sure that people learn to use energy more efficiently. I have come across one or two examples of that during my research.

Part of the campaign, which was launched by the Secretary of State, was to see that all major retailers contributed what they could to lowering domestic electricity consumption and expense. That was done mainly by selling low-energy light bulbs at half the retail price. I understand that use of low-energy light bulbs saves 85 kg of carbon dioxide annually, and will save £10 on the average fuel bill. I gather that the bulbs are as bright as ordinary light bulbs, but they use only one quarter of the electricity and last eight times longer than ordinary light bulbs.

I come from Yorkshire and, quite unfairly perhaps, we Yorkshiremen are said to be extremely careful with our money. Well, that seems to me to be a good deal. When the debate is over today, and I return to the bosom of the Waterson family, I shall be raising those figures with Mrs. Waterson to ensure that we can make those savings ourselves.

On the same basic subject, it was perhaps little noted at the time that the electricity industry regulator, Professor Littlechild, made a contribution towards encouraging conservation. He proposed that electricity companies spend £100 million by 1998 to promote energy-saving devices, such as energy-efficiency fridges, low-power light bulbs and energy-efficient personal computers. That all adds up to helping the basic thrust of the campaign, the aim of which everyone is agreed on.

The House has also heard about the best practice programme, which is moving in a similar direction, and about home energy labels, which have been promoted by the Energy Efficiency Office, and voluntary appliance labels. Those give consumers a guide to the energy efficiency of refrigerators and similar facilities in the home.

It bears repetition that the central importance in all that is the home energy efficiency scheme, which provides grants for basic energy-efficiency measures. It was important, and rightly welcomed, that the Chancellor almost doubled the provision for the scheme in the Budget. The scheme was extended not only to pensioners but to those who are receiving disability living allowance. It is reckoned that the extra £35 million a year will provide grants to about 200,000 households a year. That would bring the total number of households receiving grants to almost 500,000 throughout the country.

I will return to the theme that I hope will wash over into Committee. That is my concern that there is a danger of dissipating legislative energy and the enthusiasm of people who are involved in the field in too many different projects and schemes. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed conceded in his speech that there was a risk of diverting resources into a less than fruitful direction.

I must ask whether local councils are the best vehicle through which the process can be pushed forward. Is there a problem, particularly with the private housing stock, that council inspectors will be seen as busybodies? There was a lot of feeling in my constituency when the local council started its survey of private housing stock. People felt that the inspectors were demanding access to private homes and there was some confusion over the precise powers that they enjoyed. One would not like to see such a situation developing into a tabloid story if the Bill were to end up on the statute book.

An important way of encouraging energy efficiency is a subtle combination of the role of the market, publicity and information and exhortation. A combination of those three subjects in a triangle could make people see that it is in their own interests to do what they can to save energy. I will mention two aspects of what I call the market forces approach. In November last year, the Secretary of State for the Environment urged all companies to consider the total impact of what they did on the environment. He called for the publication of energy efficiency targets and their inclusion in companies' annual reports.

Environmental reporting is becoming much more the norm for large and even medium-sized public companies. It is important that the matter is taken seriously by management, is monitored and reported on the annual report, and that it leads to constructive debate by the shareholders of the company at its annual meeting. That is a major contribution.

Another aspect of the market forces argument is the proposal, again made by the Department of the Environment, that lending institutions should be encouraged to play a part in encouraging energy efficiency by providing home energy ratings when properties change hands. As I understand it, when one went to buy a new property, it would have with it, apart from the other warranties and descriptions, a rating for how energy efficient it was. It was also proposed that the lending institutions should provide so-called "green loans" to encourage householders to invest in energy-efficiency measures. That strikes me as potentially a powerful way of reaching the agreed goal in energy conservation.

If the extent to which people's properties are energy efficient affects their pocket, energy-efficiency measures will be taken up. That could work in the same way as insurers, particularly from some parts of central London, are willing to give significant discounts on premiums if householders can demonstrate that they have taken significant precautions against break-ins and burglaries. That is something which we should encourage. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will dwell on that matter in his speech.

Another major question—I appreciate that we cannot go into it in detail today—is how much the proposals will cost. The Bill is a little coy, perhaps not unreasonably, about the cost implications. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed touched on the estimates, which I have also seen, provided by at least a couple of local authorities, of the start-up and continuing costs of the legislation. I must say in all honesty to the right hon. Gentleman that I am sceptical about some of the calculations. That matter can also be examined in more detail in Committee.

I am worried not only about the cost but about the potential extra bureaucracy involved. We have quite enough local and central Government officials as it is. We should look again at that aspect, especially because, as I said earlier, the legislation might involve surveying private housing stocks, often substantial stocks, across the country in every local government area.

In short, I am not yet fully convinced that the Bill is the answer. I am convinced that it is a useful contribution to the broader debate and that it deserves to go into Committee and be discussed in more detail. I still have reservations about whether it would not be a better use of resources and time to beef up existing schemes, of which there is already a range in operation. However, the Bill deserves a fair wind, at least for the moment. Again, I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on winning this particular lottery.

11.13 am

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on not only winning the lottery but presenting the Bill. I am delighted that he chose to put his luck to the production of this Bill rather than to other forms of betting that might have been more directly financial advantageous to him.

In an earlier exchange, it was suggested that the subject of energy conservation was a little boring. Having listened to the speeches so far this morning, "boring" is not the adjective that comes to mind. The debate has been extremely well informed and interesting. Extremely worthwhile contributions have been made by all hon. Members that have spoken. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) for his interesting excursion into the various schemes that are available to encourage energy efficiency, and for the tribute that he paid to the work of the Department of the Environment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) said that he would give the Government a B-plus for energy conservation on a school report. I would give the Government an A-minus.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: A great deal will depend on what our hon. Friend the Minister has to say in his speech. It is possible that one of us may have the chance to intervene to give the Government alpha-plus or whatever.

Mr. Thomason: I would have put a comment on the school report saying, "Potentially scholarship material, but needs to pay just a little more attention to get there." My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North has made the point precisely. That attention may well be given during the Minister's remarks.

I welcome the Bill. I shall support it, but only as a starting point. It raises issues which require further consideration. I am not yet satisfied that it is precisely correct in its drafting and approach. But we need to have the discussion; we need to have initiatives taken. Therefore, the Bill is to be welcomed as a move in that direction.

Let us set the Bill in its context. The Government were active at the Rio summit in encouraging the reduction of emissions into the atmosphere internationally; this is clearly an international problem. We cannot simply deal with it nationally. We must encourage Governments in other countries to take action, too. We must be seen to do our part.

I am glad that the Government have set targets for CO_2 emissions up to the year 2000. However, I hope that before long they will be prepared to extend their targets beyond the year 2000. It seems to me that we should not simply create the barrier of that year and wait until we are almost at that point before we start to look beyond. In the initiatives proposed in the Bill we are perhaps setting the ground for the Government realistically to consider the opportunities for establishing additional targets after the year 2000.

Fuel prices have been falling for the domestic consumer in Britain in the past two years as a direct result of the initiatives of privatisation in the gas and electricity industries. Against that background, notwithstanding the imposition of VAT on gas and electricity, there is a danger that the need for energy conservation is not borne in mind by the general public. They see their bills drop year by year, but if we are to encourage people to be conscious of the need for energy efficiency, we almost need to see fuel prices rising.

It is a strange and awkward argument. Of course, we do not want members of the public—our constituents—to have to pay more for fuel. Yet we want to encourage energy efficiency. The best way of doing that is to put up prices. So, starting from the awkward position of seeking to encourage energy efficiency but not wanting to put up prices, we have to consider other ways of drawing to the attention of the public the importance of reducing their liability.

The Bill goes a long way to creating the publicity which makes people energy conscious. It is a limited measure. My first criticism of it is that it deals only with domestic buildings. Domestic buildings are an important part of energy usage. Some 30 per cent. of the final United Kingdom demand goes into domestic buildings. It has been suggested that as much as 46 per cent. of energy used for space heating methods and 15 per cent. of energy used for water heating could be saved by energy conservation measures. This is important, but so is the commercial and public sector which—through its buildings rather than industrial usage—consumes about 13 per cent. of total energy used.

Those two sectors represent 43 per cent. of United Kingdom energy demand. We should deal with the 13 per cent. used in commercial and public buildings, as well as the percentage used in the important domestic sector. The two sectors also account for about 50 per cent. of United Kingdom carbon dioxide emissions, which is why we need to establish those savings.

The average household now uses the same amount of energy as it did in 1970. Higher heating and lighting standards are being attained, but building regulations have also improved. New households are using two thirds of the space heating required in pre-1976 homes. The achievements have been enormous, but we have a long way to go.

Other hon. Members have referred to improvements in the building regulations and to the fact that further action can be taken in that sphere. In principle, I endorse those improvements—on which the Government are consulting —but I must add the proviso that there is a danger that we may be using building regulations as the principal weapon to encourage energy efficiency and forgetting the importance of existing buildings.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: I support the improvements in building regulations and I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that it is not a question of more bureaucratic control, but of getting the message across about energy-conscious building design and improved design quality. Those are more important than increasing the number of regulations, which can often be misinterpreted.

Mr. Thomason: My hon. Friend is right, but there is a danger that the proposed building regulations will be over-regulatory and that we will create homes from which so little energy will be lost that other difficulties may arise, as there will also be very little fresh air. We need to encourage greater awareness of energy efficiency in building design, but the general public must be aware of the advances in energy efficiency for existing buildings, because that is where the maximum savings can be achieved.

The pay-back from even the simplest energy-efficiency scheme is enormous. People will get their capital back in a few years. Investing in energy-saving schemes is a good strategy. People who can afford to do so should introduce such schemes—even modest schemes—if they have not already done so. I understand the difficulties for people on low incomes, who do not have capital available to finance energy-saving schemes even though they would pay lower service costs for heating and lighting as a result.

I have several reservations about the Bill. Local government can produce schemes, but one cannot, and should not, force people to introduce energy-efficiency schemes. The Bill fails to deal with that problem and it must be considered carefully. The proposed local authority plan should be directed towards encouraging the public to invest voluntarily in energy efficiency rather than towards bureaucratic mechanisms. I am worried that there is too much emphasis on bureaucracy and structure and not enough on the end product of persuading people to invest in such schemes.

I think that I am likely to be the only member of the Select Committee on the Environment to speak in this debate, as I do not see any of my colleagues in the Chamber. Perhaps I should therefore say a few words about the report that the Committee produced on 3 November 1993. It is a considerable tome—three very large volumes —and the Committee took a great deal of time hearing the evidence and assessing the conclusions produced in volume I.

The report is important because it directly bears on the thinking behind the Bill. Our inquiry revealed the multiple benefits—environmental, social and economic—of a comprehensive and adequately funded energy improvement programme. Examples include the benefits of reducing consumers' energy costs, which is such a vital selling point for investment; attacking fuel poverty and ill health by dealing with the problems of people on lower incomes and helping them to protect their homes adequately from cold and damp; reducing total energy consumption and the adverse effects of energy production, conversion and consumption, thus alleviating climate change, air pollution, acid rain and waste disposal; and reducing the costs of importing fuels and making United Kingdom companies more competitive. We must not forget the latter, as it is not often mentioned in debates on energy efficiency.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): The need to retain the competitiveness of United Kingdom companies is important. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Liberal Democrats' carbon tax would impose huge additional costs on industry and would have the wrong effect?

Mr. Thomason: I confirm that that is the case. It is extraordinary that the Liberal Democrats have proposed a measure that would directly attack British industry at a time when it is critical that it should maximise its competitive advantage. British industry now has a chance to compete with every country in the world on both quality and cost and it would be disastrous if that advantage were thrown away because of the introduction of a carbon tax, which would be a burden on industry as my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I had better not let that remark go without a response, or the hon. Member might be persuaded that there is no response. He must know that the argument for the carbon tax is that it would bite equally throughout the European Community, but—more importantly—the industrial and commercial sectors, which make up 18 per cent. of users, would also have to pay tax on fuel use. The Government have sought only to charge the domestic user.

Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the fact that the Conservative party and its policies might be more popular if the Government had introduced a carbon tax on all users, so that everyone paid equally, rather than imposing value added tax on domestic fuel use?

Mr. Thomason: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman's proposals, by adversely affecting the competitiveness of British industry, would ensure that many British workers would not have an income to pay the fuel tax. He would create unemployment by sapping the vitality of British industry's competitiveness.

I find the argument that a carbon tax must be introduced on a European basis fascinating. Apparently, the Liberal Democrats are not seeking to impose a carbon tax in the United Kingdom unless it is also introduced throughout Europe. It must therefore be seen as an example of their intention to give European institutions decision-making powers over this country.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Does my hon. Friend agree that, even if a carbon tax were applied throughout Europe, it would make European industry much less competitive compared to Asia and other markets, so it would have the same disastrous effect as if it were applied only in this country?

Mr. Thomason: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and makes a powerful point.

The Select Committee made the further point that energy efficiency generates jobs and achieves net improvements in the balance of trade, which is why it should always be supported, with reasonable provisos. The Committee concluded, however, that if those multiple benefits are to be achieved, it is essential that a package of measures be developed and co-ordinated between several Government Departments and the other key players in the field, of which local government is one. The Bill deals with that matter.

Central Government are taking action to make greater energy savings in their buildings and other areas of responsibility. It is essential that those initiatives be built upon and that those Departments that appear a little reluctant to take on the challenge be encouraged to follow the example of the best Departments.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman must not mislead the House. The Government had a five-year programme for reducing energy use in their buildings. After two and a half years, energy use had gone up, not down. If that is progress, I am a Dutchman.

Mr. Thomason: I shall not comment on the international aspects of members of the Liberal party, but it is clear that the Government are bringing their energy use under control, and that must be welcomed.

Organisations such as the Energy Saving Trust, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne referred earlier, the energy utilities, regulators and consumers must all be involved in that exercise. I pay tribute to the energy generators and distributors because they are participating in an exercise that may seem contrary to their commercial interests. They are participating in schemes that will lead to a more efficient use of energy, and must be congratulated on that.

The role of local authorities is at the heart of the Bill. The potential for cost savings within local government is considerable, as its total energy bill was estimated at £800 million in 1989. Even a small percentage saving would therefore have a knock-on effect on reducing carbon emissions. The contribution to reducing greenhouse gases is significant, as local government activities contribute some 10 per cent. of United Kingdom emissions. Public buildings alone contribute some 4 million tonnes of carbon emissions a year.

The local authority associations have set targets to reduce local authority energy consumption in their non-domestic buildings by 15 per cent. over the five years ending on 31 March 1996. They are to be congratulated on that important initiative, but the pledge is limited to public buildings and does not apply to local authority housing stock. Within the means available, I hope that local government will pay greater attention to the potential for reducing energy loss from their housing stock.

Mr. Brandreth: My hon. Friend mentioned the distinction between people's homes and Government buildings, whether owned by local government or central Government. Better results will be achieved with a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach. People see that they can save money in their own homes or businesses. The problem with central Government and local government is that there is no sense of ownership and people do not recognise the fact that they are spending taxpayers' money. They feel that the problem is remote, which is why we have not seen the impact that we should have seen in reducing energy use in central Government and local government. I am concerned that the Bill will result in audit and exhortation, without real action.

Mr. Thomason: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Clearly, there is an ownership problem in the public sector, which is one reason why privatisation has been such a success in so many industries. The savings that can be made, with a direct impact on business, can then be appreciated by all concerned in that business. In the public sector, employees do not perceive the problems to be theirs and are not personally involved in the operation of the business.

Mr. Milligan: Further to the powerful point made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), who is responsible for the heating bill of the House of Commons? We have often noticed how over-heated our offices are. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) sits on a Committee that could have some influence in that matter. Should we not put our house in order before we criticise others?

Mr. Thomason: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. Many of us have complained about the heat in the Corridors.

Mr. Dafis: I am a little worried that the perception is being projected that this is a top-down process. There is a mandatory requirement for local authorities to act in a certain way, but the Bill provides for a great deal of consultation locally. One of the great advantages is that that will involve people in understanding the importance of energy efficiency for everyone. It will be part of the process of creating a new culture and attitude to energy efficiency, referred to by an hon. Member earlier as the culture of thrift and good husbandry. It is part of the consequence of a green economy.

Mr. Thomason: The hon. Gentleman is right if the Bill is successful. Although I support the Bill, I am worried that there may be too much emphasis on bureaucracy and not enough on encouragement. I hope that the Bill will lead to the cultural change to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I want to be convinced of that, but I am not sure whether the Bill is phrased in the correct manner to maximise that point.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Before we move too far from the subject of the heat in this building, may I tell my hon. Friend that my wife came into my office only the day before yesterday and was amazed at the heat. She made a strong energy efficiency speech to me on the spot, which I shall never forget. My hon. Friend's point relates to the one that I made about the relationship between Departments. We need to open up the matter, not in a bureaucratic way but in the manner suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), by improving communication and awareness.

Mr. Thomason: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am impressed by the role of Members' spouses. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said that he was going to rush home to talk to his spouse about new lighting provisions in the Waterson household and now my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North tells us that his spouse has made representations to him about the heating in this building. Communication obviously exists between Members and their spouses on energy efficiency. Let us hope that it is replicated in the public at large as a result of the Bill.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On the issue of energy efficiency in this building, I sit on the Accommodation and Works Committee and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) sits on the House of Commons Commission. The Committee has made provision in the budget for work on the building to improve energy efficiency so that we do not have over-heated offices and waste energy. When people outside have a go at us about our capital expenditure programmes, we can tell tham that in the long term we shall have a sounder, greener economy, which I hope hon. Members and their spouses will welcome.

Mr. Thomason: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman refers to those improvements. We look forward to seeing their implementation at an early date, within, I trust, fair and reasonable budgetary provisions, rather than the inflated figures that we have heard mentioned for improvements in this building.

Mr. Milligan: My hon. Friend mentioned inflated estimates. Does he share my shock at another Committee's proposal to spend £15 million on refurbishing kitchens in the House? Is not saving energy and using the available money to improve energy efficiency in this place a far greater priority than spending money on the boondoggle of improving the kitchens?

Mr. Thomason: That was my point, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I appreciate that we may be tempting you to correct us if we discuss improvements to the House other than those relating to energy efficiency.

The Department of the Environment has made supplementary credit approvals of up to £3 million in 1993-94 for energy investment in English local authorities' general administrative buildings. It is another example of the Department's awareness of the need to take action, which I hope will be encouraged.

Local authorities have the potential to improve energy efficiency standards and, therefore, the affordable warmth of their housing stock as well as of their public buildings and to join combined heat and power or district heating schemes. The Bill should, if not directly at least by implication, cover such issues. Local authorities are already taking action that is germane to their ability to implement their plans, as envisaged in the Bill.

The Green House demonstration programme was introduced by the Department of the Environment in 1991-92. Its aim was to establish a network of replicable projects throughout England to show the scope for securing energy-efficiency improvements in council housing. The scheme was applauded by many witnesses at the Select Committee's inquiry which described it as

> "potentially one of the most effective measures ever introduced by the Government directly for local authorities."

The Select Committee was told that schemes funded through the Green House programme have achieved energy savings of 40 per cent., with 50 per cent. reductions in CO_2 emissions; but it was also told that the surface of the problem had barely been scratched. In its evidence, the Department of the Environment said that £5 million was being allocated to schemes to be undertaken in 1993-94, but this is to be the final year of the programme.

The Department expects local authorities to implement the good practice lessons of the programme through their housing investment programmes, but I urge the Minister to consider carefully the success of the green house programme and the possibility of extending it if resources allow; the Select Committee was encouraged by the results. It was, however, concerned that the achievements and good practice should not be lost. It hopes that the Department of the Environment will ensure that local authorities are given sufficient motivation to replicate the green house concept through the targeted use of capital receipts, credit approvals and changes to leasing regulations for schemes that meet similar criteria. I shall go into more detail about that later.

What more might local authorities do and what could they do under the Bill's proposals? Local authorities could improve their contribution to energy-efficiency programmes in a number of ways. The Select Committee recommended that for local authorities with low levels of capital receipts the Government should grant further credit approvals for measures meeting similar criteria to those used for the Green House programme's projects. That would encourage a number of local authorities to embark on schemes compatible with the Bill's proposals, which they might feel unable to do at the moment and which they are not considering seriously.

Furthermore, the Government could change the conditions of operational leasing so that local authorities could invest in more energy-efficient forms of heating, as they should. The Committee found it nonsensical that the Department of the Environment was encouraging local——

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): Why should the Government make credit approvals rather than make grants available? I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that these days many local authorities are struggling to find resources, so why should not the Government give them grants rather than credit approvals?

Mr. Thomason: Credit approvals are often more effective. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the revenue implications for raising the capital may not be substantial; it is the permission to raise capital which is most important for many councils. That is why I believe that credit approvals are an excellent way to encourage but not force local authorities to take a particular course of action.

Grants are not always sufficiently finely tuned. They may distort the market and may not be directed in the most cost-effective manner, whereas, if the local authority takes charge of the scheme through credit approvals that it can shape to meet particular schemes based on the requirements of its neighbourhood, the money may be used more cost effectively.

I was saying that the Select Committee thought that it did not make sense for the Department of the Environment to encourage local authorities to install inefficient forms of heating merely because they were moveable assets with a residual value—for example, storage heaters as opposed to gas, central or district heating or insulation.

As I said earlier, the present arrangements mean that the operational leasing of moveable units of heating is easier for local government to finance. The restrictions apply to capital investment on static systems and it would, therefore, be appropriate for the Department of the Environment to allow local government to lease static systems such as boilers. That does not happen at the moment. If operational leasing could be extended to fixed assets of an energy-efficient nature it would assist local government to put substantially more money into energy-efficiency schemes compatible with the plans produced under the Bill.

More local authorities should incorporate energy efficiency into their other programmes such as city challenge. As has been said, many companies now produce green annexes to their annual report and assess their contribution to the environment as part of their financial statement. We must ensure that consideration of the importance of energy efficiency runs through central and local government's policies and thinking. The issue should be taken into account in projects such as city challenge.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: Does not the hon. Gentleman realise that although we would welcome the involvement of the city challenge initiative in energy savings, very few local authorities win under that scheme? In other words, a number of authorities compete every year, but resources are limited.

Mr. Thomason: Some authorities may not win, but some do win. My argument is that they ought to incorporate energy efficiency in their bids. They ought to think in terms of energy efficiency and incorporate that in city challenge. There is insufficient evidence that that lesson has been learnt. A steer from Ministers to encourage local authorities, when putting in city challenge bids, to take energy efficiency into account would be welcome.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I fear that the hon. Gentleman is doing less than justice to some of the excellent local authorities and their work on city challenge. I direct his attention to the city of Leicester, where the city challenge work has a full component of energy efficiency work.

Mr. Thomason: I believe that the words that I used were "if more local authorities incorporated energy efficiency into their schemes", and that is my argument. Although there are good examples—the hon. Gentleman has referred to Leicester in that context—several authorities are not considering energy-efficiency in their bids. We want them all to consider energy efficiency.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: That is quite important, because there is the issue of emphasis in local authorities. Earlier, I mentioned the fact that Norwich was one of the cities that took a lead under the energy action scheme. The key is the word "action". Now we have the Norfolk Energy Forum, which I praised earlier, but I think that my hon. Friend is saying that we want action, not discussion. I emphasise that perhaps we ought to go back to calling organisations "energy action" rather than energy forums.

Mr. Thomason: That is absolutely right. We need to ensure that energy efficiency is in people's thoughts.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) referred to Leicester city council. I was saying that more local authorities need to take energy-efficiency measures into account. Let me give him another example of a local authority that takes energy efficiency into account, to emphasise that the debate is not of a party political nature. When the Select Committee visited Newcastle, it found that insulation work had been carried out by Neighbourhood Energy Action, the city council and an organisation called Keeping Newcastle Warm, using city challenge funds. That is another example of work that is being done through city challenge. However, we need more of that; energy efficiency should be taken into account all the time. In Newcastle, people demonstrated that there is the potential to move beyond the basic draught-proofing, loft insultation and energy advice measures of the home energy efficiency scheme.

In Glasgow, the Select Committee found that the city council and Heatwise Glasgow were working towards more effective and comprehensive energy improvement schemes, although not using city challenge money.

The Select Committee would like more local authorities —I emphasise more—to introduce home energy labels for their housing stock. It is notoriously difficult to encourage tenants and landlords to invest in energy efficiency, but the advantage is that higher rents can be offset against lower energy bills. Labelling would also allow local authorities to set targets gradually to improve their housing stock.

It would also be helpful if more local authorities took up the opportunities offered by contract energy management, where specialist energy management companies seek out and finance oportunities in host organisations and receive a proportion of the fuel bill savings generated. Contract energy management offers special benefits to public sector organisations, which have limited resources to invest in capital programmes.

That brings me back to the argument about the problems of capital investment by local authorities that was made by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham). Here is an example where, without putting out capital investment, local authorities can be involved in achieving energy efficiency savings that have direct financial benefit to them, by partnership with the private sector.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise, however, that many local authorities, such as Coventry, are confronted by an extensive capital investment programme, whether it is through council housing schemes or bringing in consultants. There is a big capital cost, but in the longer term, obviously, they can recoup that. Does he also recognise that authorities such as Coventry city council have been involved in energy-saving schemes for many years, but that they have a limit when one considers large council housing stocks?

Mr. Thomason: I am fascinated to see the rush of Opposition Members to defend local government, when I have not criticised local government. I have said that more local authorities should promote energy efficiency and that better practice should be encouraged. Of course, there are good schemes to which I have referred, and to which the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury referred, which have been implemented by local government. I suggest that we need more of those schemes. We need the Government to play a part in encouraging local government to take up those schemes. Some of the schemes are not sufficiently widely known and not appreciated, and the financial savings that can be generated are not widely understood.

The importance of the debate and the Bill lies not only in the scheme that it advocates, but in the facts that, for three or four hours, the House is debating energy efficency; we are making ourselves and, through ourselves, more people in the country, aware of the importance of energy efficiency; and we are driving towards the objectives that everyone who has contributed to the debate so far agrees should be aimed at.

Mr. Simon Hughes: May I reinforce the point that the hon. Gentleman has just made? My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) came second in the ballot for private Members' Bills. Does not the fact that he chose this subject for his Bill show the importance that we attach to energy conservation? It says that we Back Benchers regard this as one of the most important things that we can do something about. I hope that that message will get across.

Mr. Thomason: I am sure the hon. Gentleman makes an important point.

The difficulty with contract energy management schemes and some other parts of the European Community's Save directive is the perceptual barrier that is to be overcome by local authorities. Many authorities are already undertaking conservation work, but there is a perception in local government that schemes take away in-house decision making. We need to make it clear to

[Mr. Thomason]

local government that, by contracting out to an operator who will achieve savings and make recommendations that can be introduced at no extra cost, it is not giving away a power, but, on the contrary, showing that it can provide a better service to people who use its buildings or live in its houses. The best practices of local government should be replicated throughout.

I hope that the Government will try to encourage energy management throughout the public sector and, in particular, will acknowledge the work of contract energy management.

If more local authorities were allowed to hold minority interests in contract energy management companies, further progress might be made. Partnership between local government and the private sector in combined heat and power projects is another, perhaps more important, area where the best needs to be replicated more universally.

It would be helpful if more local authorities worked in partnership with specialised energy organisations, such as the Select Committee witnessed between Glasgow city council and Heatwise Glasgow, as a result of which tremendous energy improvements and savings have been achieved in the city's local authority housing stock.

Those are some of the things that can be done in the context of the Bill's proposals and some of the things that are already being done. Let me now deal with the terms of the Bill.

The Bill encourages schemes that should have a good pay-back period. Cavity wall insultation, which costs perhaps £300 to £500 to install in an average property, is expensive. Only 22 per cent. of the existing housing stock has it, yet that investment will be paid back in between four and seven years. The return is not brilliant, but it is satisfactory and people should be made aware of its advantages.

Double glazing is relatively even more expensive because its pay-back period is between 10 and 20 years. It is marginal whether it is cost effective, yet cavity wall insulation has been installed in only 22 per cent. of the housing stock, but double glazing has been installed in 51 per cent. The reason for that, I suspect, is that people see other advantages for double glazing: it improves the appearance of the property or adds convenience.

We need to increase the perception of other forms of insulation such as cavity walling to make people conscious of the savings that are available and of the advantages. The fitting of double glazing should be encouraged—I am not complacent about only 51 per cent. of properties having it —but there is a lesson to be learned from the difference in the installation figures for those two forms of energy installation.

Another area that is early in development in this country, has a low take-up and yet is extremely effective is condensing boilers. The pay back can be as little as two to four years, yet few people are fitting them. I hope that the plans envisaged in the Bill will lead to greater use of condensing boilers.

One would think that draught proofing was the simplest form of energy efficiency. It cuts, on average, 23 per cent. of heat loss. It can have a short pay-back period; the money invested can be returned in as little as two years—or 10 years if more expensive schemes are used. Draught proofing is easy to install, but is fitted in only 35 per cent. of the housing stock. Virtually two thirds of the housing stock does not have the most elementary form of energy-efficient device, which should be encouraged by virtue of the Bill

Water tank insulation also has a quick pay-back period, but, in contrast to draught proofing, it is fitted in 94 per cent. of properties. People are aware of the need to insulate hot water tanks, but do not yet appear to be aware of the importance of excluding draughts from their properties. Is it more comfortable to sit in a house in which the hot water cylinder does not have a jacket than it is to sit in one with a gale blowing through every window? The public have not perceived the importance of draught proofing. I trust that action will be taken as a result of the Bill.

The legislation does not deal with manufacturers—perhaps that subject falls outside the Bill's direct purpose. However, it should be seen as fundamentally important to the future of energy-saving schemes. Too many energy-inefficient products are sold. Too many old appliances are not being replaced by energy-efficiency equipment. We must develop public awareness so that new fridges, dishwashers and washing machines are far more energy efficient. When the public buy such a product, they must realise the importance of finding out its energy efficiency. If they do so, they will get better value for money. That subject is not likely to be covered by the Bill, but I wish it were.

I have some worries about the Bill, the first of which involves regulation and over-regulation. Many Conservative Members are worried that more regulations are being introduced, and there is more and more control of the individual. We welcome the Government's initiative in introducing a deregulation measure. That is good news, and we do not want another set of proposals to create more regulations for the individual. It is important, therefore, that the scheme is seen to be voluntary, and as a means to encourage energy-efficient schemes, not a licence for local government or anyone else to dictate to individuals. It must not give local government the authority to impinge on individuals' freedom.

Clause 2(1)(a) uses the word "investigation". It requires local government to carry out an investigation to decide on the measures required. The word "investigation" puzzles me slightly. In press reports I have seen "survey" used instead of "investigation". That implies that somebody from the local council will knock on the door of every house in the district and look around the property to see how energy efficient it is. I hope that the Bill does not intend to introduce such a policy—I should be worried if it did. If the Bill proceeds into Committee, as I hope it will, I trust that we shall have some clarification on that subject.

Some schemes have been introduced that are cost-effective means of assessing energy-efficiency measures. I think that Derby city council has produced a scheme in which properties are looked at on a type-by-type basis, rather than a property-by-property basis.

Clearly, there is an important cost implication to be considered, as well as the issue of privacy. Therefore, I trust that that point can be cleared up as the Bill progresses. Otherwise, we must ask ourselves what rights the local authority will have to gain access to inspect properties and how it will assess volume of work undertaken on a property-by-property basis. I am sure that that is not intended, but it ought to be clarified.

I am concerned that the Secretary of State is left with the power to set the appropriate percentage saving, which, presumably, it will be necessary for local government to implement. There are cost implications for local authorities in complying with legislation, and that ought to worry us.

Some local authorities may find it easy to meet targets, partly because they have not already made efforts. Other authorities may find it more difficult because they do not have available financial resources. That requires further consideration.

I emphasise the point about successful local authorities because if a council had done effectively nothing about energy efficiency for years, finding savings of 20 per cent. would be relatively easy. However, for an authority that had been efficacious in its energy efficiency work, such as those mentioned earlier, saving another 20 per cent. would be extremely hard. It is necessary to consider the starting point of such savings and to acknowledge the success that has been achieved by many in local government.

Briefly, I shall draw attention to the financing of the Bill, as it obviously has cost implications. I wonder whether all the implications have been thought through fully and I should like to be assured that they have. We have considered the pay-back arrangements and we can see that the individual who installs energy efficiency schemes will, by virtue of a reduction in their fuel bills, get the money back relatively quickly.

Therefore, is there a need to consider recycling money? May we invest a smaller sum in the scheme and see it being reused as savings are achieved by the individual? The individual house owner must see some direct financial benefit, but I am concerned that simply handing out grants or loans may not be the best way in which to use scarce resources.

We need to consider the way in which we address advertising and organisation and the costs of those if the plans are to be introduced. I should like specific provisions made, probably in clause 2(2)(b) or elsewhere in the Bill, to address specifically the method of financing, so that it considers not only what can be and should be saved, but the financial implications of the proposals for the individual householder, the local authority and possibly the Government as well.

We need to consider how we set the targets. I am a little worried about Government setting targets through the structure envisaged in the Bill, which it may not be possible to achieve. It is all well and good setting a target which states that by a certain date, local authority 'X' must achieve a 10 per cent. saving in energy and what that would mean for carbon emissions and so on, but how could we monitor progress and establish the success of the authority in meeting that target? How do we verify the conclusions that the plan seeks to achieve, establish that they have been achieved and assess the ongoing cuts that may be required? The monitoring and inspection arrangements require further consideration.

I should be very concerned if people who had installed insulation or whatever under an energy efficiency scheme then had someone knocking on their door to check that the work had been done. Clearly, we need a policing method for grants to ensure that the money is used for the right purpose, but I am worried about the idea of an energy efficiency police force being created and lurking in corners trying to catch people out. I know that that is not what is envisaged, but let us try to ensure that the Bill dispels any anxiety on that score.

I suppose that another fundamental point is that it is all well and good installing draught-proofing, but if a householder leaves the windows open all the time there will be no saving. We must ensure that best practice extends not just to the installation of energy-efficiency systems but to their use. The points that I have raised do not strike at the root of the Bill, but they are germane to its consideration.

The Bill represents a good and valuable starting point, but it is no more than a starting point. It should encourage partnership between the private sector, central and local government and the public. It should encourage a greater awareness of energy efficiency and a better use of resources. With some amendment and improvement, it could be a very important measure.

12.10 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): On behalf of the Opposition, I warmly welcome the Bill and offer the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) our full support.

The Bill represents a substantial push in the right direction. It sets in place a mechanism for producing an audit of energy efficiency needs area by area around the country. It sets in place a planning mechanism for developing the schedule of work that could be carried out. It sets in place also a proper assessment of priorities. In my constituency, for example, there are blocks of flats constructed 30 or 40 years ago with little insulation where there is a crying need for better insulation and energy efficiency work. The Bill would enable us to have a proper audit, a proper system of planning and a proper assessment of priorities. What it does not do is to enforce the carrying out of energy efficiency work. It lays the foundations that would enable the work to be done and provides a useful impulse to encourage the carrying out of that work.

Why is energy conservation so important in the first place? A number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have touched on some of the reasons. I would identify four very simple reasons why energy conservation is crucial. The first is an environmental reason. We are now beginning to understand the impact that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have on the atmosphere of our planet. The scientific consensus—disagreed with, it would seem, only by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) at times—is that the increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere will in due course lead to catastrophic climate change unless we do something about our production of carbon dioxide. That is why the Government were right to sign up at the Rio summit two years ago to the target of reducing our carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. I would argue that that is why the Government are wrong not to have any targets beyond 2000. It is significant that, in the Sustainability documents published a week or so ago, the Government once again duck the issue of what happens beyond 2000. They say that it may be necessary in due course to set targets. Of course it is necessary to set targets beyond 2000. I believe that the Government have performed an ill service in not doing so before now.

It is worth noting that carbon dioxide emission levels in Britain are currently rising, despite the Government's commitment to restore them to their 1990 level by 2000. We must recognise that reducing carbon dioxide emissions is important. It is worth noting also that Britain contributes some 3 per cent. of the world's carbon dioxide emissions,

[Mr. Chris Smith]

yet has only 1 per cent. of the world's population. We are clearly overproducing carbon dioxide even for the present high levels of global production.

The first and crucial reason why energy conservation is important is that we need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The second is that we need to make people warmer. It is worth noting—it was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed—that currently some 7 million families in Britain cannot afford to pay for the warmth that they need and that 3 million homes are suffering condensation and mould growth.

The family expenditure survey in 1988 showed that the average low-income family spent £8·50 each week on fuel, representing 10 per cent. of total household expenditure. In other families—not the low-income end of the spectrum—a little more money was spent, at £11·30 per week on average, but it represented less than 5 per cent. of total household expenditure. In other words, for families on low incomes, the proportion of the household budget spent on heating their homes is far greater than the proportion of average and above-average income families. Fuel poverty is a reality for millions of people in our country, and the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel bills will make that even worse.

The third reason for ensuring that energy conservation is carried out is that it will save people money across the board. That will be especially important after 1 April this year. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) spoke earlier about VAT on domestic fuel. He said that a levy on everyone's energy bills to encourage energy saving measures was a worthwhile thing.

I have heard VAT on domestic fuel called many things, but using it as a lever to encourage energy efficiency work is, I must say, a poor explanation for imposing it on millions of households throughout the country. Energy-saving measures are important. Energy-saving measures will cut people's heating and electricity bills, but VAT on domestic fuel is not the way to go about ensuring that that happens.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: Does my hon. Friend accept that the imposition of VAT on energy, particularly in more deprived areas where there are older properties, as there are in my constituency in Coventry, is a contradictory policy because the Government have also cut grants to people in inner cities who live in older properties? There are currently major problems with between 17,000 and 20,000 properties in my constituency. Those properties are occupied by the poorest families.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I will refer in a moment to some of the things that the Government are doing in that area.

Most experts believe that the Government's figures are over-optimistic. Even on the Government's own figures, the imposition of VAT on fuel will reduce carbon dioxide emissions in this country by less than 1 per cent. Advancing energy conservation objectives as the reason for the imposition of VAT on fuel is not a particularly sound argument.

The fourth reason why energy conservation is important is that it generates employment. The Bill specifically refers to that point in clause 2(3).

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend now that he has moved on to his fourth point. However, with regard to his third point, does he agree that not only would an efficient energy efficiency programme save people money, but in some cases it would also save lives? We must be aware of the fact that more of our elderly people die in winter compared with summer than in countries such as Sweden which are clearly far colder than Britain. The Swedes have always taken energy efficiency seriously and we never have. The fact that we are top of the winter mortality league should be a cause for shame. If the Bill helps to reduce that, that is another reason to support it.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend has a long history of work in that area and he is absolutely right. With regard to thermal efficiency, our building regulations standards are currently at about the level of standards in Sweden in the 1930s. That says a great deal about the progress that we still have to make. I will refer in a moment to the building regulations issue because it is important that we place some of these points in that context.

The fourth reason why energy conservation is important is that it generates employment. Several studies have been carried out to assess how many jobs would be created if we had a substantial programme of energy efficiency work in this country. They vary in detail, but, as a broad average, they show that for every £20 million expenditure per year on energy efficiency work some 1,000 new jobs could be created. A recent study by the Goodman group in the United States showed that, pound for pound, expenditure on energy conservation work generates about 40 per cent. more employment than expenditure on energy production work or developing new sources of energy generation.

There are a range of reasons why we should be endorsing and working much harder at energy conservation than we are now. Those reasons relate to the environment, to making people warmer and to saving people money. In addition, as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) said, they relate to saving people's lives. They also relate to generating employment.

Many local authorities around the country are already engaged in such programmes. I was pleased that the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) mentioned a number of local authorities which are already engaged in good energy-efficiency work. I noted with a somewhat wry smile that every local authority that he mentioned is Labour controlled, but this is not necessarily a party political matter. Local authorities with all forms of political control have taken up the issue of energy efficiency and have effectively run with the ball.

For example, Leicester city council has filled the cavity walls in nearly 13,000 council homes, achieving cost savings of 50 per cent. due to economies of scale, and it is conducting an energy survey of all of its council housing stock. That demonstrates that some local authorities are already doing some of the work that the Bill will ensure is done by local authorities up and down the country. One of the reasons why I welcome the Bill is that it makes the conducting of such surveys and audits mandatory for local authorities, rather than simply permissive. A permissive power would not add anything to the existing position—it would simply be a declaratory statement on the statute book saying to local authorities, "We know that some of you are already doing it already and we want to encourage you to do it." The Bill seeks to encourage reluctant local authorities as well as those that are well ahead of the game already.

There are many other examples of local authorities with a good energy conservation record. Glasgow city council has already been mentioned. It has insulated something like 70,000 homes under the Heat Wise programme. Newcastle has worked out a project, together with the European Commission, British Gas, Northern Electric and British Coal, aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions and energy consumption in the city by the year 2000. Nottinghamshire county council has had a programme of energy conservation work in its buildings for 14 years. Mendip district council is implementing a three-stage plan for the improvement of its stock of 5,500 houses. Many other examples could be given. Many local authorities are already in the vanguard of progress in this respect.

The Government's record stands rather poorly in comparison with that of local government. However, they are doing one or two useful things. In the most recent Budget, the Chancellor announced an increase in funding fo the home energy efficiency scheme from £35 million to £77 million per year. That is welcome. Some of that additional money, has been transferred from other energy-efficiency work funded by the Government. It is worth noting that, even with the increase in funding, the scheme is limited in what it can fund in people's homes. It relates mainly to insulation and the lagging of pipes and boilers—it is not used for things such as cavity wall insulation and the installation of new boilers, which are two of the most efficient measures that can be taken in people's homes. Therefore, the scheme is limited.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): My hon. Friend is talking about the home energy efficiency scheme and the increase that was announced recently by the Government, to a great fanfare. Is my hon. Friend aware that it has been projected that, despite the increase in the budget, half the stock will not have been dealt with by 2000 with the current levels of efficiency? The Government have not admitted that, and I have not been able to get an answer from them to my written questions. Does my hon. Friend think that the Government do not know what the target is for completion of the programme? Does not the independent work which has been carried out lead to that conclusion?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend takes the words out of my mouth. I was about to advert that, under the home energy efficiency scheme and even with the additional funding, it will take the best part of two decades to insulate all the low-income households in the country. In other words, people will start to pay higher bills in April, but some will not get help with insulation until some time next century.

Welcome though the increase in the scheme has been, it is a modest measure and we should not allow the Government to get away with telling us that it is the perfect answer to the energy-efficiency needs of the country. The Government have also established the Energy Saving Trust, which is potentially an extremely valuable institution. However, the trust will need more than the £6 million that British Gas has tipped in and the £25 million that the regional electricity companies are saying that they will tip in to have the kind of impact that the scheme could have if it were turned into a viable body. It may improve, of course, as the months and years go by, but it has made something of a slow start. We can but hope that it will pick up rather faster than it has hitherto.

In other aspects, the Government are going backwards. The Government green house programme to assist local authorities to carry out energy-efficiency work in their own buildings was worth £45 million last year. The programme is worth £5 million and, so far as I am aware, it is due to be abandoned completely. At the same time as they are increasing the home energy efficiency scheme, the Government have been cutting the green house programme completely. If one looks at elements within the housing investment programme for energy insulation and efficiency work, there have been cuts year by year in authorisations for improved insulation work.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove said that the Government are putting their own house in order and making sure that their own buildings are becoming more energy efficient. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that they are not doing so. I tabled a parliamentary question a few weeks ago asking for information on energy expenditure, by Department, in the past three years. The answer shows that the Government's expenditure on energy has gone up in each of the past three years. That does not say very much for the Government's reported target of 15 per cent. energy efficiency savings in five years.

If we had a Government who were more serious about energy efficiency, how could we build on the provisions of the Bill and not just use it as a mechanism for planning our national work in the area? How could we do more to improve the energy conservation profile around the country? I would advance just three ideas.

First, we could and should have a proper national programme of energy conservation work in people's homes. We could do it without any cost to the taxpayer if we implemented the proposals that the Opposition made a year ago. They were rejected by the Government, but we are still open to last-minute conversion by the Government if they want to pick up the idea and run with it. The proposals were to carry out work in people's homes free at the point of installation, but funded over a period by a small premium on the unit price of gas and electricity. People would still be better off because they would save substantially on their energy bills. It would make them warmer and mean that we had a major rolling national programme of energy conservation work in people's homes. The idea ought to be taken much more seriously by the Government than it has been hitherto.

Secondly, we need some changes in the regulatory regime. At present, with the slight exception of the introduction of the E factor, which appears to have produced some benefits, the basic system of regulation for electricity and gas in Britain means that there is an inbuilt advantage for the electricity companies and British Gas in selling more of their product. Therefore, they have a disincentive to invest properly in energy efficiency.

There is a whole host of schemes in the United States, for example, where the regulatory regime has decoupled increased sales from profits. That decoupling, by means of a change in regulation, could insert into the system a real incentive for the utilities to encourage energy efficiency, rather than sit back and simply let it happen.

The third area in which we could make considerable progress is in the building regulations. Eight or nine months ago, the Government made some amendments to the building regulations which made a mild improvement,

[Mr. Smith]

most of which resulted from the insertion in the building regulations of double glazing as standard for new properties. However, there is far more that the Government could do on building regulations, especially with regard to the thermal insulation value of walls, roofs and floors of new construction. I urge the Government to look further at how the building regulations could be improved in that respect.

I also urge the Government to pick up the Bill that we shall debate in a few weeks, which would insist on better thermal standards for buildings when they are converted rather than only for new buildings. There is a lot that could be done which is not being done. We could have a decent national programme of energy efficiency work. Changes could be made to the regulatory regimes for gas and electricity. We could have better building regulations. The Government's record on energy use and energy efficiency could be improved.

The Bill makes a good start. That, above all, is what is important about it. It represents a platform on which we can build. It creates a mechanism that will put in place work in local authorities to identify needs, assess priorities and set out what needs doing. Then all that we need is a change of Government to ensure that the work gets done.

12.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The Bill of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has raised the very important issue of energy conservation. It also provides a useful opportunity for advancing energy efficiency in our housing.

It is a constructive Bill, on which there is clearly considerable consensus, demonstrated by the fact that the supporters are drawn from both sides of the House. That consensus has been echoed in the excellent speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason). I am not sure what marks I will get at the end of my speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North. I generally assume that the Government's policies always merit alpha and if there is a shortcoming and the mark is beta-plus, that is because of my failure rather than that of the policies.

The debate has also shown that hon. Members have some concerns about the Bill, which I hope can be considered constructively in Committee and resolved.

As hon. Members have said, the Bill has also provided us with the opportunity to consider energy efficiency. I think that the House knows that the Government attach great importance to energy conservation, energy saving and, most importantly, to the efficient use of energy in our homes and in running businesses.

For many years, we have made it clear that energy efficiency makes sound sense because it saves money, which can be used to develop businesses, improve homes and boost the economy. The energy efficiency campaign has already contributed to significant savings in energy use. When discussing energy efficiency, there is always a temptation—or a danger—to think that nothing has happened until today. That is not the case. Since 1979, the United Kingdom economy has grown by about 25 per cent., but, despite that substantial economic growth, we still use roughly the same amount of energy. That is entirely due to the considerable improvements in the more efficient use of energy. With further cost effective improvements, about 20 per cent. of current energy demand can be cut. That is good news for the economy and very good news for the environment.

Of course, cost effectiveness is not the only reason why we continue to seek to improve energy efficiency—such efficiency also helps to protect the environment by reducing the threat of climate change. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North gave a good dissertation on climate change, which is a consequence of industrialisation and prosperity. The release of carbon from burning fossil fuels for energy is increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere—carbon dioxide is the most significant greenhouse gas and contributes to the enhancement of the natural greenhouse effect. The natural effect is beneficial; the bad news is when it is enhanced and climatic changes result.

As the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said, there is almost unanimity in the House —with the possible exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), whom he mentioned—about the fact that that issue needs to be tackled. Although uncertainties remain, we know enough about the threat of climate change to be satisfied that the problem is real and serious.

Britain will have to take costly measures in order to adapt. That may lead to disruption to our markets in other countries and to our sources of raw materials and other commodities, which may affect our trading position. I do not think that anyone believes that tackling the dangers presented by climate change and taking the necessary precautions will be a nil-cost policy. That is why the international community must take precautionary action, in effect taking out insurance against that risk. So we welcome initiatives that will help to tackle the problem of climate change by encouraging energy efficiency.

We have had a continuing programme of Government-led action and initiatives. In 1990, we produced Britain's first comprehensive survey of all aspects of environmental concern, including global warming. The report, "This Common Inheritance", was a milestone in environmental auditing. It will go down as an excellent example of taking forward the principles of sustainable development. The preface quotes from John Stuart Mill's "Principles of Political Economy":

> "Is there not the Earth itself, its forests and waters, above and below the surface? These are the inheritance of the human race . . . What rights, and under what conditions, a person shall be allowed to exercise over any portion of this common inheritance cannot be left undecided. No function of government is less optional than the regulation of these things, or more completely involved in the idea of a civilised society."

Mr. Chris Smith: I endorse the sentiments of John Stuart Mill, but, if "This Common Inheritance" was such a milestone, when will we see the third—supposedly annual—assessment of progress, which was supposed to have emerged last September and has yet to appear?

Mr. Baldry: "This Common Inheritance" was not only an enormously valuable contribution in its own right, but the start of a process whereby the Government stated, at regular intervals, their actions, achievements and further commitments. The House will recall that both the first and second-year reports set out in a clearly tabulated manner, referring to each of the commitments in the White Paper, a summary of the White Paper commitment, the action taken to date, and the further commitments envisaged.

The programme is advancing constantly. For example, the first year's report shows what the Government did during that time to develop potentially economic renewable energy technologies, new regulations and controls, and the use of the market. The second year's report updates the information in the same fashion, with a summary of the White Paper commitments, the action to date and the commitment to further action.

In due course, a further report will be published because this is an extremely important process. The Government are taking forward their commitments and ensuring that the House and the country understand the action being taken. Equally important, they are ensuring that we know the further targets that they have set.

Clearly, at a time when we have been considering the important strategy of sustainable development, which contains many objectives, it was sensible to ensure that that substantial document was in place before producing the next report on the follow-through from "This Common Inheritance" because they are integral documents. When the hon. Gentleman sees next year's report and annual update of "This Common Inheritance", he will be impressed by the continuing targets that we have set ourselves.

Mr. Smith: I must pick up the Minister on that point, because he spoke about "next year's report". We are still waiting for last year's report. I hope that we do not have to wait for another year.

Mr. Baldry: With respect, the hon. Gentleman was not listening. I made it very clear that, as a consequence of the earth summit in Rio, we published a sustainable development strategy which sets out targets for action in a range of environmental activities. The annual reports—the updates on "This Common Inheritance"—not only outline our achievements, which are substantial, but set out the targets for coming years. It is sensible to ensure that the targets for our sustainable development strategy are clearly set out in the annual updates, but until they were finalised with the international community, they could not be included.

When the hon. Member reads the next annual update, which will be published in the not-too-distant future, he will realise that it sets tough targets incorporating those that followed the sustainable development strategy established at the Rio summit and will also deal with other aspects of environmental protection set out in the original White Paper.

The production of annual updates has established a method of which we can be proud and which has become a model for other countries. At the earth summit in Rio, we encouraged others to follow our lead by making a concerted effort to tackle environmental issues. The framework convention on climate change which was negotiated in Rio commits us to return our emissions of carbon dioxide to 1990 levels by the year 2000. The convention was ratified in December and will come into force in March.

Agenda 21, which was also agreed at Rio, set out an environmental strategy for the 21st century and recommended that Governments produce strategies for sustainable development. The Prime Minister persuaded other Heads of Government to produce strategies by the end of last year and the United Kingdom agreed its strategy in December.

Last week, the Prime Minister launched the United Kingdom's four major strategies which were produced as a follow-up to the earth summit. They are substantial documents, and I hope that hon. Members will have the opportunity to read them. They are a sustainable development strategy, a climate change programme, a biodiversity action plan and a sustainable forestry programme.

The sustainable development strategy builds directly on the 1990 White Paper "This Common Inheritance", but it considers more closely sustainable development, which means economic development in a good environment for our children's sake. Its message for the next 20 years is one of balance. It stresses the need for economic development and the importance of environmental protection. Economic development and environmental protection go together, and energy efficiency has a key role in encouraging sustainability.

The sustainable development strategy includes three new measures: the Government's panel on sustainable development, which is a small, high-level group to give strong and independent advice to the Government; a United Kingdom round table on sustainable development to bring together representatives of the main sectors or groups under the Secretary of State for the Environment; and a citizens environment initiative to carry the message to individuals and local communities.

The House will have a further opportunity to discuss the follow-up to the Rio summit in a debate on Monday. I am sure that many hon. Members here today will be interested in participating in that debate. It is worth noting that Conservative Members have made some excellent speeches, but that, with the exception of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) who speaks for his party, Labour Members have been notable by their almost total absence. We should perhaps recall their absence in the debate on Monday. The climate change programme sets out a detailed programme of measures to meet the United Kingdom's commitments under the convention on climate change, placing the United Kingdom at the forefront of efforts to combat global warming. The document is the product of a far-reaching public participation exercise. The United Kingdom is one of the first countries to publish a detailed programme of measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Sometimes, to hear the Opposition speak, one would gain the impression that Britain was always the last on environmental initiatives. Indeed, on most environmental initiatives Britain is the first. We were the first country in the world to demonstrate under the convention how we will meet the targets for the main greenhouse gases.

Mr. Dafis: It is worth noting that some European countries have far more ambitious targets in relation to reducing CO_2 emissions than Britain. Denmark, I believe, intends to reduce emission levels by 25 per cent. by the end of the century, as does Germany, which intends to reduce emission levels by 30 per cent. by the year 2005.

Mr. Baldry: In environmental protection, we have learnt as the years have gone by that there are two types of targets. There is the type of targets that we set, which we

[Mr. Baldry]

are determined to meet and will meet, and there is the type of aspirational targets that people put in documents, knowing that they have no chance of meeting them, expecting that they will not be in government by the time the year comes when they are supposed to have met the target, but thinking that it looks a jolly good figure to put in a document at some international gathering. The targets that we sign up to, whether they be for water protection, air pollution or combating climate change, are targets which we are determined to meet, and will meet.

Central to our programme on combating climate change are measures to limit CO_2. That is a programme based on partnership with business, the public and the private sectors. It sets out comprehensive measures aimed at achieving savings by 2000 of about 10 million tonnes of carbon—or 6 per cent. of United Kingdom emissions—as well as about 10 per cent. of methane emissions, about 75 per cent. of nitrous oxide emissions and substantial reductions in other gases. The overall effect should be a 5 per cent. reduction in United Kingdom greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2000.

However, the programme looks beyond 2000. There was some suggestion today that the sustainable development strategy in some way finishes at the year 2000. It does not. It sets out some of the longer-term options for action that may need to be considered in the light of emerging scientific evidence and the further development of the convention, so that we develop a sustainable strategy.

We are determined to meet those commitments—commitments to the international community and commitments to our children. Energy efficiency can help us to move towards sustainable development, and energy efficiency is our first priority for limiting CO_2 emissions. Energy efficiency is the fastest and most effective way of meeting our CO_2 targets. Everyone has a part to play in that, as we are all users of energy.

Like the promoters of the Bill, we are keen to encourage energy efficiency in the home. No less than a quarter of all CO_2 emissions in the United Kingdom are from energy used in our homes. That can be reduced by one fifth or even up to a half by taking simple energy efficiency measures. Indeed, nearly half of the savings that we are looking for through the climate change programme are expected to come from reducing energy consumption in the home.

The business and transport sectors are both expected to contribute about a quarter of the savings, and one tenth of the savings are expected to come from the public sector.

We are playing our part in carrying forward the climate change programme. We have substantially increased our spending on energy efficiency. In 1994-95, spending will be increased to more than £100 million—17 times the spending in 1979-80.

We are also providing a strong framework to encourage energy efficiency. The Energy Efficiency Office in my Department carries our energy efficiency policy forward. It promotes cost-effective energy-efficiency measures in the work place and the home, and strengthens environmental protection by reducing energy use.

Our policy has four main prongs: we use publicity to try to ensure that everyone is aware of the importance of energy-efficiency; we provide encouragement and technical advice to enable people to take informed decisions about whether and how to invest in energy-efficiency measures; where necessary, we provide financial incentives to encourage the installation of energy-efficiency measures; and, where appropriate, we promote regulation.

We have a wide range of initiatives to encourage improved energy efficiency in housing, each of which is targeted on a specific group. We provide publicity through our "helping the earth begins at home" campaign, which uses advertising and promotion to make people aware of the link between energy use in the home and the threat of global warming and encourages people to use energy more efficiently.

The campaign has the support of a range of organisations, and it gives straightforward advice to householders on how they can best insulate and heat their homes, on how they might install energy-saving light bulbs and on a range of measures that every householder can take —insulation, draft proofing, heating appliances and controls and simply turning a thermostat down by 1 deg C, which can knock 10 per cent. off heating bills without leading to a noticeable difference in comfort in most rooms.

My hon. Friends commented on heating in the Palace of Westminster. It is clear that we could turn down the thermostat considerably more and make a large contribution to savings on the Palace's heating bill.

Those are all straightforward measures that each householder can take in their own home not only to save money but to make a contribution to the environment. We see our role as ensuring that they get the information on which they can make informed judgments.

The campaign is already having a clear impact. Our energy advice week will run from 12 to 20 February, and I hope that all hon. Members will do what they can in their constituencies to support the campaign, which will concentrate on providing clear and impartial advice on energy efficiency, because we want people to be aware that energy efficiency can cut fuel bills.

We have a comprehensive package of measures to provide encouragement, information and advice to help people to take informed decisions on how to invest in energy efficiency. We help building professionals and housing managers in a number of ways. Our best practice programme provides authoritative advice and information for building professionals and housing managers on improving energy efficiency in housing.

We have produced a range of good practice guides on, for example, energy efficiency in offices and how architects can develop a low-energy office. I mention that, because it was suggested earlier that we should be doing more to encourage architects to design for energy efficiency. We are doing so. The Building Research Establishment and the Energy Efficiency Office have been doing that for a long time.

One reason why we have been able to increase our gross domestic product so substantially without consuming much more energy is because British industry and business have incorporated best practice in buildings, in heating and lighting and in the use of energy.

Good housekeeping in schools has been promoted in a guide for school staff, governors and pupils. Hon. Members who visit schools in their constituencies—I know that many of my hon. Friends do—will know that schools that manage their own budgets have been taking a close interest in how to ensure the greatest energy efficiency in their buildings. Likewise, best practice guides have been issued for energy efficiency in hospitals, and NHS hospital trusts have been making substantial savings on their heating bills as a consequence of incorporating good and best practice.

We have, for example, a guide for energy and estate managers on a best practice programme for electricity savings in hospitals. It sets targets for savings of 15 per cent. in energy consumption over the next five years. In a recent study of 450 hospitals, the Audit Commission identified scope for energy savings of 15 per cent. All those savings can be obtained in a comparatively straightforward way if managers and others apply themselves to thinking about energy efficiency and considering it when they make decisions about the future of their estate.

We have best practice guides and energy consumption guides to show energy users how their consumption compares with that of others. We also have good practice guides and case studies describing good practice and new practice case studies that promote novel measures. We also had the green house demonstration programme, which has made £60 million available over three years to encourage local authorities to develop and apply energy-efficiency strategies to housing.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was rather curmudgeonly about that, saying that, because the green house programme was coming to an end, it meant that the Government were in some way lessening their commitment to energy efficiency. That is rubbish. The green house programme is, by definition, a demonstration programme. It allocated money from the overall housing programme to encourage local authorities to see what they could achieve with their resources to promote energy efficiency in their housing stock. It was never intended to be an indefinite programme, but a demonstration programme. During its three years' existence, it has achieved a considerable amount. Indeed, it is not insignificant that Newark and Sherwood council, one of the local authorities prayed in aid in support of the Bill, did all its work under the green house demonstration programme. Extra money was given to the council under the programme, clearly proving its value.

We have been able to show local authorities what they can achieve if they sensibly apply good energy efficiency methods to their housing stock. We now say—as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said—that, when local authorities assess their housing investment programme each year and come to the Department of Environment to identify the projects and the sums of capital required, we expect those authorities to make clear their intentions on energy efficiency. We want to ensure that they make energy efficiency an integral part of their annual housing investment programme submissions. In that way, we will ensure that energy efficiency becomes an integral part of the culture of housing management.

We also have a network of 11 regional energy efficiency offices, which promote good environmental management in energy-efficiency measures across the United Kingdom. They provide an independent source of advice, which enables energy consumers to take action. They signpost the Department programmes and provide information on energy-efficient techniques and technologies. Companies or businesses often recognise that they have to take action on energy efficiency, but they are concerned about whom they should approach. If they go to one of the utilities, will they receive impartial advice? Understandably, that sometimes causes them concern. Chambers of commerce, the Confederation of British Industry and businesses generally have discovered that a high standard of advice is available from the regional energy efficiency offices. That advice has enabled many businesses and companies to save substantial sums of money.

We are also providing help for individuals. We are promoting home energy labelling, which provides information on the energy efficiency of a dwelling and identifies the most cost-effective measures for improving it. Under the campaign "helping the earth begins at home", we have, together with others, developed a home energy label. It is of little value to householders to know that they need to make their homes more energy efficient if they do not have some standard and objective test by which to measure improvements in their home.

The home energy labelling will do that. It will provide valuable information to home owners and buyers about the energy efficiency of a property. We are working with mortgage lenders to incorporate home energy labelling into their survey reports and we are encouraging them to offer "green loans" to help people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

In due course, I hope that, when people buy and sell their homes, among the sales particulars and general information such as, for example, telling one which council tax band the property may be in, there will also be an indication of the property's home energy rating. People will be able to make value judgments about the property's energy efficiency and assess whether, when they move in, they will need to undertake work to improve the energy efficiency of that property.

We are encouraging voluntary appliance labels to give consumers a guide to the energy efficiency of the appliances that they buy. Often, consumers want to do the right thing for the environment—they want to buy, for example, the most energy-efficient kettle. That is difficult if they have not got the information on which to make a value judgment. We want appliance labels so that if a person who wants to buy a kettle goes into a shop, the appliance label will give them an indication which is the most energy-efficient appliance.

Where necessary, we provide financial incentives to encourage the installation of energy-efficiency measures. The home energy efficiency scheme provides grants for basic insulation measures and advice for low-income households. Since the scheme began in 1991, more than 500,000 homes have been treated—a substantial number. In this financial year, grants of £37·5 million are expected to be given to 240,000 households—almost a quarter of a million households—which was dismissed by the Opposition spokesman as if it were nothing.

Treating 240,000 homes is a substantial achievement and £37·5 million is a substantial sum of money. It may not be a substantial sum of money to the Opposition, but in real terms it represents a substantial commitment by the Government towards energy efficiency.

We have all become rather cynical of any comments made by the Opposition about any sort of public spending ever since we woke up one morning to hear the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) announcing that the Labour party had no spending commitments. So it is impossible to make any sensible judgments or have any debates on any area of Opposition spending and whether it will be more, less or indifferent because they clearly want

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to try to ensure that they have no spending commitments between now and the next general election. If they have, they are not real commitments.

Mr. Milligan: Does my hon. Friend also remember that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East made it clear that only commitments which were given in the House were solid, and the ones which were made outside the House were for the birds? Does he agree that we have had a clear commitment from the Opposition Front Bench today that the Labour party will spend a great deal more money in the energy efficiency area?

Mr. Baldry: Yes, of course.

Mr. Chris Smith *rose*——

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman is rushing to make it clear that, perhaps, it was not a commitment, and that if it was a commitment, it was not one that he had the authority of the shadow Chancellor to give.

Mr. Smith: May I make two observations in response? First, the amount of extra money that the Government have just trumpeted as a splendid addition to the home energy efficiency scheme budget represents about 2 per cent. of the annual income that the Government will have as a result of putting VAT on domestic fuel. That does not seem to be an especial act of generosity.

Secondly, if the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) and the Minister had listened to what I said, they would have realised that the national energy efficiency programme, which I advocated, all the details of which we published a year ago—I would happily provide them for the hon. Member for Eastleigh if he wishes—and which has the endorsement not just of the shadow Chancellor but of the entire shadow Cabinet, does not cost the taxpayer a single penny.

Mr. Baldry: That is an example of the strategy of the new model Labour party: Labour Members go around the country giving the impression that they intend to spend more money on energy efficiency and so on, but when they are challenged as to whether they have made a commitment in the House or one for the birds outside the House, they go back to the small print and say, "Actually, no. We were not proposing any extra spending at all. This was not a commitment to extra spending." I suspect that we shall see considerably more of that between now and the next general election.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Now that my hon. Friend is apparently about to break away from the startling debate about what the Opposition are or are not saying about public spending, could he say whether there is any chance of the excellent home energy efficiency scheme being extended in some sensible way, which is what I called for in my speech?

Mr. Baldry: Throughout its history, the home energy-efficiency scheme has been extended year by year. There are good reasons for that. There are also good reasons—not least, logistical reasons—why we cannot have an enormous scheme all at once. We need to ensure a steady take-up of the scheme by people who want to have their homes insulated, but if the scheme is advertised and promoted too widely and too many people come forward, those who have applied for energy grants and have been waiting an number of weeks for them to come through will be frustrated.

Neighbourhood Energy Action and those who have been running the home energy efficiency scheme over the years have been outstanding. They have managed to insulate half a million homes. I do not suppose that there is an hon. Member who has received a complaint about the NEA and the organisations that apply the home energy efficiency scheme. That is a considerable tribute to them. It is also a tribute to the way in which the Government have been running the scheme to ensure that at no time is it so large that those involved cannot properly meet the needs and tackle the logistical problems.

I have no doubt, given the scheme's considerable success in the past, that it will continue to contribute. I repeat that this year there are expected to be financial grants of £37·5 million for a quarter of a million households. That is a very considerable contribution in any one year. In addition, some £69 million—nearly £70 million—of Department of the Environment moneys this year were allocated to estate action to be spent on energy-related works.

I am sorry that the hon. Members for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) and Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), who intervened several times, are no longer here, because Coventry has received large amounts of estate action money. Several huge estates in Coventry have been completely refurbished over the past couple of years, and refurbishment of estates such as the Woodend estate continues, with estate action funding. Much of that funding goes towards making homes more energy efficient.

Mr. Brandreth: In my own constituency of Chester, the Poet's Corner estate in Blacon is a beneficiary of the scheme. One aspect has been particularly exciting: a skills survey was undertaken among people who live on the estate who have become involved in ensuring that the energy-efficiency measures are put into force. Not only is the money being made available; the community has the sense of ownership that is so essential if the scheme is to work properly.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. One of the great advantages of estate action schemes is that they not only promote community involvement but help to generate local jobs for local people on the estates concerned.

In addition to the funding that we are putting into energy efficiency, we are encouraging regulation where it is appropriate, even in a deregulatory age. For example, the regulations governing energy efficiency standards in new buildings in the United Kingdom have been tightened several times over the past 20 years, and they are currently being reviewed again.

We are consulting on proposals to strengthen the provisions in the building regulations, which include the provision of double glazing, improved insulation, better heating controls and the incorporation of a home energy rating. Revisions should lead to an improvement in energy efficiency of 25 to 35 per cent. compared with current regulations. Thus, substantial improvements in energy efficiency are being effected by building regulations.

We know that the task of achieving energy efficiency savings is not one which the Government can achieve alone. Many others have an important part to play in encouraging energy efficiency in the home. That is why we have worked with the gas and electricity industries to set up the Energy Saving Trust to develop and manage new programmes to promote the efficient use of energy in the domestic and small business sectors. The trust has a target of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 2·5 million tonnes of carbon by 2000—a quarter of the United Kingdom's target reduction.

The trust has made an excellent start. Four schemes have already been launched, and two large initiatives for action in the home are out for consultation. A scheme to encourage the sale of low-energy light bulbs to domestic customers, run in conjunction with the industry, resulted in the sale of 740,000—nearly three quarters of a million—in only eight weeks, about the same number as are sold otherwise throughout the whole year.

An incentive scheme for gas condensing boilers resulted in 3,000 rebates of £200 being claimed by owner-occupiers by the end of 1993. New manufacturers and products have entered the marketplace as a consequence. A residential combined heat and power scheme has been heavily over subscribed in the first tranche. A pilot study of local energy advice centres for the domestic and small business sector, partly funded by the Government, is proving very successful.

We are working closely also with the European Union to improve domestic energy efficiency. A directive setting energy efficiency standards for central heating boilers came into effect on 1 January this year. A directive on appliance labelling will introduce labelling for refrigerators, freezers and fridge-freezers by the end of this year. We are pressing the Commission for action in setting minimum energy efficiency standards for domestic applicances generally.

Local authorities also have an important role to play. The energy bill for local authority housing comes to nearly £3 billion a year, so local government efforts are crucial if we are to complete our energy efficiency programme.

Central and local government are already working closely together through the central and local government forum, which was set up under the White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", to carry forward the energy efficiency campaign in local government. The local authority associations have endorsed and encouraged their members to adopt a target of reducing energy consumption in their non-housing buildings by 15 per cent. over a five-year period. The associations will shortly survey their members to establish where progress has been made and assess the extent of the additional commitment required.

As well as energy efficiency in their estates, local authorities and local councils can fulfil a valuable role in pulling together energy thinking in their areas. Industry, schools, further education institutions and, of course, householders, can all contribute to energy efficiency and produce genuine savings towards our carbon targets. As was said earlier, initiatives such as city challenge and a host of different groups, including local authorities, community groups and various partners in city challenge, have come together to promote, among other things, energy efficiency to improve the warmth and comfort of local people in their homes.

Local authorities are in a good position to pull together and co-ordinate thinking in their areas, possibly through establishing targets whose achievements can be monitored. That need not be a resource-intensive exercise: rather, it is one aspect of the functions that authorities should already be carrying out when ensuring that people are thinking ahead and looking for a sustainable future.

We know that energy efficiency is worth while and cost effective and will help save the environment. It is a win-win situation. Energy efficiency saves money and helps to save the earth, but we are not complacent about the work that we are doing now, and we are continuing to adapt our initiatives to meet changing circumstances.

If future, we intend to use our efforts to emphasise the importance and value of energy efficiency to all those with an interest. We will continue to work with the Energy Saving Trust to develop our dialogue with industry, and work with the European Union.

From 1 April, provision for the home energy efficiency scheme will be almost doubled and extended to pensioners and disabled people. The extra £35 million per year for the United Kingdom will provide grants for more than 200,000 extra households per year, bringing the total number of households receiving grants to almost half a million a year. It will reduce the fuel bills of recipients, save energy and help to fight the threat of global warming. It will also create some 1,500 jobs. It will boost a specialist sector of the construction industry and materials producers and improve the housing stock.

Over the next two years, we will also be significantly expanding the "helping the earth begins at home" advertising and promotion campaign. We hope to establish a scheme under which mortgage lenders incorporate home energy labelling into their survey reports, and to see building regulations which improve energy efficiency standards come into force.

We will also continue to work closely with the European Union in its work on standards and labels for domestic appliances. As the House can see, a lot has been done, a lot is being done and a lot will be done to ensure that we meet our environmental targets and our commitments to the international community and to ensure that we utilise energy efficiency to combat climate change and to promote our environmental objectives.

Where does the Bill fit into that? Our commitments to energy conservation are clear, but we have concerns about some of the details of what is proposed. We have to look at the Bill in the context of Government policies overall.

The Government are determined to keep a tight lid on public spending, and, as importantly, to avoid unnecessary burdens on local authorities; not to assume inappropriate responsibilities for central Government and to avoid regulation unless there are overriding reasons.

Our concerns about the Bill centre on the additional duties it would place on individual authorities. If the Bill were to be amended so that those duties were turned into powers which enabled authorities to take the schemes forward where they thought that that was in the best interests of their residents, our concerns would be largely met.

We are also concerned at the assumption that central Government would pay for those programmes. Indeed, it is interesting to learn that the Association of Metropolitan Authorities does not consider that the financial burdens of this Bill would be particularly great for an individual authority, especially when taking account of the longer-term payback from reducing the energy consumption of a council's own housing stock. If that were the case, such a self-financing scheme would, could and should be readily adopted by responsible authorities.

[Mr. Baldry]

We know that we must keep spending under control if we are to sustain economic recovery. The tight financial settlement means that any additional costs arising from the new functions for local government proposed in the Bill would have to be found from making offsetting savings elsewhere.

As it stands, the Bill would have spending implications for local authorities and for central Government. I know that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has circulated figures showing how much it might cost two local authorities to set up a database on the condition of housing stock in their authorities. Newark and Sherwood district council estimates that it would cost about £1 per dwelling; Derby city council estimates 53p per dwelling. If those costings were replicated by other local authorities, the cost of setting up databases across the United Kingdom would lie between £11 million and £23 million.

It is quite possible that those costs would not be representative of those incurred elsewhere—indeed, they may understate the costs that would be incurred by others. Both those authorities already have a keen interest in energy efficiency. One of them already has the necessary computer hardware, software and trained staff.

We must not forget that those costs are only part, and probably a small part, of the costs that would be involved in carrying forward the Bill. In addition, local authorities would have to bear the costs of preparing draft plans; consultation; preparing final plans; keeping the plans up to date; and implementing their recommendations.

On the other hand, we must recognise that not all those costs would be additional. We have already issued guidance to authorities asking them to collect information about the energy efficiency of housing in their areas as part of the process of preparing housing investment programmes. It would be useful to consider the extent of the additional costs which would be imposed by the legislation. That matter can be considered in Committee. The Government would be faced with additional spending.

At the outset, the right hon. Gentleman was somewhat coy as to whether the Bill required a money resolution. Only a cursory glance at the Bill makes it clear that the Secretary of State would be required to set a date by which all plans should be sent to him, and a timetable for the implementation of plans. Of course, that would require funds to be provided by Parliament.

In addition to the concern about extra funding and, indeed, where that funding should come from, hon. Members know that we are determined not to add to the burdens of local authorities unless it is unavoidable. We are concerned that the provisions in the Bill may impose an unnecessary burden.

Mr. Chris Smith: I wonder whether the Minister could explain his point about funds being required to be provided by Parliament for the Secretary of State. The consideration of plans submitted to the Secretary of State by local authorities would not involve anything other than consideration presumably by one or two officials in his Department. Surely, it is within the present resources of the Department of the Environment to carry out that consideration.

Mr. Baldry: I never cease to be amazed by how Labour Members think the machinery of government works. Clearly, if local authorities are obliged to provide reports on the energy efficiency of their housing stock, those reports would need to be considered by the various regional offices and by officials in the Department of the Environment. That would almost certainly require a bid from the permanent secretary of the Department for extra staff for that function.

The thought that all that could be done on a totally cost-free basis is wholly unrealistic. The cost to central Government of the regulating and monitoring function might not be substantial, but it would be real and would require a money resolution. Listening to the proponents of the Bill, I am concerned that there is an ambiguity which will need to be explored in Committee. The ambiguity is whether this is an exercise that some Labour Members suggested could be done at little or no real cost to local authorities, because they would be making savings on their stock over a period and that money could be reinvested, or whether there would be a real cost arising from this legislation that should be met by either local or central Government.

Whatever is the case, I suspect that there will be costs arising from this legislation. Those costs are a concern to us at a time when we are trying to control public expenditure. That concern will be legitimately considered in Committee.

Mr. Beith: The essence of the Bill is certainly not to commit to the programme of work that people might feel is desirable when they see the outcome of the energy audit. The Bill does not impose on the Secretary of State the responsibility to fund however much work might be seen as desirable to achieve different levels of energy efficiency. The core of the Bill is the insistence that auditing should be carried out at a reasonable cost. As the Secretary of State has clearly said publicly that the Government wish to see this work done, surely he is not suggesting that the limited burden that would be imposed on his Department and on local authorities is so great as to make him want to go back on what he said and hope that local authorities will not do it at all.

Mr. Baldry: I return to what I said earlier: even the modest approach of simply wishing to have an audit of the housing stock in a local authority area is not without cost. As I said, Newark and Sherwood district council, which benefited considerably from the green house demonstration programme and is probably as advanced as any local authority in this field, estimates that it would cost £1 per dwelling. Derby district council, which is a Conservative-controlled council with an impressive housing record, a switched-on housing department and a dynamic housing committee, estimates that it would cost 53p per dwelling.

As I said, if we extrapolate those costs across local authorities generally, that would lead to an overall cost of somewhere between £11 million and £23 million for only the auditing function. That is a real cost. It may well be that in Committee the right hon. Gentleman will be able to convince us that we have misunderstood what others are saying. But I think that the estimates of Newark and Sherwood and Derby district councils, which are the two examples that he prayed in aid in his briefing on this Bill, are real costs and they must be met from somewhere. Those costs concern us. If one is making it a mandatory obligation upon local authorities that they shall carry out those orders, the costs must be met from somewhere. That will take me on to my second concern.

Mr. Beith: I do not understand what the Government are saying. I understood it to be the Government's view that they want the work to be carried out. They are worried that local authorities might be obliged to carry out the work because, if so, that would cost money. Frankly, if local authorities obeyed the Government's wish that the work be carried out, it would still cost the same amount of money. What are the Government saying to the House?

Mr. Baldry: The Government are concerned that the Bill is seeking to put statutory duties on every local authority. When statutory duties are placed on every local authority, they then, not surprisingly, come to the Government and say that Parliament has placed a new obligation and a new burden upon them.

As part of the negotiations that we have every year with the local authority associations, they, not surprisingly, trawl through any legislation that has been passed by any Department. The associations then say that a certain function has been put on the statute book, from which there is a cost involved. The associations then wish to be reimbursed for that cost.

If a local authority wished to carry out an audit of its stock within its resources, we would wish to encourage that. We are concerned about placing a statutory duty on each and every local authority which they would then have no alternative but to carry out. Some will do it more efficiently than others, but they will turn to the Government and say that they wish to be reimbursed.

I made it clear in my opening comments that our concern is that the Bill contains too many shalls and not enough mays. We are generally determined not to add to the burdens of local authorities unless they are unavoidable. Our second concern is that the provisions of the Bill may impose an unnecessary burden. The House should take that concern into account now, in Committee and when the Bill comes back to the Floor of the House.

Many local authorities are already doing a great deal to improve energy efficiency. Some 250 local authorities have agreed to sign up to my Department's "Making a Corporate Commitment" campaign. Some authorities have set themselves performance improvement targets. For example, Basingstoke and Dean borough council aims to reduce effective energy use by 15 per cent. in the five years to 1998; Bedfordshire county council aimed to reduce energy costs by 15 per cent. over the five years to 1991 and by a further 10 per cent. by 2000; Cotswold district council plans a 15 per cent. reduction over five years to 1997; Ipswich borough council plans a 15 per cent. reduction over five years to 1998. I am sure that there are many more.

In addition, many local authorities are already taking steps to improve domestic energy efficiency, and obviously we wish to encourage that. Local authorities already spend around a quarter of their council house repair and improvement budgets on energy-related work, such as new heating systems. Better output can, of course, be obtained by applying the lessons which every local authority should have learned by what has been achieved through the green house programme.

The programme was launched in 1990 to establish a network of energy efficiency demonstration projects to show local authorities in England how energy efficiency of council housing could be improved. Over three years, some 180 schemes in 130 local authorities have been undertaken. Results are very encouraging, with schemes achieving fuel cost reductions of up to 40 per cent. and carbon dioxide reductions of up to 50 per cent.

Drawing on experiences gained from the green house programme, we asked local authorities to include energy efficiency as an integral part of their housing strategies and investment programmes. Interim guidance was issued last June and further guidance is planned for the spring.

A key element of that guidance is that local authorities should survey their housing stock to establish its energy rating as part of devising an energy efficiency strategy for inclusion in their overall housing investment strategy. Indeed, it is difficult for any responsible authority to come to the Department of the Environment to make a sensible bid for housing investment money unless it has carried out a survey of its housing stock.

We need to take stock and to consider in Committee what has already been done by local authorities, the work that is in progress and that which stems from the recent changes to the housing investment programme process. We may conclude that it is not necessary to impose additional duties on local authorities. It may be simpler, cheaper and wiser to build on existing systems than to establish something new.

Similarly, we are keen to avoid unnecessary burdens on central Government. We need to consider further whether it is essential for additional duties to be imposed on the Secretary of State, whether it is appropriate for him to prescribe the precise way in which a local authority should go about this undoubtedly important part of its business or whether it should be left to manage those things for itself. We can be certain that, even among those local authorities that carry out surveys and develop best practice in energy efficiency, the way in which they conduct those surveys will not always be exactly the same. It would seem somewhat curious to argue that the Secretary of State should have a statutory duty to prescribe the precise way in which local authorities should go about conducting the surveys.

That takes me to our natural desire to avoid unnecessary regulation. As the House will know, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is having a bonfire of unnecessary controls. We can celebrate the first part of that in the Second Reading of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill next week. We shall be able to keep ourselves warm by the fire of unnecessary regulation which will be burnt during the proceedings on the Bill. We are determined not to introduce new controls as fast as the old ones are turned to ashes. We need to consider whether further legislation is essential, or whether the same objectives could be achieved without new laws.

Hence, the Government are determined to do all we can to promote energy efficiency. We know—we agree with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed—that local authorities have an important role to play. The right hon. Member and his supporters seek to introduce a Bill which we need to consider with care. The Government believe that the Bill could make a constructive contribution, but we have genuine concerns about it. In particular, we are concerned that it might impose additional and unnecessary burdens on local authorities and central Government. It could also create new and unnecessarry controls and hinder our efforts to control

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public expenditure. Those issues need full examination and should, therefore, be considered in Committee, where I hope that they can be resolved constructively.

1.42 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am privileged to have an opportunity to respond to the debate and consider some of the points that have been raised. I begin by thanking the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) for taking up the Bill and for his excellent opening speech this morning. I was delighted that such an able and experienced Member was prepared to adopt the Bill.

We have had an excellent debate. I was gratified to note the extent of support for the principles and purport of the Bill. I noted carefully the reservations that the Minister expressed. I shall respond to some of them before I finish my remarks. The debate has been an opportunity for a wide-ranging debate on energy efficiency. That is most welcome. There is no doubt that energy efficiency should be a central issue in Government policy.

The debate has also been an opportunity for the Minister to provide a wide-ranging apologia for the Government's initiatives and policies and an opportunity for the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman to have a go at the Government about their deficiencies. Of course, that is reasonable enough.

We heard a great deal of substance and much intelligent comment during the debate. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) set the scene very effectively. He referred to the astonishing fact that global energy demand is likely to double by the year 2020. He also said that the percentage of energy produced from sources that emit carbon dioxide would increase from 74 to 92 per cent., which is both dramatic and worrying.

I have another statistic. In its preparations for the Rio summit, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change insisted that we need a 60 per cent. reduction in global carbon dioxide emissions in the near future. The panel also recognised that there will have to be an increase in carbon dioxide emissions in developing countries to enable some development and therefore the reduction in the developed world must be well over 60 per cent. That is an urgent requirement.

I do not need to say that energy policy is controversial. It is a very difficult area and all sorts of issues cause hot controversy. The hon. Member for Norwich, North mentioned nuclear energy, which is highly controversial, but renewable energy sources are also becoming controversial, which is astonishing in my view.

There is universal agreement that energy efficiency and conservation must be the areas of priority action. A cultural change in people's lives is necessary, so that everyone becomes more aware of their responsibilities and can make informed choices about their use of energy. I am convinced that the creation of energy conservation schemes—the energy plans to be drawn up by local authorities—would enhance and encourage the development of a new and strong awareness among ordinary people. That is one reason why it is essential that the process be mandatory. The fact that it is will signal its urgency and importance.

The involvement of local organisations is essential and is also covered by the Bill, which contains a requirement for local organisations of all types to be involved in the consultation process. The hon. Member for Norwich, North mentioned the Norwich energy action campaign, which led to the creation of the Norfolk Energy Forum, and described the way in which they have resulted in greater public understanding of the importance of energy efficiency.

The hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) had two criticisms of the Bill—or perhaps they should be described as reservations. One was what he described as the danger of the "top-down" approach. The advantage of such an approach is that it establishes the process within a United Kingdom strategy, which is necessary. Instruction from above is the only means of having such a strategy. However, by involving the local community we would at the same time be encouraging a "bottom-up" approach. I must emphasise that it is essential that such a process be mandatory.

The other reservation of the hon. Member for City of Chester was that the Bill was concerned more with analysis —gathering information, and so forth—than with action. That brings us to the heart of the matter. If enacted, the Bill would set up a process which would identify precisely how action could be most effective. It is not about gathering information for the sake of it, but about making action effective. There is a danger of resources being dissipated in various directions, and of inappropriate action and targeting. Other hon. Members have said that cost effectiveness needs to be considered. The Bill is primarily about efficiency, action and a clear sense of direction.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) emphasised the need for an understanding of the most cost-effective ways to bring about improved energy efficiency, and I am sure that that problem would be dealt with by the schemes. After all, clause 2(1)(a) says that the schemes will decide what measures would be desirable and practicable to achieve greater energy conservation as regards the heating and lighting of accommodation. Finding the most appropriate and cost-effective method is therefore the heart of the matter. The question of the cost of implementing the schemes and the programme of energy efficiency is left open. The Bill does not specify how that should be done.

I looked carefully at the paper prepared by the Labour party a year ago. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is right to say that that programme would involve no Exchequer cost, because it advocates premia-based bills for people whose homes have undergone changes under the energy efficiency programme. That is one option, but the Bill leaves it to the Secretary of State to decide what method should be used to fund the programme.

Targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions vary between 10 and 30 per cent. That flexibility recognises the work already done by many local authorities. The Minister emphasised how many local authorities have already carried out considerable work in that regard, but local authorities in many parts of the country could save at least 10 per cent. more in carbon dioxide emissions. The effectiveness of the work can be monitored simply by measuring energy consumption in areas where the programme has been implemented. That can be seen in the level of people's fuel bills, so it is easily feasible.

Local authorities' environmental and housing departments are uniquely equipped for carrying out the work of the survey and deciding what needs to be done. The execution of the tasks is non-controversial because in most cases local authorities would act as enablers rather than providers of services. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and the Minister cast doubt on the figures prepared by Newark and Sherwood and by Derby local authorities. There cannot be much doubt that the work was done rigorously—it was certainly done in good faith on the basis of what those authorities thought would be necessary to set up the equipment to carry out the surveys.

Mr. Brandreth: Did those two local authorities do that work using their own current resources? If so, I imagine that, like my own local authority, they did it because they believed that it was worth while. I am reluctant to have a mandatory system imposed because it would take away a local authority's incentive to do the work for its own good and for the sake of the housing stock in its community. It would then become a matter for which funding is provided and for which audits must be carried out. Those local authorities are doing the audit because they know that it makes sense, which is why I favour the voluntary principle.

Mr. Dafis: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but local authorities must understand that it makes sense for all of them to undertake the work. The authorities that have been mentioned have done so partly because they are enthusiastic and excited about what it involves. Others have not acted, however, so there needs to be mandatory action to ensure that they take advantage of the opportunities.

Mr. Robathan: I have not been here for the entire debate, but I said that I had been contacted by all my local authorities, which are enthusiastically backing the Bill. District councils would have to implement its provisions and I believe that they and individuals across the country would enthusiastically give their support.

Mr. Dafis: I have come across hardly any opposition —for the sake of honesty, I stress the word "hardly"— from local authorities to the principle of the Bill's provisions being mandatory. The principle is largely accepted by most local authorities and we have had many requests for information.

Concern has been expressed that the process would be regarded as authorising prying into private homes. I do not believe that it should be a matter for concern, because local authorities have a responsibility under the Housing Act 1985 to assess housing conditions in their district at least once a year and energy efficiency should be part of that assessment.

Newark and Sherwood reckons that a 2 per cent. sample of housing stock would be sufficient to obtain the energy profile of an area. The Bill would provide no additional powers or rights of access to buildings. It would not be difficult to obtain the support and co-operation of householders, as they would gain a considerable advantage from a visit by the person carrying out the energy audit; they would be given a great deal of useful information about their property and how to make energy savings.

Mr. Milligan: The hon. Gentleman says that people would benefit, but is he suggesting that only 2 per cent. of households would be visited? If so, the benefit would be rather limited.

Mr. Dafis: I mentioned the benefit to show that it would not be difficult to obtain the co-operation of private householders in order to gain access to their property because it would be to their advantage. I cannot imagine that householders would object, but if they did there would be no access to their property.

Reference has been made to the remarkable coalition of support that has gathered around the Bill, not least among Members of Parliament. It is striking that there have been so many strong expressions of support and substantial contributions from Conservative Members. Many organisations also support the Bill. It has been said that they are of a social and environmental nature, although businesses also support it.

Organisations representing disabled people are especially interested—a fact which merits attention. Disabled people spend far more on energy than other people. The imposition of value added tax on domestic fuel will impact heavily on them. According to figures that I have seen, it is clear that the concessions granted to help those in lower income groups will not entirely compensate for their increased expenditure, so social as well as environmental objectives need to be considered.

An important political objective could also be achieved if the Bill were passed. There is an opportunity for the Government to show that they are prepared to deal with energy efficiency seriously. A range of measures has already been introduced, but the passage of the Bill with its mandatory powers would convince the public at large that the Government are serious. It would be seen as an attempt to get to grips with the unfortunate and damaging effects of the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel. Thousands of people will be watching the Bill's progress carefully.

We need to think in the context of the need to approach sustainability. The Minister has emphasised that. The Government's intentions were shown by the publication of the documents a fortnight ago about the Government's commitments to Rio, their statement that we need a radical change of direction and their insistence on the need for a sense of urgency in relation to sustainability. No one should underestimate the enormity of the task that approaching sustainability involves. The Prime Minister described it as a "huge task".

The Bill is the perfect example of sustainable development. It provides improved welfare and a better quality of life in the form of comfort and improved health. It facilitates increased economic activity and greater efficiency. It reduces heat and maintenance costs, reduces pollution and leads to a better husbanding of natural resources. It is a practical Bill, despite the reservations that the Minister mentioned. It is uncontroversial. It is not over-ambitious. In addition to being practical, it would signal the Government's willingness to take seriously the subject of energy efficiency and the task of approaching sustainability.

I very much hope that the Bill will be enacted in its entirety or nearly in its entirety.

2.1 pm

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): I must congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), whose brainchild the Bill was. It has proved, at least so far, to be a sustainable development.

Unfortunately, I was not in the House to hear the opening speech by the right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) whose Bill it is, and I apologise to him for that. I had to be in my constituency for

[Mr. Stephen Milligan]

the past 48 hours, where we had an important meeting with the Minister for Public Transport to discuss the future of railway jobs. Indeed, I was not here last night. As the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) is sitting on the Front Bench, I thank him personally for the sensitive and co-operative way in which the Labour Whips Office is administering the policy of non-co-operation. It has been of great advantage that that has not been administered too tightly; as a result, some hon. Members have been enabled to leave the House from time to time. *[Interruption.]* One has to pay tribute where tribute is due.

There has been a certain degree of political correctness in the debate. The fact that the Bill is supported by three parties and a wide range of sponsors should induce some scepticism.

Mr. Dafis *rose*——

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): *rose*——

Mr. Milligan: I give way to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs).

Mr. Beggs: I have been here from time to time since the debate commenced, and I should like the hon. Gentleman to know that at least four parties support the Bill.

Mr. Milligan: That deepens the suspicion. If everyone is agreed on spending other people's money, we must consider the Bill carefully.

The first question that we have to ask, which no one has asked in my hearing in the debate, is: do we need to save energy? What is the purpose of saving energy? It was argued some years ago that we need to save energy simply because energy is a finite resource; we are running out of oil and gas; therefore, we need to save energy.

I do not believe that that argument is credible any longer. There are many other finite resources. There are finite supplies of many minerals. We do not have to have saving programmes for ferrous metals. That argument is extremely dubious. We have greater known resources of energy than at almost any time in human history. The resources of oil and gas are very extensive. In this country, we have 300 years' supply of coal under our soil. We are closing pits because it is no longer economic to extract the coal and because other technologies are more advantageous. That may well be the case for other sources of energy of which there is considerable supply. So the fact that there are finite energy resources is not in itself an argument for saving energy.

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend comes to the debate somewhat late, as he admits. It would be reasonable to ask whether he pays any fuel bills, because if he does, he will know that they are quite costly and that the less fuel he uses, the less he will have to pay. In his own very rich condition, I am sure, it may not matter to him too much, but to many people it matters quite a lot how much they pay. I am sure that he realises that that is a good reason in itself for saving fuel and energy.

Mr. Milligan: I am happy to show my hon. Friend my fuel bills for recent quarters, from which he will see that my consumption is modest, as indeed are my means. Like many people, I am conscious of the cost of fuel, but people must meet many other bills. They know what they are and can decide whether to install energy-saving measures. They do not need a Government measure to make that decision or to pay more tax to support such a measure.

There were scare stories about 15 or 20 years ago, at the time of the first oil crisis, that oil was running out and we had to have massive energy-saving measures. Oil is now cheaper in real terms than it has ever been. We have plentiful supplies of energy, including on this island, and it is not clear that we want to reduce energy uses for that purpose.

The second argument is that we need to save energy for strategic reasons, but, as we have so many energy resoures in this country, it is not clear that there is a strategic argument for saving energy.

The only serious argument for saving energy is global warming. Has the case for global warming been proved? It is perfectly clear that the earth is warming up. One need only look at the length of glaciers in the Alps, which have been shrinking in the past 30 or 40 years, to realise that we are living on a warmer globe. That is not a bad thing. There are many disadvantageous results, but there are advantages, too. It may soon be possible to expand vineyards in southern England. Instead of trying only to prevent global warming, we also should be taking more action to adapt to it and to take advantage of it. If we were faced with global cooling, how much more worried we would be about the situation.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: My hon. Friend, in his interesting argument, mentioned global cooling. I should like to bring him back to the nitty-gritty of the Bill. I have discovered in the past hour that Norwich city councillors have suffered much cooling and have been made uncomfortable, which shows what needs to be done at a more practical level. I gather that a survey conducted in the past 19 hours of 406 windows in Norwich city hall showed that 19 would not open, 123 would not close, 48 had broken fittings, 21 had missing fittings, 20 had damaged or corroded frames and 201 panes of glass needed replacing. Surely we should be discussing such practical measures of insulation to ensure that we use energy efficiently and that councillors keep warm rather than the esoteric matters that my hon. Friend is suggesting.

Mr. Milligan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It seems, if I may put it in graphic terms, that Norwich has a window of opportunity to take advantage of the new consensus in favour of energy saving.

It is clear that the globe is warming up, but it is rather less clear whether that is due to natural or man-made factors. Evidence on that is still not certain. As results of global warming would be fairly disastrous if it continued according to some of the more extreme forecasts, it is right for us to take measures to reduce energy usage. In all environmental matters, however, there is a tendency for a consensus to develop in the House—we all want to be seen to be green and pro-environmental—without counting the costs.

We have realised in recent years that, faced with the costs of environmental improvements, people take a different attitude. I cite the example of rising water bills. The House approved EC directives to increase the quality of water in the seas around our beaches and of drinking water, but people across the country are now facing huge increases in water bills. I am surprised that there has been such controversy about the effect on elderly people of imposing VAT on fuel, because the increase in water bills that many elderly people are now facing dwarfs the increase in fuel bills, especially after the compensation measures that have been agreed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. People are asking, "Are we getting the environmental benefit that was promised? No one told us the cost." In considering measures such as the Bill, it is relevant to ask difficult questions about costs.

I was not present to hear the speech of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, so I do not know what details he proposed, but in an article in *The House* magazine he suggested that the cost per council could be about £50,000 or £60,000. That seems to be pretty unrealistic. The survey and audit would be very limited —the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North talked about 2 per cent. of houses. I am not sure that there will be much advantage if only 2 per cent. of houses in my constituency are audited. I do not see how we can learn much more from an audit than from a general study of conditions across the country. If the proposal is to conduct a house-by-house survey, the figures given seem unrealistic. At a time when everyone is complaining about rising taxes and the level of the public sector borrowing requirement, we must be extremely cautious, particularly if the burden is to be borne by council tax payers.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the generous settlement agreed for the standard spending assessment for the Eastleigh district, which has enabled Eastleigh council to reduce its share of the council tax by 50 per cent. I wonder how many other boroughs can boast that they have halved their proportion of council tax. At a time when people are finding it difficult to make ends met, the prospect of increasing council tax, for whatever worthy reason, must be studied with care.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Does my hon. Friend agree that clause 3 of the Bill is worrying? We have heard many complaints recently about the Conservative Government centralising powers in Westminster and taking them away from councils. Clause 3 of the Bill gives the Secretary of State onerous powers and duties. Does not that run contrary to messages about decentralising power?

Mr. Milligan: I know that my hon. Friend is a proponent of subsidiarity and appreciates the principle of the Maastricht treaty—although he has doubts about other of its aspects—but his words reflect the fact that powers and responsibilities must be borne at the appropriate level. I am not convinced that local authorities are the appropriate level. Some of them do good work—I am impressed by the work in my own district, where the provision of energy-saving schemes for elderly people has been encouraged. Elderly people have been compensated for the increase in VAT, but they face far higher fuel bills than most of us. We can spend time in the Chamber and turn the heating off at home, but people at home all day face higher fuel bills.

I have been impressed by the literature sent out with recent electricity bills by local electricity companies. The literature sets out in detail the sort of savings to be made from different investments. Double glazing yields certain savings, while protecting hot water boilers produces different savings. The literature graphically charts the savings that one can expect.

As one of my hon. Friends said, double glazing produces a low rate of return. It can cost between £3,000 and £5,000 to install, and has a long pay-back period. In my constituency, Southampton city council has embarked on the improvement of some of its council estates and has forced people to install double glazing in their homes. Some people have bought their flats and cannot afford double glazing. Two of my constituents faced bills of £8,000 from Southampton city council. It insisted on installing double glazing against the wishes of those tenants, who had bought their flats and believed that they were free to make their own choice of improvements. I have written to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction to ask him to intervene in that case. The policy may save energy, but it is imposing intolerable burdens on my constituents. Such costs should be looked at with great care.

I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will have a chance to reply to me today, but I have noticed something else about the electricity companies' bills. They state that one way of saving VAT on fuel is to pay the VAT in advance —to suggest that one has used far more fuel in the current quarter than one will in the next quarter. In that way, one can avoid VAT for several years. I suspect that many people may take up that opportunity, which is an easy way to avoid the tax. The policy will yield a huge bonus to the electricity companies without providing a corresponding bonus to the Treasury. I do not know whether my hon. Friend wishes to encourage or discourage people to take advantage of the scheme, which is perfectly legal, but reduces the impact of the savings to be made by imposing VAT on fuel.

The Liberal Democrats' proposed carbon tax has been mentioned. I am puzzled about its impact. It was suggested, I think by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), that its main impact would be to introduce extra taxes on industry. Industry already pays VAT on fuel. A carbon tax would place an additional burden on industry and destroy jobs, whereas it has been argued that the Bill will promote jobs in energy conservation. I hope that the Liberal Democrats' idea of a carbon tax will die a slow death.

Mr. Duncan Smith: A quick death.

Mr. Milligan: A quick death. My hon. Friend has corrected me. I do not see any advantage in introducing that tax on a European basis when the situation in various countries differs so greatly.

I do not wish to oppose the merits of the Bill, as the principle of it is sensible. If it makes it possible to introduce more information and more studies of the benefits of energy conservation, that will be excellent. However, the Bill imposes a wide range of extra duties on local authorities, which are hard pressed at present and have a number of responsibilities. Some local authorities find that implementing and paying for certain responsibilities—for litter, for example, which seems a good thing for which to ask local councils to take responsibility—is quite onerous. We must think carefully before we load yet another responsibility on local authorities and ask people to pay even more council tax.

If the Bill goes to Committee, it will be considered carefully, but it must be viewed sceptically before further burdens and regulations are introduced.

2.15 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I shall make a short speech because other hon. Members wish to introduce Bills. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on introducing the Bill. It is obvious that there are reservations about it, although, having been in the House a fair number of years, I have always heard it stated by whoever happens to be in Government that there are reservations about Bills. The proper place to discuss those reservations is in Committee. The Minister has suggested that the Bill will not be opposed and I hope that it will go to Committee, where genuine concerns can be discussed.

All hon. Members know from the contacts that we have had and from the visits that we have made in our constituencies that there is a deep concern, especially among elderly or disabled people and people on low incomes, about heating bills. Often, the houses that they live in are in urgent need of substantial improvements to doors and windows, which would make all the difference.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) talked about the great benefits of privatisation and how electricity prices, if anything, have come down. Conservative Members need to read the recent report of the Electricity Consumers Committee, which was published on 25 January. That committee was set up by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) to try to protect the interests of the consumer. The report is a most damning indictment of what has happened since privatisation. It said that privatisation had delivered a totally inadequate deal for the country's 21 million electricity consumers and it called for big price cuts. The report also made the most damning comments about the behaviour of many of the people who now head those organisations, about their salaries, about share options and about the ever-increasing profits and dividends. The people appointed by the then Secretary of State for Energy now criticise what is happening.

I should like to comment on a paper that I and other hon. Members have received from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. I am sure that those authorities cover all the political parties represented here. The association is in total support of the Bill. It says that the Bill will certainly help to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and will help energy conservation, and that the enormous numbers of people—some 7 million in this country—who sadly suffer from fuel poverty can only benefit from such legislation. It adds that every year some 40,000 people in Britain die because they cannot afford to have their homes properly heated. Any number of our constituents will tell us the same thing.

The AMA also says that such measures would create employment. No doubt people will ask, as they so often do, "Where will the money come from?" What about the enormous resources that local authorities gained from the sale of their housing stock? Many authorities, irrespective of the political party in control, are begging the Government to allow them to spend that money. If they were allowed to spend just some of those enormous resources on the measures that the Bill seeks to introduce, it would help to create employment as well as to improve local authority housing stock.

I hope that the Bill will be given a fair wind in Committee because there is no doubt that those whom we seek to represent fully support it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Protection of Dogs Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.20 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is rather appropriate that we should be about to debate a Bill which deals with the bolting of the fox. I have just this moment had a parliamentary answer handed to me from which it is clear that one fox has just bolted: it has been revealed that, when the Prime Minister instructed the Foreign Secretary to overrule the memorandum from the accounting officer, it was the first time in history that a Prime Minister had ever taken such action. I might add that, if it were not a Friday, I should request an emergency debate on the situation under Standing Order No. 20.

It has been suggested by opponents of the Bill that it is a back-door route to banning fox hunting. I only wish that it were; I wish that it were grander in its range and could achieve that objective. Had I drawn an earlier place in the ballot, my Bill might have been debated first and I might not have had to wait through a one-hour filibuster by a Minister on the previous Bill. If that had been the case, I would, indeed, have introduced a Bill on fox hunting because I find it so contemptible and unacceptable. To me, the fox hunt is a case for the socially pretentious coming together with the individually inadequate. It seems a grotesque parody to call it sport. It is astonishing to think that a regiment of light infantry should have to be amassed behind a pack of hounds in order to pursue one wretched fox.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The right hon. Gentleman may be aware that I used to be in the Army. Will he accept my assurance that the light infantry tend to be on foot? I think that he is more likely to be referring to the dragoons or the hussars or the cavalry, who tend to ride horses.

Mr. Williams: I intended to say "light cavalry", and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for correcting me if I said otherwise. That is not really of much importance, however. The fact is that it is hard to think of a more inept and less competent and efficient way of trying to dispose of one poor fox.

The public has the false impression that, after the fox has run and gone to ground, it is safe and—in the true sporting spirit—lives to run and flee another day. But, of course, we are dealing with a gentleman's sport, so no such luck for the poor fox. As soon as it goes to earth, the hounds mark the spot, are taken away and the terrier men—the thugs of the hunt scene—are sent in with their terriers and spades to dig the wretched creature out. The terrier is put into the burrow, or wherever the fox has gone to earth, and has to fight with the fox underground and try to make it bolt or drag it out. A video produced by the League Against Cruel Sports shows a case involving the New Forest hunt, where the fox had sought refuge in a culvert that was half-filled with water. The terrier was forced into it. It did not want to go in. Eventually, it emerged with its jaws embedded in the lower jaw of the fox, towing it out of the lair, whereupon the terrier men stood on the fox and eventually killed it. That was probably the kindest thing that they did to it that day.

The attitude of a terrier man is best summed up in an article in a journal called "Earth Dog, Running Dog". In it, someone observes that another journalist had said that, because there was a video camera around, the terrier men would have been wiser to leave the fox alone and keep quiet about their normal practices. The writer of the journal is not such a timid character. He said that the terrier men of the New Forest were digging out a fox while antis were present, complete with a video camera. The terrier drew the fox from a drain and the terrier men then stood on it and shot it. He said that that is perfectly acceptable and completely necessary for hunting to have any meaning. He goes on to ask whether we have not given in enough to antis, and salutes the terrier men and everyone involved with the hunt, who carry out their sport in the face of some of the most blatant and violent intimidation and harrassment.

Those poor kindly huntsmen on horseback are being viciously intimidated by people who care to film what they are doing to a helpless creature. It really is unbelievable that fox hunting can be deemed to be a sport. But the terrier men do not only attach themselves to the hunt. They become a so-called sport in their own right. There are some 5,000 of them around the country. Numerous incidents are reported where the terrier, having been put in to try to flush out the fox, is lost not only for hours but sometimes days, and where it is crushed and killed in trying to get to the fox. So sporting are those terrier men that they even boast about the scars that their pets sport.

My Bill is intended to protect both victims of the terrier men—the fox or other wild animal that has gone to earth and the terriers that are supposed to be their pets.

2.28 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I hope that the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) will accept my assurance that, first, I do not hunt; and secondly, I am a keen advocate of the welfare of animals, both wild and otherwise. However, I find the Bill deeply flawed. There is much in it that I do not think that the House should be asked to consider.

I note that it would be an offence to allow a dog to enter the subterranean refuge of any wild animal. That goes completely against the nature of dogs. I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) owns a dog.

Mr. Alan Williams *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Robathan: I see that he does not. However, I do and I was brought up with dogs. I currently own a very lovely Labrador called Otter. As a Labrador retriever, it is her nature to retrieve things. She will retrieve anything because that is what she was brought up to do. Such dogs originally retrieved fish in Labrador.

We used to have a border terrier. She was a very charming little dog called Pippa. She lived with children and never bit a child in her life. However, it was her nature to go underground and kill things. That is what she liked doing. One cannot argue with the nature of dogs. It distresses me that people who perhaps do not own dogs would go against that.

I notice that rabbits are excluded.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 18 February.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

HEDGEROWS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 18 February.

INSHORE FISHING (SCOTLAND) BILL [LORDS]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 11 February.

Passport Fraud

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Having been successful in securing this Adjournment debate, I want to raise the subject of passport fraud. My subject today will range from my personal experience of three cases in which my constituents have been involved and I hope then to exploit what I consider to be a larger example of where there may be problems.

The particular case that I want to outline before referring to two others is that of my constituent Mr. Smith. In 1991, he called at the passport office in Petit France to renew his and his wife's passports. Like many other people, Mr. Smith took with him his own birth certificate and a copy of his wife's. I understand, and most people will now know, that that is not necessary, but many people take those documents in the belief that that is necessary.

At no time at that point was Mr. Smith told that it was not necessary for him to bring those documents and he was certainly not handed his birth certificate back when he took it in. Fourteen days after his visit, his new passport arrived as promised. It was not until August 1991, when the couple were about to go on holiday, that they discovered that Mrs. Smith's photocopied birth certificate had been returned but that her husband's original certificate, dating back to 1921, had not.

Mr. Smith immediately wrote to the passport office, but received no reply. He later discovered that the birth certificate of his 10-year-old grandson had also not been returned by the passport office. Mr. Smith took up both those cases with my predecessor, now Lord Tebbit. After failing to receive a satisfactory answer, he pursued the matter himself.

My predecessor was told by the United Kingdom Passport Agency that Mr. Smith's birth certificate was never recorded as being present with the documents that were handed in. If the birth certificate was not needed, why did the official accept it? That is the first question that I should like answered. If it was not needed, it was obviously easy, to lose in the system as no record of it would have been, necessary.

In February 1992, Mr. Smith was contacted by the Home Office requesting details of his grandson's birth certificate. Mr. Smith provided details of his grandson's name and all the other relevant details. He was then contacted by the Passport Agency saying that it had no trace of his birth certificate, but that that of his grandson had been found.

The official promised to send his grandson's birth certificate back immediately with all the details appertaining to it. Mr. Smith discussed matters further. However, when the package arrived two days later the birth certificate was not the original that had been handed in but a rather badly hand-written copy containing the information that Mr. Smith had given the Home Office at the time. The original certificate, of which the families had a photocopy at home, had been type-written and was dated 1980 while the new hand-written certificate was dated 1989. The family had a photocopy and were able to compare the two.

In all my correspondence with the United Kingdom Passport Agency once I took up the matter, the chief executive persistently said that they had no record of Mr. Smith's birth certificate and that no certificate was ever lodged. Officials have never accepted the fact that Mr. Smith's grandson did not receive his original birth certificate back from the passport office. I wonder why they need to go through this charade when it is clear that it was not the original that was sent in with the grandson's details and he has never had the original back.

When Mr. Smith went to have a duplicate birth certificate issued by the local registrar—this is especially interesting and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to bear this point in mind—he was told by the registrar that the main cause for people having to get new birth certificates was the claim that the original had been lost by the passport office, and occasionally by the Department of Social Security. I therefore begin to touch on the larger issue of which my hon. Friend is aware. I wonder how many times this happens and we do not know about it.

Mr. Smith has been reassured by Mr. Lonsdale, the chief executive of the United Kingdom Passport Agency:

> "The UK Passport Agency undertakes a variety of checks on the bona fides of applicants for passports. I hope it will re-assure you to know that if in the future an application is received with your particulars it will be carefully scrutinised and a passport issued only when we are satisfied that it was made by you personally."

While that reassures my constituent, I am surprised that Mr. Lonsdale felt it necessary to say that if there was not something else nagging at the back of his mind with the knowledge of what happens to other people.

I raise the issue of another of my constituents, Mr. Goobey, who was on an extended holiday in Norway in 1992. He sent his Norwegian fiancée's passport to the immigration and nationality department to be stamped for residency status. Required with that application was her future husband's birth certificate. All the documents bar the birth certificate were returned.

Despite writing four letters about the loss of the birth certificate, Mr. Goobey did not receive any explanation for its loss until I finally took up the case with the chief executive. Once again, I was given the explanation that there was

> "no trace of its receipt".

However, the document was needed for his fiancée's residency to be given. How did she receive that status if the Department had no record of the document ever having been with the other documentation?

Essentially, I am concerned that, despite my correspondence with the Passport Agency, we seem to have been constantly fobbed off. I wonder how many other people are perhaps fobbed off and do not take up the issue with their Members of Parliament. Perhaps they are not even aware that something has gone wrong, or perhaps they accept that there was some mistake and say nothing about it.

I am reminded of the case of a crack dealer arrested in Hackney in 1991. The man claimed to be Mr. Joshua William Saunders aged 40 from St. Pancras. After investigation, it was discovered that he was Michael George Morrison aged 32 of Kingston, Jamaica who was wanted in Kansas City for drugs and firearms offences. The real Mr. Saunders is still alive and living in this country. What certainty do I have to give my constituent Mr. Smith that someone dealing in illegal substances is not using his identity to travel between countries?

There is also the story of Donald Brown—I discovered that he is known as one-eyed Donald—who is known to the immigration and police services. He has been deported from Britain five times and has managed to return with a different identity each time.

I am worried about the ease with which agents can obtain birth certificates. I understand that there is a strong and big business in dealing in false passports and birth certificates. I am reminded that Dominic Arkwright did a piece for Radio 4's "Today" programme about trafficking in these documents.

I am also reminded of the recent case in the *Daily Mail* where the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey)—I told the hon. Lady that I would be raising this issue—was tricked into assisting a constituent in his claim for a variety of benefits. This is no reflection on the hon. Lady; it is simply an illustration of how this individual managed to run a particular issue past her. It was later discovered that he had obtained birth certificates, false driving licences and bogus rent books. He said that it had been as easy as "taking candy from children".

The ease of obtaining another identity was highlighted in that rather good book, "The Day of the Jackal", where it was pointed out—I suspect to the whole world—how easy it was. All that was needed was an hour because birth certificates are public documents. A person can apply for anyone's certificate so long as he writes with the relevant references. It is estimated that only 5 per cent. of those application forms are checked, and there have been cases in which "agents" have applied for up to 20 birth certificates at a time.

The book was published in 1971, and 23 years later it appears that the loophole remains open. I note that the Government published a White Paper on the matter in January 1990, entitled "Registration Proposals for Change", in which tighter regulations were proposed. The document stated:

> "Those requiring certified copies will have to complete a more comprehensive application form resembling that for a passport. Applicants will be required to identify themselves, state their relationship to the subject of the required certificate and the purpose, official or otherwise, for which it is required. They will also be asked to give their address and this may be confirmed before the certificate is issued. A statutory power will be introduced enabling the Registrar General and local registrars to refuse to issue certified copies unless reasonably satisfied of the identity and entitlement of the applicant."

I know that those proposals were probably welcomed by all parties at the time. I urge my hon. Friend to implement them as soon as possible. I understand that the implementation of the proposals is connected with the review of local government, but the loophole will be exploited each week, month or year that it remains open. I believe that it is probably being exploited even as I talk today.

Jamaican yardies realised in 1988 that there was a lack of visa requirements for travel to the United States. That requirement was dropped in America, and it became inviting to them. I only use yardies as an example; others may have different purposes for travelling to and from the United States. It became inviting for people such as them to have possession of a British passport because they did not need the second check of a visa. The use of a British passport gave people who otherwise might not have the ability to travel between the two continents that possibility.

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

British passports are not the only ones which can be false; I accept that a fire in Kingston, Jamaica destroyed many records and made things difficult.

Blank passports and birth certificates have been stolen from HMSO printers in Manchester, and I gather that in 1992 at least 100 were stolen from Petty France. I believe that a man and women were arrested in Petty France in 1991 for possessing blank passports and that they are now serving time.

Those who deal in drugs have no shortage of money and can put up large bribes. I am extremely concerned about that in the light of the recent discovery that there were 20 illegal immigrants working in the Home Office, as reported in last weekend's Sunday papers. I assume that it is correct information, although I have not been able to check it myself. That means that we need to be more careful and to have greater checks within that area.

I am rather concerned that there seem to be a number of ways in which those wishing to abuse the system can do so. It is not just passport fraud for which the documents are used. Anyone living here with five different identities can surely go on to claim all sorts of other benefits. While I am the first to stand up for everybody's right to claim benefits to which they are entitled, it concerns me that we have a large amount of benefit fraud. I urge my hon. Friend to look at the matter with regard to my constituents. I am particularly worried at the way in which they have been treated by the passport office. They have never received the answer that I believe is their due. They could have been given much clearer and simpler answers and perhaps greater checks could have been made.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to assure me that tighter restrictions are in force in the Home Office and that we shall not see repetitions of what has happened to my constituents and others.

2.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on his success in obtaining this important debate. In a few moments, I shall talk about the subject of passport fraud in general. Before I do so, may I tell him how pleased I am that he referred to the specific case raised by Mr. Ronald Smith, who has had a long and distinguished career in public service. As my hon. Friend said, Mr. Smith raised the case with my hon. Friend's predecessor, now Lord Tebbit. There has been a certain amount of correspondence on that case.

There are always people who will seek to benefit by beating the system in one way or another. In the case of commercial or banking fraud, the benefit to the fraudster is usually financial gain. In the case of passport fraud, the benefit to the end user is usually the ability to outwit the immigration and nationality controls of this country or a country overseas.

My hon. Friend will recall from his excellent work in the Committee stage of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, that the problems faced by the immigration service at passport control go much wider than the question of British passports. He will recall the talk then about forged documents of a wide variety—not necessarily British passports. My hon. Friend quoted many examples. I am sure that he will bear it in mind that in many of those cases the process of fraud did not necessarily involve a fraudulently obtained or forged British passport.

My hon. Friend will also wish to know that the birth certificate is not used as evidence of identity. I shall enlarge on that in a few moments. He also mentioned a report in this week's *The Sunday Times* about an allegation that 20 illegal immigrants worked in the Home Office. I hope that my hon. Friend and the House will be reassured to know that I have written to the editor of that newspaper making it clear that there is no substance to that allegation.

Some end users are willing to pay large sums of money to obtain a passport fraudulently, so there will always be middlemen trying to obtain passports on their behalf. As I shall seek to show, that is something about which we are constantly watchful.

It is the task of the United Kingdom Passport Agency, which is responsible for the six passport offices at Belfast, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Newport and Peterborough, to take steps to defeat the fraudulent passport applicant. The embassies and consulates of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have a similar responsibility overseas. It may be helpful if I describe in broad outline the security procedures that are followed, which I have personally seen in action on my visits to different passport offices. For obvious reasons, I shall try to avoid giving away any details that would be of assistance to the criminal mind. I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate that I must be careful about that.

All standard passport applications have to be made on an official passport application form. There are separate forms for new passports and replacement passports, and for amendments to existing passports such as the addition of children or a change of surname, for example, on marriage. The procedures vary slightly for the different types of application. In the case of an application for a new passport, the applicant is required to give evidence of his identity by having his application and his passport photograph countersigned by a responsible person who has known him or her personally for at least two years. There is sometimes criticism about limiting the people who can countersign a passport application to those who are professionally qualified or of a similar standing, but it is obviously vital that we should be able to trust the person who provides evidence of identity.

My hon. Friend will recall that the passport application form clearly states, in the form of a caution:

> "You are warned that the making of an untrue statement for the purpose of procuring a passport is a criminal offence."

So the warning is perfectly clear for anyone who serves as a countersignatory, as well as for an applicant.

As we often make inquiries to check that the person said to have countersigned the application and the photograph has done so, it helps if the countersignatory has a place of work where he or she can be contacted during normal working hours.

I understand that in Canada the only people who can countersign an application for a new passport are those who have been accepted for inclusion on a special list of countersignatories. We have not reached that point here yet, but it has been suggested in some quarters that all new passport applications should come through solicitors, who would vouch for the identity of applicants and the authenticity of the relevant documents. We have so far resisted that suggestion, on the grounds that the inconvenience and expense would not be justified for the great mass of applicants. It will be clear from my remarks that a birth certificate is not taken as evidence of identity.

In addition to evidence of identity, we require evidence of nationality. For most adults born in this country, a certificate of their birth is sufficient for that purpose—not for identity, but to establish that other fact. For those born abroad, the relevant documents may be certificates of naturalisation, registration, birth or marriage, as appropriate to the circumstances.

Mr. Duncan Smith: A birth certificate could be used to obtain proof of identity in another sphere, which could then be used to help the applicant to obtain a passport.

Mr. Wardle: As I sought to explain to my hon. Friend, because identity is sought by separate means, identification does not hinge on the birth certificate.

I appreciate the significance that many people attach to their birth certificates and to those of their families. However, what we call the original birth certificate is in fact a copy of the details contained in the relevant register of births. The legal position is that anyone can quite properly obtain the birth certificate of any other person if they have sufficient information about the birth to identify the registration from the public indexes and if they pay the statutory fee. Such public access to specific records has been a feature of our civil registration system since its inception in 1837. We are mindful of the fact that a birth certificate cannot, or should not, be seen to be evidence of identity for a passport application, because the certificates are so readily obtainable.

I come to the particular case that my hon. Friend mentioned today. When I say particular, I mean the case of Mr. Ronald Smith. I shall write to my hon. Friend about the case of Mr. Smith's grandson and, as I know Mr. Smith's son-in-law—I think that my hon. Friend does, too—I shall pay particular attention to the reply that I send my hon. Friend in that regard. I shall also write to him about the case of Mr. Goobey.

The essence of Mr. Smith's case is that he has informed us that he deposited his birth certificate with the London passport office when he applied for a replacement passport. The office says that it has no record of having received it and that because it was an application for a replacement passport, rather than a new one, the person who examined Mr. Smith's application at the counter would have relied on Mr. Smith's previous passport, which was retained and subsequently returned. That previous passport would have been pivotal in the application for a replacement. At this distance in time, it is not possible to resolve the uncertainty conclusively one way or another, but I wished to set out the circumstances.

Mr. Smith's real concern, however, is that his birth certificate might be misused by someone else to apply for a passport fraudulently. There, I think that I can give him some reassurance. As I have explained, anyone who so wishes can obtain a copy of Mr. Smith's birth certificate from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys by providing certain details and paying the statutory fee. As a result and as I have explained, the passport office does not accept a birth certificate as evidence of identity.

Anyone wishing to obtain a passport fraudulently using Mr. Smith's or anyone else's birth certificate would need to provide evidence of identity, by means of a countersignature of the passport application, and photograph by a responsible person who has known him personally for at least two years. Passport office staff are specially trained to look at all aspects of a passport application and its supporting documentation to see whether a fraudulent application is being made.

In addition to the normal checks operated by all passport office staff, special fraud detection teams in each passport office liaise closely with the police. They have had considerable success. In 1992, some 800 cases of suspected fraudulent passport applications were referred to the police.

The criminal law provides severe penalties for those who are found guilty of offences in connection with passport fraud. Those vary, depending on the precise form the fraud has taken, but can be up to 10 years' imprisonment under the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981. Charges may also be brought under the Criminal Law Act 1977 and the Immigration Act 1971.

The passport office's files are full of cases of attempted fraud. I shall cite just one, because my time is limited. It is a case where a postal passport application from Chelmsford was sent to the Peterborough passport office, apparently countersigned by a London-based solicitor. The staff at Peterborough were suspicious of the application and checked with the solicitor, who denied having signed the form. Checks were then made with the Passport Agency's main passport index, with St. Catherine's house and the City of London police. Those revealed that the application was being made on behalf of a person in Tenerife who was wanted by the United States authorities for an alleged multi-million pound fraud. As a result of the inquiries, the person concerned was arrested in Tenerife and extradited to the United States to face trail.

Although this debate is primarily about passport fraud, we should also remember that the primary purpose of the passport service is to provide British passports promptly and economically to those who qualify for them. This is an area in whch there have been significant improvements in recent years, while always taking into account the importance of pursuing and identifying fraudulent applications as diligently as possible.

The Passport Agency was set up as an executive agency of the Home Office in April 1991, as part of the Government's next steps programme. The agency issues more than 3 million passports a year. At this time of the year, that means that, at the six passport offices, a total of more than 20,000 passport applications are received each working day. The House will appreciate that that considerable volume of business needs to be handled carefully but speedily.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary sets customer service targets for the turnround time for processing straightforward, properly completed passport applications. He also sets targets for reducing unit costs. The main customer service target is to process straightforward, properly completed applications in a maximum of 20 working days in the period from January to June—the busiest time of year—15 working days in July and August, and 10 working days in September to December. Over the year as a whole, the target is to process those applications in an average of nine working days.

I am pleased to say that all these targets have been met. In addition, in its first two years as an executive agency, the Passport Agency has reduced its unit costs by over 4 per cent. in real terms. Regular surveys have shown that

[Mr. Wardle]

customer satisfaction is very high and the Passport Agency has been awarded a charter mark for excellence in the provision of public services.

As I have explained, the passport offices put great emphasis on the prevention and detection of passport fraud. They liaise closely with the police, Customs and Excise and the immigration service, exchanging information about developments in the world of passport and visa fraud. The new-style British passport contains a number of advanced security features, making it more difficult for the personal details or photograph to be changed after issue.

It is vital that the battle against passport fraud should be waged vigorously and continuously by improved technology and in other ways. At the same time, we must recognise the interests of the vast majority of applicants who are honest and law-abiding, and are entitled to obtain a passport for holiday or business purposes without too much hassle and expense. As in so many things in the Home Office sphere of operation, it is a question of achieving the right balance between security and convenience. I hope that I have been able to show my hon. Friend that, in the case of Mr. Smith and the other cases which he cited, that is the approach taken by the passport office. I hope that this debate has clarified some of the issues and provided reassurance to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 24 January 1994

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Property Investment Advisers

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners who are the current property investment advisers to the Church Commissioners; and for how long they have been retained in that position.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners' assets committee is advised on property matters by a group comprising Mr. J. H. M. Newsum, BSc., FRICS, Mr. G. E. Richardson, FRICS, and Sir Christopher Wates, FCA, which was set up last year. DTZ Debenham Thorpe were also appointed last year to provide independent valuations of, and strategic advice on, commercial property investments. The committee also receives advice from the following firms of chartered surveyors, to which properties have been entrusted for day-to-day management:

	Since:
Chestertons	1954
Cluttons	1948
Donaldsons	1988
Hillier Parker May and Rowden	1983
Smith Gore	1948
Victor Behrens, Sandhurst and Co	1973
Wardell Armstrong	1982

NATIONAL FINANCE

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January at column *849*.

Ministerial Cars

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will quantify the cost of the factors which led to an increase in the cost of cars for Ministers in his Department since 1990-91.

Mr. Nelson: There are two main factors which have led to an increase in the cost per Government car service car for Ministers in my Department. The first is the effect of inflation which, since 1990-91, has added some 12 per cent. to GCS costs, particularly pay, vehicles and fuel. The second factor is that during the period the GCS restructured its charge to reflect the fact that it had been under-recovering its costs by some 15 per cent.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Government Departments have had responsibility for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise Department since 1979.

Sir John Cope: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is a separate Department of Government managed by commissioners appointed by the Queen. Treasury Ministers have, for the period from 1979—and long before—had responsibility for the Department.

Value Added Tax (Service Charges)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent and in what circumstances VAT will be added to service charges in respect of the supply of energy.

Sir John Cope: Certain services associated with the supply of energy, for example maintenance of appliances and pipes on the consumer's side of the meter, are already subject to the standard rate of VAT. Other services which are currently seen as an integral part of the supply of energy, such as meter rental and disconnection and reconnection services, will continue to follow the liability of the fuel and for domestic consumers will therefore be subject to 8 per cent. VAT from 1 April 1994 and the standard rate from 1 April 1995. First-time connection to the gas and electricity mains will, however, continue to be relieved for VAT.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* columns *357-58,* what estimate he has made of the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 resulting from the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Nelson: I estimate that there will be no net extra cost.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the organisation of executive offices in the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue has today announced further moves towards a smaller number of larger executive offices.

With effect from 1 April 1994 the controller of claims branch will assume responsibility for the office of the inspector of foreign dividends and the two executive offices will be managed as one.

Also with effect from 1 April 1994 the controller of the capital taxes offices—England, Wales and Northern Ireland—will assume responsibility for the capital taxes office—Scotland—and the two offices will be managed as one.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has made of the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 resulting from the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The provision for statutory sick pay is included within the Department's existing running costs baseline. The cost to the Department of statutory sick pay is notional. Any additional cost to the Department arising from the need to cover sick absence would be absorbed within the baseline.

Patient S

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department why the case of Patient S which was heard on Friday 14 January was heard in camera; and why the patient was not named.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In accordance with rule 36 of the Court of Protection Rules 1984 all patients' cases are heard in chambers to which the public have no access unless the judge otherwise directs. This rule is designed to protect the anonymity of mentally inacapable patients should they ever recover.

Liverpool Legal Aid Board

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his latest estimate for 1993-94 of the percentage of legal aid applications processed by *(a)* the Merseyside area office and *(b)* the Liverpool legal aid board within (i) two weeks and (ii) six weeks.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There is only one legal aid area office in Liverpool, which serves the Merseyside area. The targets set by the Legal Aid Board nationally for processing legal aid applications in 1993-94 are 70 per cent. within two weeks and 90 per cent. within six weeks. The performance of the Liverpool area office in the year to date—from 1 April 1993 to November 1993, the most recent month for which figures are available—has been 70·3 per cent. of applications within two weeks and 93·5 per cent. within six weeks. It is estimated that for the year as a whole Liverpool area office will more than meet the national performance targets.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects the Liverpool legal aid board will achieve BS5750 accreditation; what the cost is of gaining accreditation; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for seeking BS5750 accreditation.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Legal Aid Board as a whole, including the Liverpool area office, received accreditation under BS5750 from Lloyd's register quality assurance in November 1993. The cost attributable to accrediting the Liverpool area office was approximately £20,000.

The board's purpose in adopting BS5750 was to become more efficient throughout the organisation by adopting, so far as possible, common, documented, working systems; to demonstrate a commitment to quality; and to provide assurance that the improved systems of control it had introduced and would be introducing in the future would be applied throughout the organisation on a consistent and correct basis.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of legal aid applications between 1992-93 were processed by the Liverpool legal aid board within *(a)* two weeks and *(b)* six weeks.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The targets set by the Legal Aid Board for processing legal aid applications in 1992-93 were 60 per cent. within two weeks and 85 per cent. within six weeks. The performance of the Liverpool area office was 73 per cent. of applications within two weeks and 92 per cent. within six weeks, both above the national average.

Small Claims Court

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to reform the small claims court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Significant changes were made to procedures in this forum in October 1992, including an increased responsibility for the judge to assist unrepresented parties in putting their case and provision for litigants to be assisted by lay representatives.

Public consultation has recently taken place on proposals for the automatic reference of unliquidated claims falling below the small claims limit into this forum, and for a new procedure for small personal injury claims. My Department is currently analysing the response to his consultation.

In the light of these changes, the Lord Chancellor does not currently have any intention of "reforming" the small claims arbitration procedure in any more extensive way, although he has been open about his intention to keep the small claims limit under review and to raise it in due course.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many official Christmas cards were sent out in 1993 by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* civil servants and *(c)* staff of Government agencies working in or to his Department, and how much these cards cost (i) to buy, (ii) to post and (iii) in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is as follows:

	Amount sent	*Purchase price*	*Postage cost*	*Cost in staff time*
Lord Chancellor	201	Own purchase	£53	£72
Parliamentary Secretary	50	£13	£6	£44

	Amount sent	*Purchase price*	*Postage cost*	*Cost in staff time*
Civil Servants	1,168	£1,028	£226	£155
Agencies	689	£423	£127	£227

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will now make it his policy to publish the level of Export Credits Guarantee Department claims payments in regard to Iraq for each year since 1979.

Mr. Needham: The amounts paid out by year on ECGD's top claims markets are now detailed in the Department's annual report, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Since 1990-91 Iraq has featured in the list. ECGD's 1992-93 report will be presented to Parliament later this month.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Export Credits Guarantee Department loans were outstanding to Iraq at *(a)* 2 August 1990 and *(b)* 15 January 1991.

Mr. Needham: At the 2 August 1990 there were 28 ECGD-backed loans outstanding on Iraq. This total remained unchanged as at 15 January 1991.

Allivane Group

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information his Department holds regarding the trading activities of *(a)* Allivane International Group and *(b)* Allivane International Ltd., respectively, with (i) Saudi Arabia, (ii) Jordan, (iii) Yugoslavia, (iv) Portugal, (v) Iran and (vi) Iraq since 1983.

Mr. Needham: It has been the practice of successive Administrations not to disclose information supplied in confidence by or about applicants for export licences.

Export Licence Applications

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade under what conditions he is prepared to reveal details of particular export licensing applications.

Mr. Needham: It has been the practice of successive Administrations not to disclose information supplied in confidence by or about applicants for export licences. However, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is prepared to disclose information in circumstances where he considers that the public interest overrides considerations of confidentiality. One such consideration is the need to avoid helping those who seek to evade export controls.

Electric Cars

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance his Department has given to the PSA (Peugeot)/City of Coventry Electric car project research into the viability of a pay-as-you-drive electric car hire scheme.

Mr. Sainsbury: None.

Instruments of Torture (Export)

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Government's policy on the export of instruments of torture.

Mr. Needham: As I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) on 12 January, *Official Report,* column *168,* the Government deeply deprecate the export of any equipment knowingly to be used as an instrument of torture. The difficulty in this area lies in the fact that many perfectly innocuous goods may be misused for such purposes overseas and it is not practical to control the export of such items. However, if any such cases are brought to the Government's attention we shall make the strongest possible representations to those involved; if they are ignored, we will examine what steps could be taken to prevent export taking place. When realistic, enforceable controls are possible we can act urgently to impose them.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Renewable Energy Advisory Committee.

Mr. Eggar: The renewable Energy Advisory Committee consists of DTI and other Government officials and independent members. The independent members are as follows:

Member	
Mr. Gerald Leach	Consultant to the Stockholm Environment Institute
Mr. Richard Morris	Portlea.Ltd.
Mr. Alan Tweedale	Energy Supplies Ltd.
Dr. Gordon Walker	SERC, Rutherford Appleton laboratory
Dr. Ann Wheldon	Department of Engineering, university of Reading
Mr. J. Paul White	Norweb plc

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Overseas Projects Board

Mr. Needham: The members currently appointed to the Overseas Projects Board are:

Overseas Projects Board
Members

Sir Alan Cockshaw
Chairman
AMEC plc

Mr. C. H. Brown
Chief Executive, British Gas plc

Mr. B. P. Dewe Mathews
Director, J. Henry Schroder Wagg and Co. Ltd.

Professor G. Fleming BSc PhD
Department of Civil Engineering
University of Strathclyde

Mr. R. T. Fox CBE
Vice Chairman, Kleinwort Benson Group plc

Mr. S. Gillibrand CBE
Vice Chairman, British Aerospace plc

Mr. D. O. Lloyd
Director, Sir William Halcrow and Partners Ltd.

Mr. I. W. Reeves
Chairman, High Point plc

Mr. A. White CBE
Chairman, Biwater Ltd.

Mr. P. Hills
Executive Director
Samuel Montagu

Mr. F. Kennedy
Executive Board Director
George Wimpey plc

Sir Wilfrid Newton
Chairman
London Regional Transport

Mr. D. Jefferies
Chairman, National Grid Company

Sir Desmond Pitcher
Chairman
North West Water Group

Mr. P. L. Lockton CBE
Managing Director
Rolls-Royce India Ltd.

Mr. K. A. Bray
Managing Director
GEC Asthom

Mr. R. Beresford
Managing Director
Mott McDonald

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Export Guarantees Advisory Council.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

R. T. Fox, Esq, CBE *(Chairman)*
A. G. Gormly, Esq, CBE *(Deputy Chairman)*
Sir Robert Davidson
B. P. Dewe Mathews, Esq
T. M. Evans, Esq, CBE
Sir Frank Lampl
G. W. Lynch, Esq
J. W. Melbourn, Esq, CBE
D. B. Newlands, Esq
C. R. Smallwood, Esq
Sir Derek Thomas, KCMG
Viscount Weir

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Advisory Council on Research and Development.

Mr. Eggar: ACORD has been dissolved. I announced this to the House at the same time as the membership of the new energy advisory panel on 27 October 1993, *Official Report*, columns *645-47*.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Insolvency Practitioners Tribunal.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The chairmen and members currently appointed to the Insolvency Practitioners Tribunal are as follows:

Chairmen:	
J. M. Bowers	Retired solicitor
J. P. Brooks	Retired QC
N. A. Halton	Legal counsel, ESSO
W. S. James	Registrar in bankruptcy
J. H. Vallat	Barrister and solicitor
Members:	
M. Clark	Retired inspector general
G. B. Duffin	Retired accountant
J. W. Dyson	N/K
P. W. Farmery	Barrister
A. D. Gwyther	Retired inspector general
M. G. M. Haines	Chartered accountant
E. G. Harper	Retired inspector general
Mrs. B. Kalisch-Brodkin	Solicitor
E. W. McDowell	Retired accountant
E. P. Morris	Consultant on information systems
B. Phillips	Retired accountant
M. Prior	Solicitor
J. A. Simmonds	Registrar in bankruptcy
D. G. Slidders	Retired accountant
Mrs. E. M. Stanton	N/K
El Walker-Arnott	Solicitor
I. G. Watt	Chartered accountant
G. A. Weiss	Chartered accountant
Mrs. Moira Black	Chartered accountant

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Policyholders Protection Board.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The current members of the Policyholders Protection Board are:

Sir Roger Neville—*Chairman*	Group chief executive of the Sun Alliance group
Mr. Richard Gamble	Group chief executive of Royal Insurance
Mr. Michael Willett	Chairman of Britannic Assurance plc
Mr. Roy Adkins	A member of the Insolvency Steering Board
Ms Helena Wiesner	An independent consumer affairs consultant

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Advisory Committee on Arbitration Law.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The members currently appointed to the Advisory Committee on Arbitration Law are:

The Rt. Hon. Lord Justice Steyn—*Chairman*
Martin Hunter, Esq.—*Vice-Chairman*
A W. S. Bunch. Esq.
S. C. Boyd, Esq, QC
Dr. K. G. Chrystie
Lord Dervaird
J. B. Garrett, Esq.
Professor R. M. Goode, CBE, QC, FBA
Mrs. P. Kirby-Johnson
R. A. MacCrindle, Esq, QC
A. L. Marriott, Esq.
K. S. Rokison, Esq, QC
D. A. G. Sarre, Esq.
J. H. M. Sims, Esq.
Professor D. R. Thomas
Professor John Uff, QC
V. V. Veeder, Esq, QC

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The current members of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission are:

Chairman
Graeme Odgers

Deputy Chairmen
Peter Dean, CBE
Dan Goyder
Hans Liesner, CB

Other members
Alan Armstrong
Ian Barter
Professor Michael Beesley, CBE
Catherine M. Blight
Patrick Brenan
John S. Bridgeman
Roger Davies
Professor Sam Eilon
James Evans
Alexander Ferry, MBE
Nicholas Finney, OBE
Sir Archibald Forster
Sir Ronald Halstead, CBE
Patricia Hodgson
Michael Hoffman
David Jenkins, MBE
Leonard Kingshott
Graham Mather
Nigel Matthews
Professor Stanley Metcalfe, CBE
Professor Patrick Minford
John Montgomery, JP
Dr. Derek Morris
Professor John Pickering
Leslie Priestley
M. Richard Prosser
Ann Robinson
James Roe
Lynda Rouse
David Thomson
Clare Tritton, QC
Professor Geoffrey Whittington

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the electricity consumers committee for each region.

Mr. Eggar: Under the Electricity Act 1989 the Director General of Electricity Supply must consult the Secretary of State on the appointment of chairmen to the regional electricity consumers committees. A list of chairmen was published in the Office of Electricity Regulation's annual report of 1992, which has been presented to Parliament in pursuance of section 50 of the Act. Other members of the committees are appointed by the director general in consultation with the individual chairmen. I have asked the director general to send the hon. Member a list of all current consumer committee members.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the advisory panel on deregulation.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The eight members of the advisory panel on deregulation are:

	Company
Chairman	
Sir Nigel Mobbs, DL	Slough Estates plc
Members	
Stephen Moss	Grosvenor Securities Ltd.
Richard Ellis	TSB Bank plc
Dan Wright	Albion Automotive Ltd.
John Hoare, BSc, FCA	J. R. Hoare and Co.
Tim Brooks	In Shops plc
Alan Hudson	Hudson Administration
Lewis Goodman	Norwest Consultants Ltd.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Ms Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made as to the effect of the GATT on employment.

Mr. Needham: Studies by the OECD, the World bank and a number of other independent bodies have forecast substantial gains in world income as a result of the completion of the Uruguay round.

I am therefore confident that the success of the round will bring significant increases in United Kingdom output and employment over the next decade, as well as boosting business confidence in the short term.

Coal Authority

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he plans to make available documents relating to the Coal Authority and the proposed licensing regime for the privatised coal industry.

Mr. Eggar: The Coal Industry Bill provides for the establishment of a new public sector body, the Coal Authority, to carry out a number of functions, including the licensing of coal mining.

I am today making available to the House copies of an explanatory note describing how it is envisaged that the Coal Authority will carry out those functions, and draft model licensing documents. We shall also be using those documents as the basis for a consultation exercise.

The proposed regime has been carefully designed to provide a flexible and impartial means of access to coal reserves in a way that facilitates the development of the industry, promotes competition and gives proper protection to third parties.

Renewable Energy Sources

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current annual level of expenditure by his Department into investigation of potential renewable energy sources in *(a)* wind power, *(b)* off-shore wave power, *(c)* on-shore wave power and *(d)* solar power; and if he will list the current expenditure patterns by (i) EU countries and (ii) European Free Trade Area countries.

Mr. Eggar: The annual level of research and development expenditure on these programmes over the previous three financial years—1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93—has averaged £6,630,000 for wind power, £189,000 for shoreline wave power, plus £206,000 for wave power more generally, including off-shore wave power, and £2,260,000 for solar power. My Department does not maintain records on the current expenditure patterns of either EU or EFTA countries.

Aluminium Imports

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is his policy towards imports into the EC of aluminium from Russia;

(2) if it is his policy to *(a)* extend and/or *(b)* increase EC quotas for aluminium from Russia;

(3) what assessment he has made of whether Russia is dumping aluminium in the EC.

Mr. Needham: Imports of aluminium from the former Soviet Union, and quota measures affecting them, fall within the European Community's common commercial policy. Since August 1993 there have been Community-wide quotas on FSU aluminium, which were extended for three months at the end of November 1993. It is not yet known whether there will be a further extension. The problems facing aluminium producers in the European Community and in other countries have complex origins going well beyond imports from the FSU. The United Kingdom and other EC member states have therefore agreed that the Commission should, on behalf of the Community and together with other countries, seek appropriate multilateral solutions for the longer term.

The responsibility for making a dumping complaint would lie with the Community's domestic industry. The Government are not aware of any such complaint, which would be for the Commission to investigate.

Tours Direct

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will investigate the collapse of Tours Direct and New Vista travel companies.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Tours Direct Ltd. was dissolved in October 1993 and could not be subject to Companies Act inquiries.

Such inquiries are confidential and I cannot comment on whether or not New Vista Travel Ltd. is being, or has been, investigated. Nevertheless, I am prepared to consider any information the hon. Member may provide in the usual way.

Deregulation

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the organisations he intends to contact for his further consultations on deregulation.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The views of all interested parties will be considered on proposals for deregulation.

Business Sector Representatives

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress he has made in identifying one representative from each business sector to facilitate dialogue with his Department.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade established a range of business sector divisions in the Department in 1992 and successfully recruited a business secondee into each of them to help facilitate an informed dialogue between Government and business.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *379*, what estimate he has made of the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 resulting from the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Eggar: I estimate that no additional costs will arise from the changes in statutory sick pay provision and employer's national insurance contributions, as I explained in my reply to the hon. Gentleman on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *379*.

Nora Heeren

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement regarding the consignment of arms on board the ship Nora Heeren currently anchored in the River Tamar.

Mr. Needham: It has been the practice of successive Administrations not to disclose information supplied in confidence by or about applications for export licences.

Textile Quotas

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list all east and central European countries subject to European Union textile quotas, giving the per capita income of each country and the date upon which textile quotas on each will be fully lifted;

(2) what percentage of quotas will be lifted in each of the 10 years of the phasing out of the European Union multi-fibre arrangement;

(3) if he will list all countries subject to European Union textile and clothing quotas, giving th per capita income levels of each and the dates, under the new general agreement on tariffs and trade, when such quotas will be lifted.

Mr. Needham: The recently concluded GATT provides for a phase-out of the multi-fibre arrangement over a 10-year period commencing from the date of implementation of the total GATT package. The phase-out will consist of four stages for which the following minimal levels have been set:

Stage 1: From start of year 1: 16 per cent. of total volume of textile trade based on 1990 figures will be returned to normal GATT rules and any quota restrictions in force on tariff lines included in the 16 per cent. will be removed.

Quotas not liberalised will have their levels increased by 116 per cent. of the prescribed MFA growth factor.

Stage 2: From start of year 4: a further 17 per cent. of total volume of textile trade based on 1990 figures will be returned to normal GATT rules.

Quotas not liberalised will have their levels increased by 125 per cent. of the prescribed MFA growth factor.

Stage 3: From start of year 7: a further 18 per cent. of total volume of textile trade based on 1990 figures will be returned to normal GATT rules.

Quotas not liberalised will have their levels increased by 127 per cent. of the prescribed MFA growth factor.

Stage 4: All remaining quotas will be liberalised.

The product content of each stage of the phase-out is yet to be agreed.

Following is a list of countries currently subject to European Union textile quotas—under the MFA and other arrangements. The figures indicate per capita gross domestic product in US dollars, in 1991, which is the latest year for which directly comparable figures are available:

	US$
Argentina	2,790
Belarus	[1]3,110
Brazil	2,940
Bulgaria	1,840
China	370
Czech Republic	[2]—
Hong Kong	13,430
Hungary	2,720
India	330

	US$
Indonesia	610
Macao	[2]—
Malaysia	2,520
Mongolia	[2]—
Pakistan	400
Peru	1,070
Philippines	730
Poland	1,790
Romania	1,390
Russia	[1]3,220
Singapore	14,210
Slovak Republic	[2]—
South Korea	6,330
Sri Lanka	500
Taiwan	[2]—
Thailand	1,570
Ukraine	[1]2,340
Uzbekistan	[1]1,350

[1] Estimated figures.

[2] No figure available.

Source: The World bank world development report.

Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals Task Force

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the terms of reference and membership of the chemicals and pharmaceuticals task force; and when it will report.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* The terms of reference and membership of all the business deregulation task forces was set out in the report "Deregulation Task Forces: Proposals for Reform", which was published on 19 January.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page), of 12 January, *Official Report,* column 167, if he will set out how THORP will reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Eggar: In the context of reducing the United Kingdom's carbon dioxide emissions, my hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade underlined the very important contribution made by the nuclear power generating industry. The thermal oxide reprocessing plant provides a service to that industry, which is valued by the customers, from the United Kingdom and overseas, who have placed more than £9 billion of orders.

Mines (Accidents)

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what were the numbers of serious accidents and fatalities per 100 miners employed in *(a)* British Coal pits and *(b)* private licensed mines in each year since 1964;

(2) what were the numbers of serious accidents and fatalities in *(a)* British Coal pits and *(b)* private licensed mines in each year since 1964.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available in the form requested. However, the hon. Member may wish to consult figures given in the report "The Framework for Health and Safety in Britain's Coal Mines", which was placed in the Library last October.

SOCIAL SECURITY

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January at column *849.*

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Friday 21 January at column *849.*

Housing Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average weekly level of housing benefit paid to individuals to subsidise private sector rents during the period 1982-83 to 1992-93, inclusive.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the table:

Average amount—£/week—of housing benefit for private sector rents in Great Britain.

Year[2]	*Amount of Housing Benefit (Income Support cases)*	*Amount of Housing Benefit (Non-Income Support cases)*	*All Cases*
1983	12·70	[1]—	[1]—
1984	15·00	[1]—	[1]—
1985	17·20	[1]—	[1]—
1986	19·50	[1]—	[1]—
1987	20·90	[1]—	[1]—
1988	21·88	14·47	18·78
1989	25·14	15·42	21·06
1990	30·88	18·72	25·45
1991	37·20	24·98	32·57
1992	43·20	29·66	38·45

Notes

[1] Information for housing benefit without income support cases before 1988 is not available.

[2] Figures for 1983 to 1987 inclusive are from samples taken in November or December of each year and from 1988 to 1992 from samples taken in May of each year.

Child Support Agency

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the projected running cost for the Child Support Agency in 1993-94.

Mr. Burt: The Child Support Agency's allocated budget for 1993-94 is £119·8 million.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases have now been dealt with in total by the Child Support Agency; and of that total how many were *(a)* cases where no form of agreed maintenance was in payment before the Child Support Agency became involved and *(b)* cases where a form of maintenance was in payment before the Child Support Agency became involved.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 24 January 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking for various details on the cases dealt with by the Child Support Agency.

Up to 30 November 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, the Agency had processed 157,000 cases, of which 89,600 had resulted in the arrangement of maintenance. Figures are not kept on the number of cases in which a prior maintenance agreement existed. It is estimated however, that 50 per cent. of clients will have an existing arrangement.

I hope you will find this reply helpful.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* letters and *(b)* telephone calls on the special hotline from hon. Members have been received to date by the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Dr. Tony Wright, dated 21 January 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many letters and telephone calls on the special hotline had been received by the Child Support Agency from Members of Parliament.

To 7 January 1994, the Agency had received more than 3,200 letters from Members of Parliament and had taken 180 telephone calls on the Hotline.

I hope you will find this reply helpful.

Privatisation

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will disqualify any firm that flouts his Department's guidelines over privatisation bids from taking part in the bidding process and from being involved in any way with the eventual contract.

Mr. Hague: All invitations to tender issued by this Department include specific details of the basis on which tenders must be submitted and require tenderers to produce a declaration of compliance with the stipulated conditions. If, prior to the award of the contract, we become aware that these procedures have been flouted, we will not proceed further with that tenderer.

National Insurance

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the annual contribution, for each year since 1979, of the Treasury to the national insurance fund.

Year	*Sum paid into NI Fund (£ million)*
1979-80	[1]2,343
1980-81	[1]2,848
1981-82	[1]2,433
1982-83	[1]2,591
1983-84	[1]2,807
1984-85	[1]2,597
1985-86	[1]2,163
1986-87	[1]2,412
1987-88	[1]2,135
1988-89	[1]1,653
1989-90	[2]nil
1990-91	[3]nil
1991-92	[3]nil
1992-93	[3]nil
1993-94	[3] [4]7,589

[1] Treasury supplement.

[2] Treasury supplement was abolished from 1989.

[3] From 1990-91 the NI fund has been reimbursed for the costs of statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay recovered by employers, but these amounts have been excluded because they are a reimbursement rather than a contribution to the NI fund.

[4] Treasury grant.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to prevent industrial espionage in the privatisation competition for the computer processing of national insurance records, currently carried out in-house at Longbenton, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Mr. Hague: The administration of national insurance is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Nicholas Brown, dated 21 January 1994:

As Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency I am responsible for answering questions about relevant operational matters. I have been asked to reply to your question about the steps taken to prevent industrial espionage in the competitive tendering for the computer processing of National Insurance records.

The work of the Data Entry operation at the Contributions Agency's Longbenton site falls within the Agency's Market Testing programme. The objective of Market Testing is to provide better value for money for the taxpayer through a very structured purchasing process which entails inviting bids from the private sector as well as the current civil service provider.

The Market Test of our Data Entry service is being carried out in accordance with the procurement policy as laid down by HM Treasury which observes EC Directives on the subject. As part of that process, an intensive set of tender documents which set out the Agency's business requirements has been issued to each prospective bidder. All bidders, including the In-House team, are likely to seek further information in support of their bids. To ensure equal treatment for all, an independent team deals with all enquiries and ensures that responses are copied to everyone involved in the competition. Enquiries can be made in writing, by site visit or exceptionally by telephone. When a site visit has been requested, the company concerned is met by a member of the independent team who escorts the visitors at all times. Questions are restricted to clarifying aspects of tender documentation. In no circumstances will replies be given to questions concerning how competitors' proposals to carry out the work are being developed.

The Agency has strict guidelines for staff on how to deal with any telephone enquiries. In brief, a response will not be given until the bona fides of the enquirer have been established, and in any case of doubt about the propriety of a question staff must refer the matter to a senior officer before a response is given.

The Agency treats very seriously any attempt by a competitor to obtain information which they are not entitled to receive. Any report of such activity would be thoroughly investigated and, if proven, could result in the exclusion of the offender from the bidding process.

I hope that I have clearly explained the very serious view that the Agency takes of an exercise of this nature, and that I have been able to reassure you that measures are in place to prevent any competitor gaining an unfair advantage in the tender process. If you have any further queries on the matter I would be only too pleased to discuss them with you.

Benefit Fraud

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many investigations were carried out for benefit fraud in each year since 1978-79; and what was the success rate in each of those investigations.

Mr. Hague: The administration of benefit fraud is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the right hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 21 January 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about benefit fraud.

I regret that I am unable to provide all the information you requested but I hope that the following is helpful.

The sector fraud organisation was set up in its present form only in January 1991 and although it is constantly refining the way in which statistics are maintained, figures for the period you requested are not available. Figures for the year ending 31 March 1992 are incomplete. However, from the information that is available, it is estimated that approximately 526,000 investigations were undertaken. Of these, approximately 250,000 had a positive outcome. In the year ending 31 March 1993 investigations were undertaken in approximately 560,000 cases of which 270,000 had a positive result.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Disability Claimants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many awards of the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance were made *(a)* between February 1992 and March 1993 and *(b)* between April 1993 to the present; and how many were made (i) on the grounds that the person was severely mentally impaired and displayed severe behavioural problems and (ii) under the deaf-blind provisions.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the table:

	February 1992 to March 1993	*April 1993 to November 1993*
Deaf/blind provision	136	30
Severely mentally impaired	[1]1,911	[1]308
All higher rate mobility components[2]	235,500	90,800

[1] New claims awards only—does not include awards made following review or appeal.

[2] The source for these figures is a 5 per cent. sample.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* requests for reviews and *(b)* appeals to a disability appeal tribunal concerning disability living allowance have been received by his Department.

Mr. Scott: There have been 292,404 reviews and 29,221 appeals registered from the introduction of disability living allowance to the month ending December 1993.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications have been received by his Department since May 1993 for *(a)* compensation and *(b)* ex-gratia payments resulting from delays in (i) disability living allowances and (ii) attendance allowance; and what was the number and percentage of successful applications and the total amounts awarded by each benefit.

Mr. Scott: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many payments have been made under the special compensation scheme for claimants who claimed *(a)* disability living allowance or *(b)* attendance allowance after February 1993; and what is the total amount paid.

Mr. Scott: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disability working allowance claimants are expected to benefit from the child care allowance.

Mr. Scott: Around 5 per cent. of the current disability working allowance case load is expected to gain from the new child care allowance.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what weekly increases will be made to recipients of *(a)* invalid care allowance, *(b)* industrial injuries benefit and *(c)* war pensions unemployability supplement from April specifically in respect of compensation for VAT on fuel.

Mr. Scott: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 30 November 1993 at columns *437-50* his proposals for the uprating of benefits from April 1994. Included in the proposed rates of benefit is extra help, over price indexation, for costs arising from the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel, as follows:

Weekly amount/single person rate

	Pence
(a) Invalid Care Allowance	20
(b) Industrial Injuries:	
disablement benefit	—
death benefit—higher rate	50
lower rate	15
unemployability supplement	50
Workmen's Compensation—Supplementation—Scheme—maximum rate of lesser incapacity allowance	20
Pneumoconiosis, Byssinosis and Miscellaneous Diseases Benefit Scheme—partial disablement allowance	20
(c) War Pensions unemployability supplement	50

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will name the 80 experts convened to consider the details of the proposed medical test for incapacity benefit.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on 20 January at col. *802*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disability living allowance claims are being paid to parents on behalf of disabled children under the age of 16 years where the parents do not receive any social security benefit by types of other income.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number and percentage of the recipients of disability living allowance who are also in receipt of income support.

Mr. Scott: The latest information available is for 28 February 1993. Twenty-one per cent.—236,000—of the 1,145,000 people in receipt of disability living allowance were also receiving income support.

Note: The source for these figures is a 5 per cent. sample.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the reasons for paying severe disablement allowance, invalid care allowance and severe disability premium at different levels from April 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Severe disablement allowance, invalid care allowance and severe disability premium have all been uprated from April 1994 in line with the increase of 1·8 per cent. in the retail prices index. In addition, in line with our promise to provide help with the cost of VAT on fuel for certain groups, such as disabled people, 50p has been added to the weekly amount of severe disablement allowance, and 20p to the weekly amount of invalid care allowance. Anyone who is entitled to the severe disability premium will also be entitled to either the disability premium or the higher pensioner premium, both of which include an additional amount intended to help with the extra cost of fuel bills. To increase the severe disability premium as well would provide this help twice over.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number and percentage of disability living allowance recipients are not in receipt of any social security benefit, by type of other income.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available.

Benefits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the estimated savings of increasing the level of deductions made to claimants of housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Mr. Burt: The estimated savings for 1994-95 across income-related benefits—housing benefit, council tax benefit and income support—are £60 million[1].

Source:

[1] 1989-90-91 family expenditure survey. At 1993-94 levels of prices, incomes and benefit rates.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the numbers of former supplementary benefit claimants who are expected to continue to receive transitional additions in 1994-95; and if he will break the figure down by pensioners, couples with children, lone parents and disabled people.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* Due to the small numbers currently in receipt of transitional additions, it is difficult to give accurate forecasts of those likely to be in receipt of them in 1994-95. Our best estimate is that there will be fewer than 6,000 in receipt in 1994-95. The small number involved makes it impossible to provide a reliable forecast of the numbers in the various groups.

The latest information available is for February 1993 and is set out in the table.

	Number of cases
Pensioners	500
Couples with children	*—
Lone parents	500
Disabled	1,000
Others	4,000
Total	6,500

Notes:

1. Source: Income support statistics quarterly inquiry, February 1993.
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 500. "*" indicates fewer than 250 cases.
3. As some people appear in more than one group, the figures will not necessarily sum to the total given.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement concerning the implications of the decision of the European Court of Justice, in case C-338/91 Steenhorst-Neerings, 27 October 1993, for the claims for back payment of benefits.

Mr. Scott: This case concerned a claim for Dutch invalidity benefit which was made in 1988 at a time when the Dutch Government had not properly implemented their obligations under directive 79/7/EEC on equal treatment in social security. Benefit was awarded under domestic law from one year before the date of claim but was not backdated to December 1984, the date by which the directive had to be implemented.

The court held that, where claims are made in such circumstances a member state is not prevented from applying national rules which limit the retroactive effect of a claim.

The United Kingdom's time limits on claims for benefit are consistent with this ruling. There will, therefore, be no implications for claims for arrears of benefit.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the estimated savings to his Department in 1994-95 of freezing *(a)* the earnings disregards for income-related benefits and *(b)* the savings limit for income-related benefits.

Mr. Burt: None. The level of earnings disregards and the capital limits are kept under review but are not uprated annually. There are no plans to increase them at the present time.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* column *424,* what are the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his Departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 as a result of the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Scott: There is no net cost. The additional costs to this Department resulting from the changes in statutory sick pay provision are fully offset by the savings from the reduction in employers' national insurance contributions.

Age-related Benefits

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *424-25*, if he will list the organisations and individuals which have been issued with a copy of the consultation document on age-related benefits.

Mr. Hague: The organisations which have received copies of the consultation document on age-related rebates direct, either through the initial distribution or as a result of requesting a copy, are as follows:

Abundance Management Services
Association of Pensions Lawyers
Association of Corporate Trustees
Association of British Chambers of Commerce
Bacon and Woodrow
Bain Clarkson Financial Services
Bank of England
Bar Council
British Payroll Managers Association
British Coal Corporation
Charter for Pension Fund Democracy
Chessington Computer Centre
CIS Ltd.
Clay and Partners
Confederation Life
CONNECTION
Conservative Trade Unionist
Consumers Association
Council on Tribunals
Cyborg Systems
Engineering Employers' Federation
Equal Opportunities Commission
Federation of Small Businesses
FIMBRA
Forum for Private Business
Godwins Ltd.
Hoare Govett Ltd.
Hundred Group of Finance Directors
IMRO
Independent Pensions Research group
Institute of Directors
Institute of Actuaries
Institute of Chartered Accountants
Institutional Fund Managers Association
J Sainsbury plc
Joint Working Group on Occupational Pensions—National Association of Pension Funds, Association of Consulting Actuaries, Association of British Insurers, Society of Pensions Consultants
Lane Clark Peacock
LAUTRO
Law Debenture Trust Corporation
Law Society
Legal and General
Lovell White Durrant
Ludgate Laud
Maxwell Pensioners Action Group
Metal Colours Ltd.
National Westminster Life Assurance
Noble Lowndes
Northern Pensions Resource Group
Occupational Pensions Advisory Service
Occupational Pensions Board
Over Fifties Association
Payroll Alliance
Pearl Assurance
Pension Trustee Forum
Pension Research Accountants Group
Pensions Management Institute
Peterborough Software
Provident Life
Prudential Corporation
R. Watson and Sons
Randolph Parliamentary Service
Royal London Insurance
Securities and Investments Board
Shannda Life
Smith New Court
Social Security Advisory Committee
Soterlou Banerji Chartered Accountants
Sun Life Assurance
Towers Perrin
Trades Union Congress
United Distillers
William M. Mercer Ltd.

The document has also been issued to a number of private individuals.

Child Care Costs

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of families currently on family credit could receive the maximum amount for child care costs as announced in the Budget, assuming that their income remained the same and their child care costs were £40 or more a week.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* Families who could receive the maximum amount of help with child care costs in family credit are those with earnings of £109 or more. Lone parents and two-earner couples with a child under 11 who have earnings of £109 or more represent 10 per cent. of the family credit case load—May 1993. Figures for couples where one partner works and the other is incapacitated are not available.

The number of people currently receiving family credit is not a good guide to the number of people who will gain from the disregard of earnings which will extend the range of families eligible for the benefit. The projected numbers receiving the benefit for future years are also higher.

The estimates from the Department's policy simulation model are that 150,000 families will benefit from the child care disregard. Those families who do not benefit from the full value of the child care disregard in family credit may get extra help through the parallel disregard in housing benefit-council tax benefit.

PRIME MINISTER

Life-supporting Treatment

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister if the letter of 22 December from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on the withdrawal of life-supporting treatment following receipt of an advance directive from a patient represents the policy of Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health sought to explain the current legal position on advance directives.

Her Majesty's Government acknowledge the right of individuals to draw up advance directives. People have a right, emphasised in the patients charter, to consent, or withhold consent, to treatment. Advance directives assist patients in the exercise of their legal rights and so ensure their lawful treatment.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics is examining this area, and is due to report soon. The Government will consider the Committee's findings very carefully.

Downing Street Dinner

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if the invitations extended to political journalists to attend dinner at 10 Downing street on 13 January stated that the proceedings would be on lobby terms.

The Prime Minister: It is not my practice to discuss the nature of invitations to private events.

Engagements

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his engagements for Wednesday 19 January; and if he will name the individuals he met.

The Prime Minister: I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others.

Jetstream Aircraft Ltd.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received personally on the future of Jetstream Aircraft Ltd.; what action he has taken; and if he will now agree to meet hon. Members with Ayrshire constituencies to discuss the aircraft.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 January 1994]:* I have received representations from several hon. Members about Jetstream. The points raised are being pursued by the Departments responsible. Ministers at the DTI and I have discussed such matters with right hon. and hon. Members on a number of occasions. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry met a group of hon. Members to discuss Jetstream in November. I am generally willing to consider requests for meetings from hon. Members on departmental issues if and when they have exhausted contacts with the responsible Ministers.

ENVIRONMENT

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during the current year.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Friday 21 January 1994.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on Friday 21 January 1994.

Empty Properties

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the numbers and percentage of empty dwellings in the *(a)* private sector, *(b)* public sector, *(c)* those owned and controlled by Her Majesty's Government and *(d)* housing associations in each region of England.

Sir George Young: The numbers of dwellings that local authorities and housing associations reported as vacant on 1 April 1993 are:

Local authorities[1]	*Management vacants*[2]	*Other vacants*	*Total vacants*	*Total as a per cent. of all local authorities dwellings*
North	3,161	3,686	6,847	2·1
Yorkshire and Humberside	4,658	3,331	7,989	1·7
East Midlands	2,803	1,262	4,065	1·3
East Midlands	2,803	1,262	4,065	1·3
Eastern	3,224	1,244	4,468	1·2
London	9,663	8,108	17,771	2·7
South East	2,947	1,108	4,055	1·2
South West	2,067	747	2,814	1·1
West Midlands	4,428	2,961	7,389	1·6
North West	6,759	8,752	15,511	2·7
England	39,710	31,199	70,909	1·9

[1] Includes dwellings owned outside local authorities' own areas.

[2] Available for letting immediately or after minor repairs.

Source: Annual HIP1 return.

Housing Associations[1]	*Management vacants*[2]	*Other vacants*	*Total vacants*	*Total as a percentage of all Housing Association dwellings*
[illegible]orth	581	271	852	2·0
[illegible]orkshire and Humberside	1,237	701	1,938	3·9
East Midlands	1,328	418	1,746	4·6
Eastern	2,495	274	2,769	3·6
London	4,869	4,524	9,393	5·4
South East	2,634	630	3,264	3·3
South West	707	319	1,026	2·6

Housing Associations[1]	*Management vacants*[2]	*Other vacants*	*Total vacants*	*Total as a percentage of all Housing Association dwellings*
West Midlands	988	1,046	2,034	3·2
North West	1,886	1,775	3,661	3·1
England	16,725	9,958	26,683	3·8

[1] Includes some 10,500 dwellings within management vacants that were purchased as a result of the measures to boost the housing market announced in the 1992 autumn statement.

[2] Available for letting immediately or after minor repairs.

Source: Annual HAR10 returns.

In addition to providing information on those of their own dwellings that are vacant, local authorities in England are also asked to provide estimates of the number of private sector and other public sector vacant dwellings in their area on their annual housing investment programme—HIP1—returns. Regional totals based on these data including estimates for missing data are set out.

There are doubts about the quality of some of the estimates provided by authorities. Information from the 1991 English house condition survey suggests that the England total for the private sector may be an overestimate, and data from central Government Departments on their own vacant dwellings, for which no regional breakdown is readily available, indicate that there is under-reporting of public sector vacant dwellings.

	Private sector (other than housing associations)		*Public sector (other than local authorities)*	
	Number vacant	*Percentage of dwellings*	*Number vacant*	*Percentage of dwellings*
North	33,000	4·6	1,200	20·9
Yorkshire and Humberside	68,000	4·5	600	4·7
East Midlands	69,000	5·3	1,500	15·1
Eastern	91,000	4·7	1,400	4·0
London	134,000	6·4	1,200	4·8
South East	111,000	4·6	3,300	7·9
South West	84,000	5·0	2,400	12·2
West Midlands	69,000	4·4	400	3·3
North West	105,100	4·9	400	2·0
England	765,000	5·0	12,400	6·8

Source: Annual HIP1 returns.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many official Christmas cards were sent out in 1993 by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* civil servants and *(c)* staff of Government agencies working in or to his Department; and how much these cards cost (i) to buy, (ii) to post and (iii) in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes.

Mr. Gummer: The number of cards purchased centrally was 11,250. The cost of purchasing these cards was £4,781·25—ex VAT—of which £4,183·59—87·5 per cent.—went to the charity Crisis.

Any further information is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who are the members currently appointed to the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Committee.

Mr. Atkins: The members of the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council are:

Mr. G. H. Baker
Mr. I. F. Blomfield OBE
Dr. J. W. Eaton
Mrs. C. J. Elvy
Mr. J. R. Hume
Miss A. M. Lees
Mr. R. H. B. Neame
Professor J. A. Patmore
Dr. A. M. Powell
Mrs. A. C. Roberts
Mr. A. T. Smith
Mr. D. A. Stevenson
Mr. P. V. Wagstaffe
Dr. M. E. Witherick

I have today announced the appointment of Audrey Lees as chairman.

Loans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each scheme operated by his Department under which loans are available, the objectives of the scheme, the number of unrecovered loans, the total value of unrecovered loans, the average number of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990, the average value of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990 and the annual cost of recovering loans.

Mr. Baldry: My Department currently operates three schemes under which loans are available. Details of these and of unrecoverable loans since 1990 are set out.[1] Information is not available on costs of action to recover loans.

Scheme

Season ticket advances to departmental staff.

Objective

To assist departmental staff with the purchase of public transport season tickets for travel between their homes and places of work.

Unrecoverable Loans

One loan, of £546·64 made in 1993 has become unrecoverable.

Scheme

House purchase loans for departmental staff on compulsory transfer.

Objective

To assist departmental staff with the purchase of comparable accommodation following permanent and compulsory transfer, where such accommodation is more expensive.

Unrecoverable Loans

None.

Scheme

Valuation tribunal employees' car loans and season ticket advances.

Objective

To assist with the purchase of cars where employees are required to be independently mobile; or to assist with the purchase of public transport season tickets for travel between employees' homes and places of work.

Unrecoverable Loans

None.

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[1] Details exclude PSA Services.

Council Tenants (Repairs)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for improving the right-to-repair scheme for local authority tenants.

Sir George Young: Regulations will be brought before Parliament shortly introducing an improved right-to-repair scheme from 1 April 1994. The scheme will ensure that council tenants have a simple and reliable way of getting urgent repairs carried out promptly and paid for by the council.

House Building

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses and how many housing association houses were built in 1979 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Sir George Young: Estimates of housebuilding completions by sector for England are shown in the publication "Housing and Construction Statistics". Figures for 1979 are in table 6.1(a) of the annual edition for 1979 to 1989. Figures for 1992 and for the first three quarters of 1993 are in table 1.2(a) of the quarterly edition for September 1993. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Rented Accommodation

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received alleging a shortage of affordable rented accommodation.

Sir George Young: I have received a number of representations suggesting that the reduction in Housing Corporation's planned expenditure announced in November's Budget will result in a reduction in the number of affordable rented homes to be provided.

Despite the cuts, the Housing Corporation's gross capital expenditure in 1994-95 will amount to almost £1,520 million, the corporation's fourth largest budget since housing association grant was introduced in 1974. This will enable at least 58,000 new homes to be provided in 1994-95, bringing the total over the three years to 1994-95 to 178,000. Furthermore, the corporation believes that, because of reductions in procurement and borrowing costs, and greater emphasis on cost-effective home ownership schemes, it should still provide 154,000 homes, over the three years 1993-94 to 1995-96, as it forecast last January.

House Building

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of housing starts in the Greater Manchester area in each year since 1987 by *(a)* the local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* private companies.

Sir George Young: Estimates of housebuilding starts by sector for local authority areas in Greater Manchester are shown in the publication "Local Housing Statistics". Figures for each year from 1987 to 1992 are in these issues:

Year(s)	*Issue Number and date*	*Tables*
1987-1990	103 October 1992	1(c)–1(f)
1991	105 December quarter 1992	1(b)
1992	106 March quarter 1993	1(b)
1993[1]	107 June quarter 1993	1

[1] First six months of 1993, provisional figures.

Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding the impact on standard spending assessments of *(a)* the special transitional grant in relation to responsibilities arising from community care policies, *(b)* the area cost adjustments policy, *(c)* the interest receipts assumed in comparison to those received and *(d)* the allowance made in the standard spending assessment in relation to provision of nursery education for the under-fives education.

Mr. Baldry: During the recent period of consultation on the provisional revenue support grant settlement for 1994-95 we received representations on a wide range of issues from 142 local authorities. My right hon. Friend will consider carefully all of these representations and any other relevant information before taking his final decisions on the revenue support grant settlement for 1994-95.

Council Flats (Service Charges)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the findings of the research into service charges on former council leasehold flats.

Sir George Young: The full report is expected to be finalised for publication in the autumn. However, preliminary data due shortly will inform an assessment of the overall scale and nature of current problems.

Council House Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the amount of council house sales receipts held by local authorities.

Mr. Baldry: Local authorities held £1 billion of usable capital receipts at 1 April 1993. Authorities are not required to account separately for the spending of usable capital receipts derived from council house sales. No separate figures for the amount of usable housing receipts held are therefore available.

As regards the reserved part of capital receipts, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on 1 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *554.*

Local Government Boundary Commission

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the names of the commissioners of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, giving in each case details of their remuneration and number of days worked each month.

Mr. Baldry: A list of the current members of the Local Government Commission, together with their present annual rate of remuneration, appears in the table. Members' time inputs vary from month to month, according to the demands of the reviews for which they have been allocated specific responsibilities.

	£
Sir John Banham—Chairman	33,170
David Ansbro	6,950
Professor Michael Chisholm	30,110
Christopher Chope OBE	20,070
Sir Kenneth Couzens KCB	20,070
Ken Ennals CB	40,140
Professor Malcolm Grant	13,890
Brian Hill CBE DL	40,140
Margaret Hodge MBE	20,070
Mary Leigh	35,120
Ann Levick	35,120
Robert Scruton	20,070
David Thomas	40,140
Clive Wilkinson	20,070
Lady Wilcox	9,260

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many officials were employed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England; and in what capacity.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Commission currently employs 80 staff, including those on temporary secondment from local government and elsewhere. Of these, 62 staff are employed on the commission's reviews and the remaining 18 on administrative duties.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all meetings in 1993 between ministers and officials in his Department and representatives of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England; and what subjects were discussed at each meeting.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or the then Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), met the chairman or members of the Local Government Commission on the following occasions: 12 January, 27 January, 15 March, 5 May, 29 July, and 27 October. In addition, my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning or the then Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), had similar meetings on 20 January, 22 February, 29 March, 19 April, 26 May, 8 June, 30 September, 12 October, 15 December and 21 December. These meetings covered a broad range of issues relevant to the work of the Commission.

There were also many meetings between officials of my Department and the staff of the commission, primarily to discuss issues connected with the day-to-day running of the commission.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the total cost so far and estimated future cost of the current review of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Commission incurred expenditure of £2·056 million in 1992-93. We are making available £5·124 million to fund the commission's activities in 1993-94 and have announced provision of £8·3 million, £2·5 million and £1·5 million for the years 1994-95 to 1996-97.

Community Charge

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will extend the community charge grant scheme in order to provide further compensation to local authorities for the £140 reduction in community charges which occurred in 1991.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to extend the close end date for community charge grant beyond 31 March.

Mr. Curry: The community charge grant compensates local authorities for income forgone as a result of the £140 general reduction in community charges for 1991-92. The existing grant rules provide for grant to be paid in relation to 1991-92 charges collected up to 31 March 1994.

The Government have considered a number of representations for local authorities and the local authority associations about this matter. It has concluded that an extension of one year of the grant scheme would be justified. The extension will apply in England, Wales and Scotland. There will be no further extension.

The Government attach great importance to local authorities' continuing efforts to bring in the balance of their community charge arrears. The extension of the community charge grant scheme for a further, and final, year will allow authorities to receive compensation in respect of charges collected during this period.

Final payments of grant will be made in 1995-96 on the basis of audited claims showing income forgone by local authorities on 1991-92 charges collected by 31 March 1995. Repayment of grant in respect of community charge transitional relief in England is also to be delayed for a further year.

Flood Damage

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to provide financial assistance to those local authorities which have been caused financial loss by the January floods.

Mr. Baldry: No applications have been received from local authorities for assistance in connection with the recent floods. Authorities have been informed that they should apply individually to the Department for assistance under the Bellwin scheme if they have incurred an undue financial burden as a result of dealing with an emergency. Each application which is received will be considered on its merits.

Area Cost Adjustment

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the area cost adjustment factor as a percentage of the standard spending assessment for each year from 1990-91.

Mr. Baldry: The total amounts allocated on the basis of the area cost adjustment factors as a percentage of standard spending assessments for each year since 1990-91 are as follows:

	Total SSA *£ million*	*Total allocated on area cost factors* *£ million*	*Percentage allocated on area cost factors* *Per cent.*
1990-91	29,805·3	836·8	2·8
1991-92	35,586·7	1,152·1	3·2
1992-93	37,992·7	1,314·5	3·5
1993-94	36,622·2	1,332·4	3·6
[1]1994-95	37,847·7	1,536·4	4·1

[1] Provisional.

The 1994-95 figures are based on the Secretary of State's proposals announced on 2 December 1993. Final SSAs for 1994-95 will be announced shortly.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities have benefited from the area cost adjustment factor, and by how much as *(a)* a total, *(b)* a percentage of the overall standard spending assessment and *(c)* an amount per resident in each year since 1990-91.

Mr. Baldry: I have placed tables in the Library showing the requested information. The 1994-95 figures have been calculated on the basis of the provisional SSAs announced by the Secretary of State on 2 December 1993. Final SSAs for 1994-95 will be announced shortly.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the change in the area cost adjustment factor compared to the overall change in standard spending assessment for each year since 1990-91.

Mr. Baldry: The annual percentage changes since 1990-91 in the total of SSAs and in the amounts allocated on the area cost adjustment have been as follows:

Year	*Increase in SSAs* *Per cent.*	*Increase in amount allocated on area cost adjustment* *Per cent.*
1990-91 to 1991-92	19·4	37·7
1991-92 to 1992-93	6·8	14·1
1992-93 (adj) to 1993-94	2·9	8·9
1993-94 to 1994-95 (prov)	3·3	15·3

Notes:

1. For the purposes of comparison with 1993-94, the 1992-93 figures have been adjusted to allow for the transfer of certain local authority responsibilities, most notably for further education. These calculations have been revised and now show an increase in the area cost factor contribution of 8·9 per cent. between 1992-93 and 1993-94.

2. The 1994-95 increases have been calculated on the basis of the provisional SSAs announced by the Secretary of State on 2 December 1993. After adjustment to allow for the impact of extra money for community care and other changes of function, the overall increase in SSA between 1993-94 and 1994-95 would be 2·2 per cent. Final SSAs for 1994-95 will be announced shortly.

Industrial and Commercial Assets (Transfers)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the value of industrial and commercial assets transferring over the last five years from *(a)* Milton Keynes development corporation to Milton Keynes borough council, *(b)* Peterborough development corporation to Peterborough city council and *(c)* Telford development corporation to The Wrekin council.

Mr. Baldry: During the last five years, the former Milton Keynes development corporation has transferred industrial and commercial assets with an estimated open market value of £16,661,000 to Milton Keynes borough council and the former Telford development corporation has transferred industrial and commercial assets with an estimated open market value of £26,184,000 to The Wrekin council. In both cases, these transfers took place in order to generate the rental income streams required to cover the maintenance costs of the community facilities, open spaces, and other community related assets being transferred to the respective councils at the same time. There have been no subsequent transfers of industrial or commercial assets to these local authorities from the Commission for the New Towns.

The Peterborough development corporation was wound up in September 1988, since when there have been no transfers of industrial or commercial assets to Peterborough city council from the Commission for the New Towns.

Hazardous Substances

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to assess the effectiveness of planning controls over hazardous substances introduced in June 1993.

Mr. Baldry: The Department has recently commissioned research into the operation of hazardous substances consents under the Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990. The research is designed to establish how effective these controls are in preventing unacceptable risks to the public from storage and use of hazardous substances at least cost to industry.

It will look at all aspects of the system by means of survey, case studies and interview.

Langbaurgh Council

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has considered the response by Langbaurgh on Tees borough council to the notice served on the authority on 10 September 1993 under section 19A of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has considered carefully the response which Langbaurgh on Tees borough council has made to the notice served in the authority, and has today given the authority a direction under section 19B of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. The effect of the direction is to require the authority to retender the work which was the subject of the notice when the current arrangement comes to an end and to seek my right hon. Friend's consent should it wish to reassign the work to the direct service organisation.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

BBC Board

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the membership of the board of the BBC, together with their salaries.

Mr. Brooke: The members of the board of the BBC and their salaries are as follows:

	£
Chairman	
Mr. Marmaduke Hussey	59,015
Vice Chairman	
Lord Cocks of Hartcliffe	15,140
National governor (Scotland)	
Sir Graham Hills	15,140
National governor (Wales)	
Dr. Gwyn Jones	15,140
National governor (Northern Ireland)	
Sir Kenneth Percy Bloomfield	15,140
Members	
Lord Nicholas Gordon Lennox KCMG KCVO	7,570
Miss Jane Glover	7,570
Mrs. Shahwar Sadeque	7,570
Mr. Bill Jordan	7,570
Mrs. Margaret Spurr	7,570

Concessionary Television Licences

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make it his policy to introduce a special concessionary television licence for all chronically sick persons, including those who do not live in residential nursing homes and similar sheltered housing schemes.

Mr. Brooke: No. As the Government have repeatedly stated, they have no plans to extend the scope of the existing concessionary television licence scheme, under which concessionary licences are available only to retirement pensioners and disabled people living in residential homes or in comparable sheltered housing schemes.

Tourism (Safety Regulations)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress he has made to equalise fire, safety and health regulations faced by the tourist industry in the European Union.

Mr. Sproat: I have held a series of meetings with ministerial colleagues with a view to reducing the impact of legislative and bureaucratic burdens on tourism, and discussions are continuing between Department and a number of other Departments. The areas of regulation under discussion include fire precautions, food hygiene and some elements of health and safety at work legislation. The implementation and enforcement of regulations in these areas in other European Union member states is not within the Government's control, but I am concerned to ensure that the tourism industry in the United Kingdom is not put at a disadvantage because regulations are enforced in more rigorous manner here than in other member states.

Uniform Business Rates

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received regarding the six-bed rule for exemption from uniform business rates.

Mr. Sproat: My Department has received many representations expressing different points of view on the six-bedspace rule, which was introduced in April 1991 after very wide consultation with interested parties. Ministers at the Department of Environment, who are responsible for policy on non-domestic rates, are also aware of the tourism industry's opinions.

Sportsmatch Scheme

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the grants awarded by the Sportsmatch scheme in 1993 indicating the amounts, the recipients and the commercial sponsors and which grants have gone to private schools.

Mr. Brooke: I have arranged for a list of all the Sportsmatch scheme awards approved in 1993 to be made available in the Library. Only non-profit distributing bodies are eligible to receive awards, and priority is given to those schemes which increase participation and are considered to benefit young people, the disabled and ethnic minorities, or deprived urban or rural areas. As far as we are aware, no awards were made to private schools.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Private Bills

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to alter the restrictions on the drafting of private bills.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

Privy Council

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the precise wording of the oath administered to persons appointed to the Privy Council.

Mr. Newton: By convention, the terms of the Privy Counsellor's oath are confidential to members of the Privy Council.

EDUCATION

Discipline

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to introduce new measures to improve discipline in schools.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has recently issued for consultation a number of draft circulars providing guidance on a range of issues relating to discipline in schools and pupils with problems. We look forward to positive and constructive responses which will strengthen and improve the guidance in those circulars.

Food Technology

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will review the status of food technology in the national curriculum at key stage 3 following the Dearing report.

Mr. Robin Squire: No decisions have yet been made about the new requirements for national curriculum technology to be introduced in 1995. The responsibility for continuing the review of the existing requirements, so as to take account of the Dearing report, rests currently with the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. My right hon. Friend expects to receive the authority's recommendations for revision in April.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member on 21 January at column *849*.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 21 January at column *849*.

School Transport

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will make a statement on the rules and regulations governing concessionary school transport for pupils attending secondary schools;

(2) what powers county councils have to discriminate against one secondary school with regard to concessionary school transport without adopting a similar policy for all other similar secondary schools in the county; what representations he has had from Essex on this matter; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many non-Church comprehensive schools in Essex benefit from the policy of concessionary school transport from Essex county council; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will make a statement on Essex county council's proposed policy towards discretionary school transport.

Mr. Forth: A local education authority must provide free transport if it considers it necessary to facilitate a pupil's school attendance. Authorities have considerable discretion to tailor this provision to meet pupils' individual needs. They also have power to help other pupils with their travelling expenses, and to carry them at a charge in any spare seats on school buses provided by the authority to carry pupils who do qualify for free transport. Data on local education authorities' school transport provision are not collected centrally.

LEAs must treat pupils at grant-maintained schools no less favourably than comparable pupils at schools maintained by an LEA. The Department has had three representations from Essex about the authority's proposal to phase out discretionary transport for pupils at the Ingatestone Anglo-European and Davenant Foundation grant-maintained schools, but has seen no evidence that would justify my right hon. Friend's intervention.

Chief Inspector of Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will place in the Library a copy of every letter to hon. Members from her Majesty's chief inspector of schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: I am consulting Professor Sutherland and will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Fitzherbert School, Brighton

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the guidance given by his Department to the estate agent responsible for the sale of the former Fitzherbert school site, Brighton.

Mr. Robin Squire: As owner of the site the CTC trust instructed agents for sale.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if the former Fitzherbert school site Brighton was sold to the organisation submitting the highest offer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: After taking professional advice, the Department was satisfied that sale of the former Fitzherbert school site was achieved on the most favourable terms available.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on how many occasions *(a)* he, *(b)* his civil servants or *(c)* the city technology college trust met with Mr. John Spiers to discuss the future use of the former Fitzherbert school site, Brighton.

Mr. Robin Squire: I understand that the then Secretary of State met Mr. Spiers on 19 May 1989, together with Mr. Ivor Revere who was the principal potential sponsor, to discuss the proposal to establish a CTC in Brighton. I am not aware of any other meeting with Ministers, but officials and staff of the CTC trust met Mr. Spiers and others interested in the project on various occasions before the Government withdrew their support in April 1990.

City Technology College, Brighton

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list those individuals and industrial sponsors who had indicated an interest in supporting the proposed city technology college in Brighton.

Mr. Robin Squire: The principal potential sponsor was Mr. Ivor Revere chairman and managing director of South Weald Properties Ltd.—trading as Greenleaf Planters. Mr. Revere had made a firm written pledge of £1 million which he withdrew on 13 April 1990. In consequence, the Secretary of State announced to Parliament on 24 April 1990 that the Government were withdrawing their financial support. Other potential sponsors had expressed interest but had not submitted firm pledges to the Department.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *414*, what are the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his Departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 of the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr Boswell: The information requested will not be available until after the end of the financial year requested.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *73*, what is the total number of schools in each local education authority and the percentage thereof which have opted for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows total numbers of maintained schools and the numbers and percentages of schools operating with or approved for grant-maintained status in each local education authority area.

LEA	*Total Primary*	*GM Primary*	*Percentage GM*	*Total Secondary*	*GM Secondary*	*Percentage GM*
Avon	369	—	0·0	60	2	3·3
Barking	55	—	0·0	8	—	0·0
Barnet	89	2	2·2	21	9	42·9
Barnsley	96	—	0·0	15	—	0·0
Bedfordshire	218	3	1·4	71	10	114·1
Berkshire	275	7	2·5	59	10	16·9
Bexley	64	2	3·1	17	4	23·5
Birmingham	336	4	1·2	79	16	20·3
Bolton	105	1	1·0	16	3	18·8
Bradford	167	3	1·8	88	6	6·8
Brent	64	1	1·6	13	8	61·5
Bromley	78	2	2·6	17	11	64·7
Buckinghamshire	290	6	2·1	45	10	22·2
Bury	71	1	1·4	14	—	0·0
Calderdale	91	2	2·2	16	6	37·5
Cambridge	267	6	2·2	44	16	36·4
Camden	41	—	0·0	11	2	18·2
Cheshire	454	3	0·7	68	3	4·4
Cleveland	203	—	0·0	44	—	0·0
Cornwall	249	—	0·0	31	—	0·0
Corp. of London	1	—	0·0	0	—	0·0
Coventry	109	—	0·0	19	—	0·0
Croydon	98	2	2·0	20	6	30·0
Cumbria	306	14	4·6	42	11	26·2
Derbyshire	450	7	1·6	61	14	23·0
Devon	442	1	0·2	64	6	9·4
Doncaster	127	—	0·0	34	—	0·0
Dorset	200	1	0·5	56	9	16·1
Dudley	83	1	1·2	22	6	27·3
Durham	298	—	0·0	43	—	0·0
Ealing	92	4	4·3	13	5	38·5
East Sussex	219	—	0·0	34	—	0·0
Enfield	70	1	1·4	17	5	29·4
Essex	581	66	11·4	105	66	62·9
Gateshead	82	—	0·0	13	—	0·0
Gloucestershire	262	7	2·7	43	24	55·8
Greenwich	79	—	0·0	15	—	0·0
Hackney	70	—	0·0	10	—	0·0
Hammersmith	38	—	0·0	10	1	10·0
Hampshire	580	13	2·2	94	17	18·1
Haringey	77	—	0·0	9	—	0·0
Harrow	54	—	0·0	10	1	10·0
Havering	74	—	0·0	19	4	21·1
Hereford and Worcester	288	—	0·0	76	5	6·6
Hertfordshire	432	6	1·4	88	20	22·7
Hillingdon	72	11	15·3	15	12	80·0
Hounslow	62	—	0·0	14	2	14·3
Humberside	354	2	0·6	60	—	0·0
Isle of Scilly	4	—	0·0	1	—	0·0
Isle of Wight	46	—	0·0	21	—	0·0
Islington	57	—	0·0	9	—	0·0
Kensington	27	1	3·7	4	1	25·0
Kent	570	17	3·0	136	57	41·9
Kingston	36	1	2·8	10	4	40·0
Kirklees	158	—	0·0	34	2	5·9
Knowsley	68	—	0·0	11	1	9·1
Lambeth	77	5	6·5	19	5	50·0
Lancashire	605	1	0·2	106	8	7·5
Leeds	249	1	0·4	46	1	2·2
Leicester	334	—	0·0	79	5	6·3
Lewisham	72	1	1·4	13	—	0·0
Lincolnshire	293	22	7·5	63	24	38·1

LEA	*Total Primary*	*GM Primary*	*Percentage GM*	*Total Secondary*	*GM Secondary*	*Percentage GM*
Liverpool	198	—	0·0	36	3	8·3
Manchester	174	—	0·0	28	—	0·0
Merton	49	—	0·0	11	—	0·0
Newcastle	82	—	0·0	22	—	0·0
Newham	67	—	0·0	14	1	7·1
Norfolk	397	13	3·3	52	12	23·1
North Tyneside	61	—	0·0	26	—	0·0
North Yorkshire	394	—	0·0	59	—	0·0
Northamptonshire	270	9	3·3	65	12	18·5
Northumberland	143	—	0·0	61	1	1·6
Nottinghamshire	426	—	0·0	82	3	3·7
Oldham	104	—	0·0	15	—	0·0
Oxfordshire	241	1	0·4	44	—	0·0
Redbridge	56	—	0·0	14	1	7·1
Richmond	39	—	0·0	8	—	0·0
Rochdale	76	3	3·9	14	1	7·1
Rotherham	115	—	0·0	18	—	0·0
Salford	88	—	0·0	18	1	5·6
Sandwell	112	—	0·0	20	1	5·0
Sefton	94	—	0·0	22	—	0·0
Sheffield	164	4	2·4	32	2	6·3
Shropshire	214	1	0·5	37	5	13·5
Solihull	70	1	1·4	13	—	0·0
Somerset	229	2	0·9	39	1	2·6
South Tyneside	58	—	0·0	11	—	0·0
Southwark	75	4	5·3	14	5	35·7
St Helens	72	—	0·0	12	—	0·0
Staffordshire	414	2	0·5	85	5	5·9
Stockport	110	—	0·0	14	—	0·0
Suffolk	255	—	0·0	77	—	0·0
Sunderland	105	—	0·0	17	—	0·0
Surrey	372	11	3·0	51	13	25·5
Sutton	43	3	7·0	14	8	57·1
Tameside	82	—	0·0	18	3	16·7
Tower Hamlets	73	—	0·0	15	1	6·7
Trafford	78	—	0·0	16	4	25·0
Wakefield	130	—	0·0	38	—	0·0
Walsall	106	2	1·9	21	6	28·6
Waltham Forest	61	—	0·0	16	2	12·5
Wandsworth	72	2	2·8	10	6	60·0
Warwickshire	244	—	0·0	37	8	21·6
West Sussex	246	—	0·0	41	—	0·0
Westminster	42	—	0·0	8	—	0·0
Wigan	125	—	0·0	21	—	0·0
Wiltshire	294	9	3·1	44	13	29·5
Wirral	106	—	0·0	21	2	9·5
Wolverhampton	101	—	0·0	20	3	15·0
TOTALS	18,905	295	1·6	3,657	561	15·3

Note: Numbers and percentages of operating and approved GM schools are as at 20 January 1994.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which her Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. Jack: During the years 1992 and 1993, the following firms, including one merchant bank, offering accountancy services were awarded consultancy contracts by my core Department.

- Amtec Consulting
- BDO Binder-Hamlyn
- Coopers & Lybrand
- Ernst & Young
- KPMG Peat Marwick
- Leopold Joseph
- PA Consulting
- Price Waterhouse
- Stoy Hayward
- Touche Ross Management Consultants

Consultancies given to the above firms included various areas of work other than accountancy and the total cost was in the region of £950,000 individual contract figures cannot be given as this information is classified commercial in confidence. This answer excludes contracts made by agencies.

Kent Woods

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the number and names of Forestry Commission woods in Kent *(a)* sold in the last two years and *(b)* to be sold in the next 12 months, showing the hectarage of each and how much money was or will be received for each wood.

Mr. Jack: The Forestry Commission has sold one woodland in Kent in the last two years—Rogley hop garden—3 hectares. The new owner did not agree to the purchase price being made public.

The commission is currently selling or considering the sale of the following woodlands in Kent in the next 12 months:

Woodland	Area (hectares)
Post Wood	26
Stone Wood	11
Cole Wood	22
Penfold Wood	7
West Wood	176

The price received for these woodlands will depend on the state of the market at the time.

Food Labelling

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the regulations currently implemented by Her Majest's Government and the European Commission relating to food labelling; what implications these have for the production and export of traditional Scottish fare, including haggis; and if she will ensure that no regulations will prevent the use of traditional recipes.

Mr. Jack: Food labelling rules are set out principally in EC directive 79/112 and these are implemented in Great Britain by the Food Labelling Regulations 1984 and the Food Labelling (Scotland) Regulations 1984, both of which have been subject to some amendment and both of which are currently being reviewed and updated. I know of nothing in any of these regulations which has a particular effect on either Scottish fare or any other traditional receipe and I have no plans to make regulations that will. If any applications are received under the EC schemes for the registration of specific characteristics of food or of geographic names, which are separate from the labelling rules, which appear to affect adversly the interests of Scottish, or any other UK producers, then I would wish to give them every opportunity to comment on issues which concern them.

Pesticides

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate she has made of the effect the liberalisation of trade under the new GATT regime will have on the amount of fruit and vegetables entering the United Kingdom contaminated with pesticide residues.

Mr. Jack: We expect imports of fruit and vegetables to continue to comply with our pesticide residues requirements. The food industry has been reminded of the need to ensure that residues comply with our statutory requirements.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many consignments of fruit and vegetables were refused entry at United Kingdom ports in 1993 because they contain excess levels of pesticides and preservatives.

Mr. Jack: In 1993, our monitoring of imported fruit and vegetables, including enforcement monitoring of imported oranges, indicated that residue levels were sufficiently low and that the imports were acceptable. Consequently, none were refused entry.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps her Department is taking to ensure that imports of fruit do not contain levels of pesticides and preservatives exceeding the maximum residue level.

Mr. Jack: One of the purposes of the surveillance monitoring programme which is carried out by the Government's working party on pesticide residues is to check that imported food complies with statutory maximum residue levels contained in the Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Food) Regulations 1988. The latest results, which are made available in full each year, were published on 18 January. Where surveillance shows that imported food does not comply with statutory limits, enforcement action may be taken at ports or within the UK.

Rift Valley Fever

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the number of incidents of Rift Valley fever in each year since 1985.

Mr. Jack: There have been no outbreaks of Rift Valley fever since 1985.

Coastal Erosion, Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what advice she can give the Isle of Wight local authorities following the recent extensive coastal problems; and what moneys may be available to help with the problems;

(2) if she will ensure her advisers visit the Isle of Wight to assess the extent of coastal erosion and landslip and to advise the local authorities.

Mr. Jack: I understand that the earth slip on the southern coast of the Isle of Wight was caused by excess water in the coastal slope rather than erosion by the sea. The coastal defences around the Isle of Wight have not been affected but, if the council wishes to undertake any works to protect against erosion by the sea in the area, its proposals will be considered by MAFF for grant aid in the normal way. So far as the present landslip is concerned, I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment would be willing to consider any application for assistance under the Bellwin scheme.

Engineers from South Wight borough council have been in contact with the Ministry's regional engineer but have not yet felt it necessary to invite him to visit the area.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Howard: Neither of the special advisers employed by the Home Office is seconded from other organisations.

Visas

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the European Commission proposal for a regulation determining the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa when crossing the external borders of the member states;

(2) if he will list those countries which are indicated on the European Commission list as countries which will require a visa for entry to the European Union.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In accordance with the procedures for Parliamentary scrutiny of European Community documents, the Commission's proposal was deposited on 18 January. An explanatory memorandum is in preparation.

Addictive Diseases Trust

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contribution his Department makes towards the Addictive Diseases Trust.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Addictive Diseases Trust receives a grant of £18,000 towards the provision of drug counselling services at HM prison Downview for the period 1 September 1993 to 30 August 1994.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons which make available the services of the Addictive Diseases Trust to combat drug and alcohol abuse.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Lady Olga Maitland, dated 24 January 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about prisons which make available the services of the Addictive Diseases Trust.

Currently, one prison, HMP Downview, makes the services of this organisation available to prisoners.

Police Co-operation

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he will take to improve police co-operation and the sharing of evidence with local housing authorities where their tenants are behaving in a criminal and anti-social manner.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is entirely a matter for the chief officer of the police force concerned.

Joseph Kasser

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the co-operation between the Customs and Excise and No. 2—north-east—regional crime squad in relation to the case which resulted in the conviction on drugs charges of Joseph Kasser in January at Newcastle Crown court.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Two defendants in this case are still awaiting trial and it would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment while the case is sub judice.

Child Abuse

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reported cases of child abuse there have been in each year since 1988 in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales; how many prosecutions there have been in each of those years; and how many convictions have been obtained in each of those years.

Mr. Maclean: The available information is given in the tables. It is not possible from the information held centrally to identify all offences where the victim is aged under 16 years; children may also have been the victim of other offences—such as murder—which are not defined by reference to the victim's age.

Table A

Notifiable offences recorded by the police, cautions and defendants prosecuted at the magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for specific offences involving children under 16 years of age in (a) England and (b) Wales

1988

Offence	*England*				*Wales*			
	Recorded offences	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	[1]*Total found guilty*	*Recorded offences*	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	[1]*Total found guilty*
INDICTABLE OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Murder of infant under 1 year of age	N/a	N/a	13	1	N/a	N/a	—	—
Infanticide	N/a	N/a	1	3	N/a	N/a	—	1
Child destruction	8	N/a	2	—	—	N/a	—	—
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	53	187	140	N/a	7	42	25
Abandoning children under 2 years	19	11	—	1	4	—	—	—
Child abduction	152	17	54	23	4	1	2	3
Sexual offences								
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	N/a	300	219	N/a	N/a	20	13
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	N/a	26	29	N/a	N/a	2	2
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	N/a	N/a	537	447	N/a	N/a	22	13
Indecent assault on a female person under 16 years	N/a	N/a	2,038	1,563	N/a	N/a	121	87

Offence	England				Wales			
	Recorded offences	Cautioned	Total proceeded against	[1]Total found guilty	Recorded offences	Cautioned	Total proceeded against	[1]Total found guilty
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	264	76	150	127	19	3	15	8
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	2,360	1,146	318	319	192	69	27	21
Incest with girl under 13	N/a	N/a	96	99	N/a	N/a	9	5
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	N/a	N/a	2	1	N/a	N/a	1	1
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	N/a	N/a	10	7	N/a	N/a	—	—
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution, etc.	N/a	N/a	—	1	N/a	N/a	—	—
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	N/a	N/a	18	8	N/a	N/a	2	—
Gross indecency with children	803	83	208	232	68	5	18	14
SUMMARY OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	3	2	2	N/a	—	—	—

[1] Will include persons proceeded against in earlier years.

N/a—Not available.

Table B

Notifiable offences recorded by the police, cautions and defendants prosecuted at the magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for specific offences involving children under 16 years of age in (a) England and (b) Wales

1989

Offence	England				Wales			
	Recorded offences	Cautioned	Total proceeded against	[1]Total found guilty	Recorded offences	Cautioned	Total proceeded against	[1]Total found guilty
INDICTABLE OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Murder of infant under 1 year of age	N/a	—	10	2	N/a	—	—	—
Infanticide	N/a	1	—	3	N/a	—	—	—
Child destruction	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	74	344	195	N/a	4	32	17
Abandoning children under 2 years	29	1	3	3	5	2	—	—
Child abduction	136	23	63	40	4	1	4	2
Sexual offences								
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	36	275	177	N/a	3	6	6
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	10	30	26	N/a	—	2	—
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	N/a	149	521	384	N/a	8	32	22
Indecent assault on a female person under 16 years	N/a	1,055	2,041	1,570	N/a	66	128	87
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	273	72	128	92	27	11	11	4
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	2,338	1,066	268	247	133	56	22	15
Incest with girl under 13	N/a	11	80	93	N/a	—	8	7
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	N/a	—	2	4	N/a	—	1	1
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	N/a	3	6	3	N/a	—	—	—
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution, etc.	N/a	—	2	1	N/a	—	—	—
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	N/a	3	13	11	N/a	—	3	2
Gross indecency with children	992	68	260	205	286	10	17	14
SUMMARY OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	1	4	2	N/a	—	—	—

[1] Will include persons proceeded against in earlier years.

N/a—Not available.

Table C

Notifiable offences recorded by the police, cautions and defendants prosecuted at the magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for specific offences involving children under 16 years of age in (a) England and (b) Wales

1990

Offence	*England*				*Wales*			
	Recorded offences	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	*[1]Total found guilty*	*Recorded offences*	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	*[1]Total found guilty*
INDICTABLE OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Murder of infant under 1 year of age	N/a	—	9	—	N/a	—	1	1
Infanticide	N/a	—	—	3	N/a	—	—	—
Child destruction	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	96	392	225	N/a	6	48	22
Abandoning children under 2 years	21	9	—	—	2	1	—	—
Child abduction	195	9	62	31	13	—	4	2
Sexual offences								
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	54	302	175	N/a	5	25	14
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	7	23	17	N/a	—	2	1
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	N/a	214	537	399	N/a	7	33	22
Indecent assault on a female person under 16 years	N/a	1,062	2,159	1,442	N/a	55	126	95
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	284	68	132	103	20	4	14	7
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	2,033	937	277	291	107	47	15	13
Incest with girl under 13	N/a	16	106	81	N/a	—	5	3
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	N/a	1	1	3	N/a	—	—	—
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	N/a	—	7	5	N/a	—	—	—
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution, etc.	N/a	—	—	2	N/a	—	—	—
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	N/a	4	12	7	N/a	3	—	1
Gross indecency with children	991	87	304	266	72	7	13	10
SUMMARY OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	2	25	23	N/a	1	1	1

[1] Will include persons proceeded against in earlier years.

N/a—Not available.

Table D

Notifiable offences recorded by the police, cautions and defendants prosecuted at the magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for specific offences involving children under 16 years of age in (a) England and (b) Wales

1991

Offence	*England*				*Wales*			
	Recorded offences	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	*[1]Total found guilty*	*Recorded offences*	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	*[1]Total found guilty*
INDICTABLE OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Murder of infant under 1 year of age	N/a	—	3	1	N/a	—	—	—
Infanticide	N/a	—	1	7	N/a	—	—	—
Child destruction	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	103	373	208	N/a	4	54	28
Abandoning children under 2 years	40	11	6	2	7	5	—	—
Child abduction	188	16	83	41	8	—	6	4
Sexual offences								
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	46	280	157	N/a	3	20	11
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	5	21	26	N/a	—	3	—
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	N/a	194	493	326	N/a	5	29	25
Indecent assault on a female person under 16 years	N/a	971	1,999	1,366	N/a	52	139	103
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	291	54	145	98	24	9	10	7

Offence	*England*				*Wales*			
	Recorded offences	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	*[1]Total found guilty*	*Recorded offences*	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	*[1]Total found guilty*
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	1,834	801	239	208	115	49	15	15
Incest with girl under 13	N/a	13	79	63	N/a	—	1	5
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	N/a	—	1	3	N/a	—	—	—
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	N/a	—	3	1	N/a	—	—	—
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution, etc.	N/a	—	2	1	N/a	—	—	1
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	N/a	3	19	7	N/a	—	1	1
Gross indecency with children	1,055	74	225	205	92	7	14	14
SUMMARY OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	3	7	5	N/a	—	—	—

[1] Will include persons proceeded against in earlier years.
N/a—Not available.

Table E

Notifiable offences recorded by the police, cautions and defendants prosecuted at the magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for specific offences involving children under 16 years of age in (a) England and (b) Wales
1992

Offence	*England*				*Wales*			
	Recorded offences	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	*[1]Total found guilty*	*Recorded offences*	*Cautioned*	*Total proceeded against*	*[1]Total found guilty*
INDICTABLE OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Murder of infant under 1 year of age	N/a	—	12	1	N/a	—	—	—
Infanticide	N/a	1	3	5	N/a	—	—	—
Child destruction	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	135	402	191	N/a	13	48	21
Abandoning children under 2 years	38	10	3	1	2	—	—	—
Child abduction	199	15	62	29	7	—	11	5
Sexual offences								
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	25	305	156	N/a	5	24	7
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	N/a	7	24	17	N/a	1	3	—
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	N/a	202	422	336	N/a	7	35	27
Indecent assault on a female person under 16 years	N/a	1,036	1,856	1,235	N/a	45	149	96
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	233	46	99	83	20	13	13	6
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	1,464	681	237	206	99	25	17	12
Incest with girl under 13	N/a	9	46	49	N/a	3	4	3
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	N/a	5	2	3	N/a	—	—	—
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	N/a	2	9	3	N/a	—	—	—
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution, etc.	N/a	1	—	—	N/a	—	—	—
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	N/a	3	23	11	N/a	—	1	1
Gross indecency with children	1,048	94	239	216	110	4	22	12
SUMMARY OFFENCES								
Violence against the person								
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children	N/a	2	4	1	N/a	—	—	—

[1] Will include persons proceeded against in earlier years.
N/a—Not available.

Stolen Horses

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by county, the number of reported incidents of horses being stolen in each of the last three years.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Loans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for each scheme operated by his Department under which loans are available, the objectives of the scheme, the number of unrecovered loans, the total value of unrecovered loans, the average number of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990, the average value of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990 and the annual cost of recovering loans.

Mr. Howard: Long-term loans have been made by my Department to the Fire Service College, a trading fund, for capital expenditure in 1992-93 and 1993-94. All proper repayments have been made when due.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has made an assessment of the value of and applicability of citizens charter type principles to electoral registration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Electoral registration officers have a statutory duty to compile a comprehensive electoral register. Electors' rights are enshrined in statute and remedies are available through the courts in cases where rights have been denied. My right hon. and learned Friend therefore has no plans to introduce a charter covering this area.

North Wales Police Helicopter

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often the North Wales police helicopter is used for transporting accident victims to hospitals or transferring patients from one hospital to another; how much has been reclaimed from the health authorities for this service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Between 1 October 1992 and 31 December 1993 a total of 65 casualties were conveyed to hospital by helicopter—3 per cent. of the helicopter's total usage. No payment has been requested from health authorities in respect of casualty evacuations in this financial year. Negotiations are taking place with the North Wales ambulance trust about charges in the next financial year when the helicopter is used at the trust's request.

The use of the helicopter in medical emergencies is confined to cases where the casualty's life is at risk, or where the use of a land vehicle would be impractical. The police helicopter may also be used to move patients between one hospital and another where such assistance is likely to save life. The sum of £4,900 has been received from hospitals for three such flights in the current financial year.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the monthly operating cost of the North Wales constabulary's helicopter; what is the helicopter's total mileage since being brought into service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The average monthly cost of the North Wales police helicopter in 1993-94 is expected to be about £59,000. This includes an element of cost involved in establishing the air support unit, and therefore should reduce next year.

Helicopter usage is measured in flying hours rather than by distance covered. From the start of the operation on 1 October 1992 up to 31 December 1993, the helicopter recorded 795 flying hours.

Correspondence

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Hammersmith may expect an answer to his letters of 11 October and 22 November 1993 concerning the effectiveness of the 27 points he announced to deal with crime.

Mr. Maclean: I wrote to the hon. Member on 20 January 1994.

Search Warrants

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department grants the power to execute a search warrant to anyone other than police officers where inquiries are being made into the immigration status of someone who is known or suspected to be in breach of immigration laws.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Paragraph 17(2) of schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971 provides for a warrant granted by a justice of the peace to enter premises to search for a person liable to detention, to be executed only by a constable.

Section 16(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 provides that such a warrant may authorise persons to accompany any constable who is executing it.

Dorothy Nwokedi

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the aircraft commander on the plane in which Dorothy Nwokedi was deported had given explicit authorisation for the use of the restraints used upon her;

(2) if he will publish the record of the reasons for the use of restraints used on Dorothy Nwokedi and of the aircraft commander's authority.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Measures were taken to restrain Mrs. Nwokedi on board the aircraft in order to avoid endangering the safety of others on board. The captain's authorisation was not explicitly sought, but he was fully aware of the measures taken and has confirmed that he was satisfied that they were necessary for the safety of other passengers.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *375*, what estimate he has made of the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 resulting from the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Howard: No precise estimate has been made, but the additional costs are expected to be approximately £1·4 million.

Local Government Grants

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total grant allocation made under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 for the years 1993-94 and 1994-95; and if he will list the individual allocations for each local authority for 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Total provision for section 11 grant in 1993-94 is currently £130·8 million. The corresponding figure for 1994-95 amounts to £111·5 million. This includes funding transferred to the new single regeneration budget. I shall write to the hon. Member on the second part of his question.

Early Release Prisoners

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in each of the last six months have been released from prison on parole, licence or any other scheme for the early or temporary release of prisoners; how many committed offences or have been charged with committing offences while released under these schemes; and what were the offences concerned.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Win Griffiths, dated 24 January 1994:

EARLY OR TEMPORARY RELEASE OF PRISONERS

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many prisoners in each of the last six months have been released from prison on parole, licence or any other scheme for the early or temporary release of prisoners; how many committed offences or have been charged with committing offences whilst released under these schemes; and what were the offences concerned.

I regret that there is currently no accurate information available for the numbers released from prison in recent months. however, all those discharged from determinate sentences are released early either under the 1991 CJA or, for those sentenced before 1 october 1992, previous legislation. The average number discharged is about 4,000 a month. At present we have no central information on the numbers released on temporary absence nor on those committing or charged with committing offences whilst released, either temporarily or otherwise. We are considering whether and if so how such information can be made available in the future.

Escaped Prisoners

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons from which there have been escapes in each of the last five years; how many prisoners were involved in each escape; how long it was before they were recaptured; and what further offences, if any, were committed during the escape period.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Win Griffiths, dated 24 January 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for details of the prisons from which there have been escapes in each of the last five years; the number of prisoners involved in each escape; the period before recapture; and any further offences committed during the escape period.

I attach a table which lists the prisons from which prisoners have escaped, the number of prisoners involved and the number of escapees still unlawfully at large, as recorded by the Incident Management Support Unit.

The further offences committed by escaped prisoners is not recorded centrally, and the time spent unlawfully at large could only be calculated at disproportionate cost.

Establishments	*1989*		*1990*		*1991*		*1992*		*1993*	
	Escapers	*Still UAL*	*Escapers*	*Still UAL*	*Escapers*	*Still UAL*	*Escapers*	*Still UAL*	*Escapers*	*Still UAL*
Acklington	6	—	11	—	6	—	2	—	3	—
Aldington	6	1	6	—	16	3	14	3	1	1
Ashwell	3	—	2	—	6	—	1	—	4	—
Bedford	—	—	—	—	3	1	—	—	—	—
Belmarsh	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Birmingham	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Blakenhurst	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Blantyre House	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	2	—
Blundeston	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Brinsford	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Bristol	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	—	1	1
Brockhill	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—
Buckley Hall	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bullwood Hall	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—
Camp Hill	1	—	3	—	1	—	4	—	1	1
Canterbury	2	2	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Cardiff	—	—	1	—	2	—	5	1	—	—
Castington	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Channings Wood	5	—	3	—	9	—	8	2	2	2
Chelmsford	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Dartmoor	2	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Deerbolt	12	—	5	—	5	—	6	—	—	—
Dorchester	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Dover	—	—	—	—	7	—	4	—	—	—
Downview	1	—	—	—	3	—	4	2	6	1
Durham	—	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastwood Park	1	—	5	—	1	—	1	—	—	—

Establishments	*1989*		*1990*		*1991*		*1992*		*1993*	
	Escapers	*Still UAL*	*Escapers*	*Still UAL*	*Escapers*	*Still UAL*	*Escapers*	*Still UAL*	*Escapers*	*Still UAL*
Elmley	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	—
Erlestoke	4	—	7	—	4	—	1	—	4	1
Everthorpe	—	—	—	—	4	—	12	—	4	—
Exeter	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
Featherstone	4	—	5	—	5	—	3	1	10	3
Feltham	3	1	—	—	14	—	18	1	3	3
Frankland	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Glen Parva	—	—	—	—	5	—	8	—	2	—
Gloucester	—	—	9	—	3	—	8	—	—	—
Guys Marsh	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	18	—
Haslar	5	2	—	—	—	—	7	7	5	4
Haverigg	1	—	6	—	4	—	3	—	10	1
Hewell Grange	—	—	—	—	1		—	—	—	—
Highdown	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Highpoint	28	—	11	—	15	—	17	5	2	1
Hindley	6	—	—	—	1	—	3	—	—	—
Holloway	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Huntercombe	—	—	7	—	3	—	4	—	—	—
Hull	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kirklevington	1	—	—	—	3	—	1	—	1	—
Latchmere House	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Lancaster	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancaster Farms	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Leeds	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Leicester	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lewes	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Leyhill	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Lincoln	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Lindholme	4	—	7	—	29	—	9	—	8	2
Littlehey	—	—	5	2	1	—	5	—	7	—
Maidstone	—	—	—	—	1	—	2	—	—	—
Manchester	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
The Mount	2	—	1	—	12	3	2	—	4	—
New Hall	—	—	—	—	1	—	9	—	1	1
Northeye	3	1	4	—	3	—	—	—	—	—
Norwich	4	—	9	—	7	1	5	—	2	—
Onley	—	—	1	—	4	—	—	—	9	2
Oxford	2	1	3	—	3	—	—	—	—	—
Parkhurst	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Pentonville	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Portland	3	—	4	—	24	—	10	—	20	3
Preston	—	—	3	—	1	—	—	—	3	—
Pucklechurch	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ranby	11	—	29	1	11	—	14	—	20	5
Risley	—	—	—	—	4	—	3	—	1	—
Rochester	—	—	—	—	3	1	2	—	3	—
Send	—	—	4	1	4	—	3	—	3	—
Shepton Mallet	—	—	4	—	2	—	—	—	3	—
Stafford	5	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	3	—
Stocken	3	—	2	—	—	—	3	—	—	—
Stoke Heath	—	—	—	—	8	—	—	—	3	2
Styal	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sudbury	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Swaleside	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Swansea	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Thorn Cross	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thorp Arch	2	—	3	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
USK	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Verne	5	—	3	—	1	—	6	—	8	1
Wandsworth	—	—	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	—
Wayland	—	—	7	—	7	1	3	—	—	—
Wellingborough	—	—	2	—	4	—	5	2	7	3
Werrington	—	—	—	—	4	—	7	—	8	—
Wetherby	3	—	—	—	2	—	3	—	5	—
Whatton	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Winchester	—	—	—	—	2	—	3	—	—	—
The Wolds	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Wormwood Scrubs	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wymott	11	—	5	—	18	—	1	—	—	—
Total	162	8	195	4	303	12	254	30	204	40

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have died in British prisons as a result of the use of unlawful drugs in each year since 1988.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 24 January 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of people who have died in British prisons as a result of the use of unlawful drugs in each year since 1988.

Information from the outcome of post mortem examinations does not always provide details of the drugs which may be implicated in deaths. In England and Wales the information available centrally, which may not be complete, on deaths in prison which were attributable to illicit drugs which are not pharmaceutical preparations is as follows:

	Number
1988	0
1989	0
1990	0
1991	2
1992	2

Data are not yet available for 1993.

Directorate of Telecommunications

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has made to the request from the three civil service unions for a meeting to discuss the directorate of telecommunications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have agreed to the meeting.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what would be the annual saving arising from the closure of bail hostels in the west midlands area.

Mr. Maclean: We expect the savings to be in the order of £200,000 in 1994-95 and £400,000 for 1995-96.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the average cost of a place in a bail hostel in the west midlands, *(b)* the average length of stay and *(c)* the average cost of a prison remand place in the west midlands; and if he will give weekly figures from the latest available information.

Mr. Maclean: *(a)* The average weekly cost in 1993-94 is £243; *(b)* this information is not readily available in the form requested; *(c)* costs for remand prisoners are not kept separately. For 1992-93, the average weekly net operating cost per prisoner at Birmingham prison—the only prison in the west midlands—was £383. Remand prisoners represent just over 40 per cent. of these prisoners.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of persons who will be remanded into custody as a result of the closure of bail hostels in the west midlands.

Mr. Maclean: It is for the courts to decide who should be remanded in custody. There are approved hostel facilities available to them in the same or neighbouring probation areas.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what alternative arrangements are planned following the proposed closure of bail hostels in the west midlands.

Mr. Maclean: There are alternative hostel facilities in the west midlands and in neighbouring probation areas and it will be for the probation service there to bring them to the attention of the courts.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whom he plans to consult about the proposed closure of bail hostels in the west midlands.

Mr. Maclean: West midlands probation service was notified on 1 December of our closure proposals and given the opportunity to comment.

Dover Bail Hostel

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for each of the last three years for which figures are available, how many residents of Dover bail hostel were *(a)* aged under 17 years, *(b)* aged 17 to 21 years and *(c)* aged 21 years and over.

Mr. Maclean: The figures for individual years are not readily available. However, the total number in each category over the last three years is (a) 0, (b) 134, (c) 146.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what capital and revenue expenditure will be available for hostel provision in the Kent area for 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Mr. Maclean: Revenue grant for 1994-95 and 1995-96 will be about £200,000 a year. Capital grant will depend on the scrutiny of spending proposals submitted by all probation areas.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for the latest year available, how many people were remanded in Dover bail hostel; and how many were *(a)* black males and *(b)* black females.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not held centrally and is not readily available.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are likely to be made redundant in the event of the closure of the Dover bail hostel; and what would be the financial costs.

Mr. Maclean: It will be for the Kent probation committee as employer to decide how to handle the consequences of closure in terms of redeployment or redundancies; we have not yet received a full account of its conclusions.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people might be remanded into custody per annum as a result of the closure of Dover bail hostel in Kent.

Mr. Maclean: It is for the courts to decide who should be remanded in custody. There are approved hostel facilities available to them in the same or neighbouring probation areas.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what would be the annual saving as a result of the closure of the Dover bail hostel in Kent.

Mr. Maclean: We expect the saving to be in the order of £100,000 in 1994-95 and £200,000 in 1995-96.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were either rearrested and charged or breached for failure to comply with requirements at the Dover bail hostel for the last 10 quarters for which statistics are available.

Mr. Maclean: The quarterly figures are not readily available. However, over the last three years a total of 16 residents were rearrested and charged with other offences; and breach proceedings were taken against 94 residents for failure to comply with hostel requirements.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the average cost of a weekly place in the Dover bail hostel, *(b)* the average length of stay and *(c)* what was the average cost of a person remand place in the Kent area.

Mr. Maclean: *(a)* The current weekly cost is £269. *(b)* This information is not readily available in the form requested. *(c)* Figures showing the average cost of a prison remand place alone are not available. The current average cost of a place at the three local prison establishments that cover a multi-functional role, of which remand is a part, is £398 per place per week.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the occupancy rate of the Dover bail hostel for each of the last 10 quarters.

Mr. Maclean: The occupancy figures for the period April 1991 to March 1992 are not available in a quarterly form. The figures from April 1992 to September 1993 are detailed:

	Per cent.
April 1992 to June 1992	61
July 1992 to September 1992	68
October 1992 to December 1992	55
January 1993 to March 1993	57
April 1993 to June 1993	52
July 1993 to September 1993	50

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will be consulted about the proposed closure of the Dover bail hostel in Kent.

Mr. Maclean: The Kent probation service was notified on 1 December of our closure proposals and given the opportunity to comment.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what capital expenditure was planned for the Dover bail hostel prior to the Home Office statement of 30 November.

Mr. Maclean: A proposal for capital expenditure on the Dover bail hostel was under consideration by my officials prior to the 30 November statement, but it was not formally approved.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in the event of the closure of the Dover bail hostel, what advice would be given to the magistrates courts regarding any future bail hostel remands.

Mr. Maclean: It is for the Kent probation service to bring to the attention of magistrates courts the facilities offered by approved hostels in its own or in neighbouring areas.

Charity Commission Investigation

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *947-48*, how many people were interviewed by the Charity Commission during the investigation; and if Dame Shirley Porter, Michael Ivens, or members of Marketforce Communications Ltd. were interviewed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: One person, Sir Nigel Mobbs, the chairman of the charity's trustees, was interviewed during the investigation.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *947-48*, in what months the Charity Commission's investigations into the payments from the Foundation for Business Responsibilities of Marketforce Communications Ltd. were carried out.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The investigation was carried out between November 1991 and May 1992.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *947-48*, who repaid the money to the Foundation for Business Responsibilities following the Charity Commission's investigation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Michael Ivens repaid the money to the foundation.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *947-48*, what considerations underlay the Charity Commission's decision not to interview the donors to the Foundation for Business Responsibilties; and which of the foundation's trustees were interviewed during the Charity Commission's investigations.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It was not necessary for the purposes of the investigation to interview the donors to the Foundation for Business Responsibilities.

Sir Nigel Mobbs, chairman of the trustees, was interviewed during the investigation.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *947-48*, how many companies and individuals made donations to the Foundation for Business Responsibilities during 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Charities are not required to identify donors or donations in their accounts and these details are not separately identified in the published accounts of the Foundation for Business Responsibilities.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *947-48*, who has been the director of the Foundation for Business Responsibilities following Michael Ivens' resignation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There has been no director of the *Foundation for Business Responsibilities since the* resignation of Mr. Ivens. Any further appointment is a matter for the trustees.

Deportation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which destinations are considered to pose a greater risk to a police officer's safety than to that of the employees of private companies when escorting detainees; and what criteria are used in arriving at these decisions.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There is no comprehensive list of such destinations and the position may change from time to time. Assessments are made on the basis of all relevant information available to my Department and to the police.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the planned use of standard request forms to private security firms as well as to police in requests for assistance in deportation cases.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Yes.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account the Home Office and police review of removal procedures in immigration cases took of the standard of training carried out by private contractors before concluding that the use of a private contractor is undesirable where there is a known propensity to violence on the part of the detainee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The conclusion was based on considerations related to the powers and resources of the police rather than the standard of training provided by private contractors.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the improvements in training of police officers involved in escorting deportees announced in the recent Home Office/police review will be extended to the employees of private security firms involved in this work.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The companies which provide escorts are selected carefully, and their staff are expected to be fully trained. In considering the adequacy of that training the immigration service will take full account of the Home Office/police review of removal procedures.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which other European countries use *(a)* gags, *(b)* handcuffs, *(c)* bodybelts, *(d)* arm restraints and *(e)* leg restraints during deportations; and what discussions he has had with Ministers of other EC countries about the use of such restraints.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It would not be possible to provide this information without detailed inquiries of other European countries. I have had no discussions with Ministers of other European Union countries about the use of restraints.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in what proportion of escorted deportations carried out by private security firms restraining equipment is used;

(2) in how many cases where deportees were escorted any sort of restraint was used in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion of the total number of escorted deportations this represents.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information in the form requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Available information on the use of restraints by the police relates to the Metropolitan police deportation group. I understand that during the period January 1992 to July 1993, 139 escorts abroad were undertaken by officers from the group, and that restraints were used in 37 of these cases.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to compensate deportees or their families who have been injured by the use of a gag during attempted deportation.

Mr. Charles Wardle: If it were established that the Home Department had been responsible for any injury, my right hon. and learned Friend would consider any claim for compensation.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what independent element there was in the joint immigration and nationality department/Metropolitan police review of deportations.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The review was conducted by senior immigration and nationality department officials and senior officers of the Metropolitan police. A representative of the Association of Chief Police Officers was also involved. There was no independent element, but the fact that the review was being conducted was made known publicly. It was open to anyone to comment on the issues involved and comments on the review's conclusions would still be welcome.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment the joint Home Office and police review made of same day removals in deportation cases; and if he will now make it his policy not to carry out such removals.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The review concluded that removal direct from the home to the airport can raise the overall level of anxiety in what is already a difficult process. Whilst the review did not rule out "same day" removals altogether, it concluded that there should be a strong presumption against them, and that they should occur only in highly exceptional circumstances and with the authority of a senior member of the immigration service.

As he made clear in answer to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) on 12 January, columns *212-13*, my right hon. and learned Friend has accepted the recommendations in the review as a sensible basis for continued co-operation between the police and the immigration service in this sensitive area.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the standard request form for police assistance in deportations to be ready; and what elements it will contain.

Mr. Charles Wardle: As recommended in the joint review of removal procedures in immigration cases, it is intended to provide the police with all information relevant to them for planning purposes. The precise format has not yet been settled but is likely to include a brief case summary of the immigration history including the reason for removal; a reference to any known propensity to violence; any relevant medical history of which the immigration service is aware; and details of family members or others who may be expected to be on the premises. It is not yet possible to say precisely when the new arrangements will be introduced, but work is already in hand.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much notice immigration officers give to police divisions that they require police assistance in deporting someone.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Normally, a minimum of 24 hours' notice.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the detailed rules and supporting guidance for claimants of the new scheme proposed in the White Paper "Compensating Victims of Violent Crime".

Mr. Maclean: We hope to be able to publish the detailed rules and supporting guidance by early March.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nominations he has received for the proposed criminal injuries compensation appeals panel; and which organisations have made these nominations.

Mr. Maclean: To date, 85 nominations have been received. Fifteen of these have been made by friends or associates of the nominee or by the nominees themselves. The remainder have come from the Trades Union Congress, the Cabinet Office—Office of Public Service and Science—and the Department of Health.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the 1993 annual report of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board will be published.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that publication of the board's 29th annual report has been delayed as a result of a query raised by the board's auditors in connection with final approval of the financial accounts for 1992-93. The report will be published as soon as the auditors provide the necessary certification.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Abortion

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he received the report on abortion law from the Standing Commission on Human Rights in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend received the 18th annual report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights on 24 May 1993. The report includes a paper on Northern Ireland abortion law, which was subsequently published by the commission for consultation which ended on 1 December. The commission is considering the replies.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions in each of the last five years an abortion ruled to be legal has not been performed because no doctor was available to carry out the operation; and if he will set out the circumstances of each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: I am aware of one such case in which an application by "K", a minor, was heard by Mr. Justice Sheil in the High Court in October 1993. If she so wishes, the hon. Member may apply for details of the case to the family division of the High Court of Justice in Northern Ireland.

Civil Servants

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants, by Department, are employed in each council area in Northern Ireland; and what is his estimate of total salaries paid in respect of those employees in each council area.

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested in respect of civil servants employed by the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

Employees by Department in Council areas

District council	*DFP*	*DED*	*DOE*	*DHSS*	*DANI*	*DENI*	*NIO (including PANI)*
Antrim	—	24	146	100	190	—	31
Ards	—	15	126	59	51	—	54
Armagh	—	19	214	66	232	—	76
Ballymena	20	78	501	78	136	—	46
Ballymoney	—	9	58	53	9	—	17
Banbridge	—	21	75	51	10	—	26
Belfast	1,122	1,621	4,188	5,070	1,812	—	2,475
Carrickfergus	18	14	72	53	—	—	99
Castlereagh	—	96	27	—	36	—	430
Coleraine	17	20	532	96	181	—	47
Cookstown	11	9	104	45	171	—	22
Craigavon	32	75	563	147	51	—	87
Down	—	25	452	116	102	—	39
Dungannon	—	19	139	85	141	—	35
Fermanagh	11	48	292	87	233	—	77
Larne	—	11	66	58	49	—	17
Limavady	—	10	72	53	48	—	40
Lisburn	37	172	233	85	58	—	95
Derry City	63	127	414	593	24	110	86

District council	*DFP*	*DED*	*DOE*	*DHSS*	*DANI*	*DENI*	*NIO (including PANI)*
Magherafelt	—	15	89	71	21	—	18
Moyle	—	—	47	—	33	—	1
Newry and Mourne	—	77	237	175	72	—	35
Newtownabbey	—	142	74	82	17	—	26
North Down	29	16	138	74	—	510	58
Omagh	13	53	408	85	219	—	44
Strabane	—	13	81	72	43	—	19

District Council	*Estimated total salaries (£)*
Antrim	7,126,390
Ards	4,176,401
Armagh	8,232,233
Ballymena	12,748,861
Ballymoney	1,907,594
Banbridge	2,278,365
Belfast	222,160,030
Carrickfergus	3,418,744
Castlereagh	8,349,002
Coleraine	12,700,635
Cookstown	5,252,903
Craigavon	14,254,904
Down	10,075,777
Dungannon	6,256,413
Fermanagh	10,372,301
Larne	2,730,642
Limavady	2,756,806
Lisburn	12,204,910
Derry City	12,913,559
Magherafelt	2,787,368
Moyle	1,050,692
Newry and Mourne	8,287,133
Newtownabbey	7,086,151
North Down	13,880,000
Omagh	12,437,926
Strabane	2,906,877

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of civil service jobs *(a)* created and *(b)* transferred to each location within Northern Ireland and to Northern Ireland from elsewhere in the United Kingdom; and if he will show for each such movement the location from which they were moved and the type of employment and grades of civil servants involved and the cost of the movement in payments to personnel and for buildings, equipment and furnishings.

Sir John Wheeler: The number of jobs created and detailed information on the movement of civil service jobs could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the number of civil service jobs in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments transferred within Northern Ireland since 1990 were as follows:

	Number	*From*	*To*
1990	—	—	—
1991	664	Stormont	Belfast city centre
	18	Belfast	Londonderry
	24	Hydebank	Belfast city centre
1992	—	—	—
1993	62	Stormont	Londonderry
	98	Bangor	Londonderry
	364	Stormont	Belfast city centre
	11	Coleraine	Belfast
	13	Antrim	Belfast

Although no jobs in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments were transferred to Northern Ireland from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, the following new jobs were attracted to Northern Ireland from Great Britain:

580 social security benefit processing jobs to deal with claims from areas of central London have been created in a Belfast benefit centre since June 1990;

211 jobs relating to accounting work on encashed books were created at a paid order unit in Lisahally, County Londonderry in 1991. This work was formerly carried out by the Post Office on the mainland; and

455 jobs have been created in Belfast since 1993 to assess, collect and enforce child maintenance on behalf of the Great Britain Child Support Agency.

Civil Service (Performance Pay)

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evidence he has as to the extent to which performance-related pay policy in the Northern Ireland civil service is achieving its objectives.

Sir John Wheeler: The present scheme has been in existence for less than two years and the extent to which performance related pay policy in the Northern Ireland civil service is achieving its objectives has not yet been subject to formal review.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set out the breakdowns of numbers and percentages for the years 1991-92 and 1992-93 of the overall performance appraisal ratings for non-industrial staff in the Department of Finance and Personnel; and whether this breakdown is consistent with the original predictions.

Sir John Wheeler: When the present performance appraisal system was introduced, no predictions were made as to the anticipated performance levels of staff.

The annual statistics on performance appraisal ratings are as follows:

Performance Markings

Grade	*Total*	*Box 1*	*Per cent.*	*Box 2*	*Per cent.*	*Box 3*	*Per cent.*	*Box 4/5*	*Per cent.*
Analysis of year ending 31 December 1991									
Grade 5 and Analogous	21	1	4·8	17	80·9	3	14·3	—	—
Grade 6 and Analogous	46	6	13·0	31	67·4	8	17·4	1	2·2
Grade 7 and Analogous	91	12	13·2	65	71·4	14	15·4	—	—
Deputy Principal and Analogous	173	19	11·0	101	58·4	52	30·1	1	0·5
Staff Office and Analogous	169	15	8·9	100	59·2	53	31·3	1	0·6

Grade	*Total*	*Box 1*	*Per cent.*	*Box 2*	*Per cent.*	*Box 3*	*Per cent.*	*Box 4/5*	*Per cent.*
Executive Officer and Analogous	128	15	11·7	71	55·5	41	32·0	1	0·8
Executive Office II and Analogous	111	12	10·8	53	47·8	44	39·6	2	1·8
Administrative Officer and Analogous	339	41	12·1	213	62·8	82	24·2	3	0·9
Administrative Assistant	122	9	7·4	66	54·1	45	36·9	2	1·6
TOTAL	1,200	130	10·8	717	59·8	342	28·5	11	0·9
Analysis of year ending 31 December 1992									
Grade 5 and Analogous	26	5	19·2	20	76·9	1	3·9	—	—
Grade 6 and Analogous	36	4	11·1	25	69·4	7	19·5	—	—
Grade 7 and Analogous	94	13	13·8	63	67·0	18	19·2	—	—
Deputy Principal and Analogous	178	21	11·8	108	60·7	47	26·4	2	1·1
Staff Office and Analogous	181	26	14·4	108	59·6	45	24·9	2	1·1
Executive officer and Analogous	104	14	13·5	65	62·5	25	24·0	—	—
Executive Office II and Analogous	96	13	13·5	53	55·2	29	30·2	1	1·1
Administrative Officer and Analogous	285	45	15·8	178	62·4	60	21·1	2	0·1
Administrative Assistant	124	11	8·9	68	54·8	45	36·3	—	—
TOTAL	1,124	152	13·5	688	61·2	277	24·7	7	0·1

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Sir John Wheeler: None.

Cardiac Operations

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many private cardiac operations were carried out in the period from 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993 and 1 April 1993 to 31 May 1993 in each of the health and social services boards;

(2) how many NHS cardiac operations were carried out in the period from 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993 and 1 April 1993 to 31 May 1993 in each of the health and social services boards.

Mr. Ancram: The provisional number of finished consultant episodes in the cardiac surgery specialty for HPSS and private patients are as follows:

	Finished consultant episodes	
	HPSS	*Private*
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	798	95
1 April 1993 to 31 May 1993	113	14

Cardiac surgery in Northern Ireland is only available at the Royal Victoria hospital.

Most cases in the cardiac surgery specialty will have had only one operation, but information on the total number of operations is not available.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* column *404,* what are the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 of the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Sir John Wheeler: Approximately £2 million.

Strip Searches

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what purpose strip searches are carried out in prison institutions in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: As elsewhere in the United Kingdom, strip searches of male prisoners in Northern Ireland are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the policy operated in Northern Ireland is broadly in line with that in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Owing to the small number of female prisoners, the statistics are readily available. During the period 1 January 1989 to 9 January 1994, 1,992 full searches were carried out on female prisoners. This figure is due to the diverse status of the prisoners held at Her Majesty's prison, Maghabery and their associated movements to and from the prison.

Full strip searches of female prisoners are generally restricted to prisoners re-entering the prison and are not routinely carried out as part of cell searches.

WALES

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which his Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. Redwood: In the calendar years 1992 and 1993 the Welsh Office awarded 30 consultancy contracts to six firms of consultants which also have an accountancy practice within the same group. The total value of these contracts was £1·1 million. The firms involved were Coopers and Lybrand, CSL Group, KPMG Peat Marwick, Pannell Kerr Forster Associates, Price Waterhouse and Touche Ross. The Welsh Office did not award any consultancy contracts to merchant banks during this period.

Loans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, for each scheme operated by his Department under which loans are available, the objectives of the scheme, the number of unrecovered loans, the total value of unrecovered loans, the average number of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990, the average value of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990 and the annual cost of recovering loans.

Mr. Redwood: My Department does not operate any loan schemes available to the public or bodies corporate other than advances from the national loans fund to certain non-departmental public bodies. The annual accounts for those advances are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and laid before Parliament.

Ysbyty Gwynedd Bangor

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement regarding the incident on 27 December 1993 at Ysbyty Gwynedd Bangor in which there was a delay before an accident victim was transferred from a helipad to the casualty department at the hospital.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Responsibility for the ambulance service and its performance rests with Gwynedd health authority which has called for a full report.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of jobs held by *(a)* men and *(b)* women in Wales for each year from 1987 to the present; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Information on employees in employment is shown in the table.

Employees in employment
Wales

Year	*Male*	*Female*
1987	498	409
1988	513	440
1989	517	465
1990	520	470
1991	490	466
1992	477	464
1993	472	464

Source: Employment Department, quarterly estimates series.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many women were employed by his Department in each year since 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The information is shown in the table.

Number of women employed in the Welsh Office

Year (December)	*Number*
1987	1,128
1988	1,165
1989	1,212
1990	1,274
1991	1,349
1992	1,306
1993	1,304

The figures show the number of individuals employed. They include staff seconded to other organisations and exclude casual staff.

The Welsh Office is an equal opportunities employer and seeks to employ and promote staff on ability. Women comprise approximately half the staff in the Department and are encouraged to develop their potential through the Department's positive action programme for women.

Llandudno General Hospital

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement regarding the proposed rheumatology unit to be based at Llandudno general hospital.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for Gwynedd health authority.

County Council Smallholdings

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement regarding the future of county council smallholdings in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Subject to the provisions of the Agriculture Act 1970, it is for county councils in Wales to manage and run their smallholdings. The Local Government (Wales) Bill will transfer these functions to the new unitary authorities.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* column *402,* what estimate he has made of the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 resulting from the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There should be no additional net cost.

SCOTLAND

Loans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each scheme operated by his Department under which loans are available, the objectives of the scheme, the number of unrecovered loans, the total value of unrecovered loans, the average number of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990, the average value of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990 and the annual cost of recovering loans.

Mr. Lang: The table sets out details of the outstanding balances for loan schemes for the private sector operated by my Department. Only one such scheme, crofters building grants and loans, has incidences of repayment arrears; these details are included.

My Department also provides loans from the national loans fund to public corporations. The annual accounts for these are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and are laid before Parliament.

Schemes and objectives	*Number of outstanding loans January 1994*	*Value of outstanding loans January 1994*	*Average number of outstanding loans*			*Average value of outstanding loans*			*Annual cost to Department recovering loans*
			Year ending 31 March 1991	*Year ending 31 March 1992*	*Year ending 31 March 1993*	*Year ending 31 March 1991*	*Year ending 31 March 1992*	*Year ending 31 March 1993*	
		£000				*£000*	*£000*	*£000*	*£000*
Home purchase assistance[1] To offer first time house buyers an interest free loan of £600 for up to five years	9	7	9	9	9	0·6	0·6	0·6	Nil
Improvement and construction of piers and harbours[1] Loans to independent harbour authorities which provide a transport service	5	112	5	5	5	25	24	23	0·2
Forth Bridge and Tay Bridge Schemes[1] To facilitate construction, maintenance and operation of river crossings	2	3,339	2	2	2	7,249	5,589	3,800	—[2]
Scottish Enterprise To provide finance for industrial investment	7	16,673	Nil	4	7	Nil	2,093	2,298	—[2]
Loans to incoming tenants of crofts To allow tenants of re-let crofts to pay the compensation due for permanent improvements carried out by previous tenant	6	3	15	10	8	0·3	0·3	0·4	—[3]
Fisheries Act 1955 To assist independent harbour authorities for harbour repair and development to increase the safety of vessels and crews	17	809	30	23	19	28	36	43	1
Crofters building grants and loans scheme Loans to crofters for new house building and improvements, including gas and electricity supplies	6,717	25,826	6,753 of which 412 in arrears	6,776 of which 409 in arrears	6,700 of which 414 in arrears	3·1 average value of 0·5	3·3 average value of 0·7	3·6 average value of 0·8	—[3]

[1] Scheme no longer open to new loans.

[2] Figures cannot be separately identified.

[3] Figures cannot be separately identified: total annual cost for the 2 schemes estimated at £120,000.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which agencies are employed by the North Ayrshire and Arran NHS trust, the South Ayrshire NHS trust, and the Community Health Care NHS trust to deal with their public relations; and if he will make a statement about the costs of this service to each of the trusts.

Mr. Stewart: The agencies employed are as follows:

North Ayrshire and Arran NHS trust	Rex Stewart Grayling
South Ayrshire NHS trust	Alan Clark Associates
Ayrshire and Arran community healthcare NHS trust	Alan Clark Associates.

The cost of the service, which is an essential part of providing an efficient service to patients and the community, represents only a minute amount—between 0·02 per cent. and 0·05 per cent.—of the revenue of the trusts concerned.

Telephone Information Line

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the Scottish Office's telephone information line; and what are the costs involved in running the service, the total numbers of staff employed, the numbers of inquiries dealt with and the number of inquiries passed on to other agencies.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office information line, 0345 741 741 was launched on 30 September 1993. Calls on the information line to the Scottish Office central inquiry unit in Edinburgh from public phones anywhere in Scotland are charged at local rate. In addition members of the public may make calls to the unit from over 20 local information points throughout Scotland at no cost.

Since the launch, the information line has received over 1,900 calls. It is estimated that more than 90 per cent. of them have been for the Scottish Office and its associated departments or agencies to deal with. The cost of operating the information line is estimated to be £28,500 per annum. This excludes start up and initial publicity costs of £175,000. The staff of the central inquiry unit was augmented by one to handle the initiative.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many official Christmas cards were sent out in 1993 by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* civil servants and *(c)* staff of Government agencies working in or to his Department; and how much these cards cost (i) to buy, (ii) to post and (iii) in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes.

Mr. Lang: In 1993 Ministers in my Department sent 770 official Christmas cards, officials sent 6,208 and agencies sent 1,715.

The cost of the cards was £2,875 including VAT; it is not possible to identify the postal costs and staff time devoted to the dispatch of the cards.

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which his Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. Lang: During the financial year 1992-93, 14 consultancy contracts costing more than £20,000 per contract were awarded by the Scottish Office to four firms of consultants, which also have an accountancy practice within the same group. The total value of these contracts was £1,031,400. The firms were Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse and Touche Ross. No consultancy business was awarded by the Scottish Office to merchant banks during this period.

NHS (Cars)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cars have been allocated to NHS managers, advisers, administrators and clerical staff in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

NHS Trust Hospitals

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cars have been allocated to the managers, advisers and administrators employed by the national health service trust hospitals in each of the last two financial years.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

Freight on Ferry Services

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of subsidy concerning freight on ferry services to island communities in the United Kingdom since 1992.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In 1992-93 deficit grant subsidy of £6·1 million was paid to Caledonian MacBrayne to meet the operating deficit incurred in providing ferry services to the inner and outer Hebrides and islands in the Firth of Clyde. Because the subsidy paid to Caledonian MacBrayne is paid to meet the overall deficit incurred in providing ferry services for commercial vehicles, loose freight, cars and passengers, it is not possible to disaggregate the amount of subsidy paid specifically in relation to the carriage of freight.

In 1992-93 tariff rebate subsidy of £2·8 million was paid to P and O Scottish ferries in respect of carriage of freight to Orkney and Shetland in 1992-93. In addition, tariff rebate subsidy of £2·2 million was made available in 1992-93 to nine bulk shipping operators providing freight services to the northern and western isles. Subsidy paid under the tariff rebate subsidy scheme is paid in respect of different categories of traffic carried by shipping operators.

Outturn information in respect of 1993-94 is not yet available.

Yorkhill Hospital, Glasgow

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which grades of employee at Yorkhill national health service trust hospital, Glasgow, are to lose entitlement to sick pay scheme benefits higher than those of the statutory scheme.

Mr. Stewart: Terms and conditions of service are a matter for the trust.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much in the next financial year will be the reduction in sick pay paid out to employees of Yorkhill national health service trust hospital, Glasgow, following adoption of the statutory minimum entitlements.

Mr. Stewart: Such information is not held centrally.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consult medical authorities on their assessment of risk to sick children's health if low-paid employees at Yorkhill national health service trust hospital, Glasgow change their attendance patterns as a result of the abolition of their sick pay scheme and the introduction of minimum statutory entitlements.

Mr. Stewart: The work pattern of staff is a matter for the trust concerned.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what indication Yorkhill national health service trust gave in its application for trust status, on its intentions as to *(a)* reducing its employees' sick pay to the statutory minimum and *(b)* putting their jobs out to tender if they rejected these terms.

Mr. Stewart: The application referred to differences in various primary conditions of service, including sick leave, and declared an intention to review these over time.

National Health Service Trusts (Pay)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the percentage by which national health service trust chief executives' pay rose between 1992 and 1993; and what is the current salary of each.

Mr. Stewart: In November 1992, chairmen of trusts were asked to ensure that average settlements for staff on trust terms and conditions did not exceed 1·5 per cent. In March 1993, trust chief executives were asked to ensure that their annual reports show total emoluments of senior staff with that of the chief executive separately identified.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the percentage by which national health service unit general managers' pay rose between 1992 and 1993; and the current salaries of each.

Mr. Stewart: The annual uplift for unit general managers pay has been from 1 September of each year. The uplift as from 1 September 1992 was 3·9 per cent. Information on the salaries of each unit general manager is not held centrally.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy that each national health service trust will publish annually the emoluments of the chairman and the chief executive.

Mr. Stewart: In March 1993, trust chief executives were asked to ensure that their annual reports show total emoluments of senior staff, including board members, in broad bandings with chairman and chief executive separately identified.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the highest possible remuneration for *(a)* a national health service unit general manager and *(b)* a trust chief executive including any bonuses.

Mr. Stewart: Under new arrangements introduced as from 1 September 1993, the maximum possible pay of a unit general manager could be in the range £61,721 to £77,150 and that of a trust chief executive the range £66,944 to £83,681. A non-consolidated bonus of up to an additional 20 per cent. can be paid by the employing body to a unit general manager or trust chief executive at the top of the range who demonstrates outstanding performance.

Lung Cancer

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women died of lung cancer in 1992 in each health board area.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is available in table C2.16 on pages 70-81 of the 1992 annual report of the registrar general for Scotland, a copy of which was sent to the hon. Member in July 1993. A copy was also placed in the Library.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much he spent in 1992 and 1993 on publicising the rise in mortality amongst women from lung cancer; and how much will be spent for this purpose in 1994.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* The mortality rates from lung cancer in women are published in the annual reports of the registrar general for Scotland. No sums are specifically allocated to publicising these data.

The trends in mortality have been taken into account in the Government's health strategy for Scotland. A national target to reduce cancers by 15 per cent. by 2000 was adopted in 1991 and smoking, as the major cause of lung cancer, was identified as a priority for health education. By March this year, the Health Education Board for Scotland, which was established in 1991, will have spent nearly £3·7 million on anti-smoking campaigns, much of it aimed at women. The board plans to spend £500,000 on further measures during the next financial year.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on Friday 21 January by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 21 January at column *849*.

Samaritan Hospital, Glasgow

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Samaritan hospital, Glasgow, is to close; and what arrangements are in hand for the transfer of patients and the staff employed in that hospital.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* Greater Glasgow health board has yet to conclude its review of acute services. The Royal Samaritan hospital features is part of that review. The Secretary of State looks forward to receiving the health board's recommendations in due course.

Casualty Departments

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those casualty departments where patients have had to wait overnight for beds during the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* This information is not held centrally.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

8. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of revenue forgone as a result of the extension of the channel tunnel concession by 10 years.

Mr. MacGregor: It is not possible to say with any precision what the value to Eurotunnel or the cost to the Government of the extension of the concession will be.

Newly Qualified Drivers

9. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce stricter standards in driving tests and for newly qualified drivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: This proposal was considered in our recent consultation document on new driver safety, on which my right hon. Friend will shortly be making an announcement.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to which his Department sent, and from which it has received responses, regarding the consultation paper on measures to reduce accidents involving newly qualified drivers, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Key: The Department issued over 5,200 copies of the consultation paper to road safey and motoring organisations, local authorities and all MPs, also to all individuals who asked for a copy. We received 203 responses from organisations and 195 from individuals. It is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who respond to consultation exercises.

Public Transport, London

10. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to meet the chairman of London Transport to discuss improvements to public transport in London.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet the chairman of London Transport regularly to discuss progress in meeting the Government's objective of securing continuing improvements in London's public transport.

Car Ownership

12. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the best estimate of the increase in United Kingdom car ownership by the turn of the century.

Mr. Key: The Department of Transport's forecasts are for Great Britain. Growth in the number of cars between 1994 and the year 2000 is expected to be in the range of 11 per cent. to 16 per cent.

New Roads

13. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much public money he proposes to spend on new roads during the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: In 1994-95, I plan to spend around £1·3 billion on new construction of national roads in England. For each of the following two years, the figure is about £1·2 billion.

London Lorry Ban

14. **Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the London night-time and weekend lorry ban.

Mr. Norris: The Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill was introduced in the House last Wednesday. This contains proposals for the Secretary of State to take powers to vary traffic orders imposing permit-based restrictions on heavy lorries in London where an undue burden is imposed on business. The London night-time and weekend ban is such a restriction and the Government will be consulting shortly on proposals to amend the ban. It is not our intention to abolish the ban, contrary to some newspaper reports. However, we do intend to dispense with the bureaucratic permit system.

Ebbsfleet International Station

15. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the positioning of an international station at Ebbsfleet, Kent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and I have received representations from the promoter of the station at Ebbsfleet, from the "Kent Thames-side" Group, from Kent County Council and from a number of other organisations, individuals and hon. Members. We are considering those representations, together with Union Railways' October report, and will announce our decisions shortly.

Jubilee Line Extension

16. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that British firms gain contracts to build the Jubilee line.

Mr. Norris: The award of contracts for the Jubilee line extension is entirely a matter for London Underground Ltd. LUL has a duty to secure competitive tenders in a proper legal fashion, having regard to EC directives, and to secure best value for money.

M1, West Yorkshire

17. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to widen the M1 motorway in west Yorkshire.

Mr. Key: As part of the Department's proposals for the M1-A1 link road east of Leeds, it is planned to widen the M1 motorway over a one-mile length between Lofthouse interchange and Belle Isle. This local widening is needed to accommodate the major traffic flows between the M1, M62 and A1.

M11 Extension

18. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the social and environmental consequence of the M11 extension.

Mr. Norris: Representations received about construction of the A12 link road between Hackney Wick and the M11 have largely focused on the impact of the new road on the local community.

Rail Services, Barnsley

19. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about rail services from Barnsley to neighbouring areas.

Mr. Freeman: I have received various representations from time to time about rail services in the Barnsley area.

Road Pricing

20. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the effects of motorway tolls/road pricing, on the economies of the English regions and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Motorway charging will provide another source of finance for expanding the inter-urban road network more quickly. This will prevent congestion that would otherwise occur and so benefit the economies of all parts of the United Kingdom.

Open Shipping Register

21. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about a British open shipping register; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 11 January, *Official Report,* column *124.* A proposal for a British open register was received from the Baltic exchange on 3 December 1993. The complex issues which it raises require careful study. That remains the position.

Crossrail

22. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the crossrail project.

Mr. MacGregor: Having considered the report of the consultants appointed to review crossrail, the Government continue to support the project. It remains the Government's view that crossrail should be taken forward as a joint venture, with a substantial private sector financial contribution. Accordingly, the promoters will be seeking to progress the crossrail Bill when the Committee stage resumes on 25 January.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has drawn on the respective roles of public and private finance in crossrail following the report of the consultants commissioned by his Department to evaluate the project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* It remains the intention of Ministers that crossrail should be taken forward as a joint venture with the private sector.

Travelcards

23. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now introduce legislation to guarantee the retention of the travelcard following privatisation of London Buses and British Rail.

Mr. Norris: No new legislation is needed to ensure the continued availability of travelcard on the London public transport network. The Railways Act 1993 gives the franchising director power to require franchisees to participate in multi-modal ticketing schemes. After privatisation of London Buses Ltd., London Transport will remain responsible for the overall structure of fares and ticketing on London's buses and can thus ensure that travelcard will continue to be available on its bus services.

"Paying for Better Motorways"

24. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish comparative figures for the level of motorway charges in other European countries compared with the levels mentioned in his Green Paper "Paying for Better Motorways".

Mr. Key: Average tolls for cars on motorways in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal are between about 5p and 10p per mile. In Greece, they are up to 4p per mile. The levels of electronic tolls for cars discussed in the Green Paper were between 0·5p and 1·5p per mile.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to which his Department sent, and from which it has received responses, regarding the Green Paper "Paying for Better Motorways", together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department issued copies of the Green Paper to all the motoring organisations, organisations representing industry and local government, and to others who contacted the Department following reports in the media. We received a total of 204 responses from organisations. It is not our practice to identify those who respond to consultation exercises.

Chronic Oil Pollution

25. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve United Kingdom port reception facilities to combat chronic oil pollution.

Mr. Norris: Recent research commissioned by the Department indicates that the provision of reception facilities for oily wastes in United Kingdom ports is adequate. The provision of such facilities is kept under review.

Railways (Noise)

26. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his final decision about the compensation and protection arrangements relating to noise on *(a)* existing railway lines in Kent and *(b)* proposed new railway lines in Kent.

Mr. Freeman: On *(a)*, I agreed during the Adjournment debate initiated on 13 January by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), *Official Report*, column 432, to reflect on the legal opinion which he had received, through the local authorities concerned, on the subject of compensation for those with properties alongside existing rail routes to the channel tunnel. I shall clarify the position to the House as soon as possible.

On *(b)*, Union Railways has incorporated extensive noise mitigation measures in the design of the channel tunnel link and it will be for Parliament to decide, when considering a hybrid Bill to approve the project, on the adequacy of the measures. Meanwhile, the Department of Transport is currently consulting on draft regulations which will bring the arrangements for noise insulation for new railways in line with those for new highways, by making properties alongside eligible for insulation where noise exceeds certain levels. All comments received, including comments on the coverage of the regulations, will be considered carefully before regulations are laid before Parliament.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to whom his Department sent, and from whom it has received responses, regarding the consultation letter on noise insulation regulations for new railways and other guided systems, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* The Department issued 210 copies of the consultation papers to local authorities, professional institutions, railway operators, local action groups and others. A list of the original addressees for the consultation letter of 11 October 1993 was placed in the Library of the House at the time, with a set of the consultation documents. Some 200 further copies have since been issued in response to inquiries. The consultation period has therefore been extended by two months and responses will now be accepted until 28 February. I shall subsequently inform the House of the Government's conclusions on the response to the consultation. However, it is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who respond to consultation exercises.

M4, West Drayton

27. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about proposals to widen the M4 motorway at West Drayton.

Mr. Norris: My Department has received some 300 representations about the proposals to widen the M4 between junctions 3 and 4B. They are mainly opposed on grounds of increased noise, air pollution and environmental impact; some also suggest alternative proposals.

M6, Birmingham

28. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of a dedicated junction on the M6 motorway in Birmingham to service the inland container point and the Holford industrial estate taking into account the effect upon local roads of such a junction.

Mr. Key: Undertaking such an assessment would serve no useful purpose in view of the Department's firm policy not to permit dedicated accesses from motorways to serve private developments.

Trans-European Rail Network

29. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to discuss with his counterparts within the European Union progress towards a trans-European railway network.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport meets the Transport Ministers of the European Union from time to time at meetings of the Transport Council. Meetings will be held on 18 April and 20 and 21 June this year, but it is not yet known whether the trans-European railway network will be on the agenda. We understand that the Greek presidency is keen to make progress with those networks, including rail, for which proposals have not yet been adopted.

Rail Assets, Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to offer British Rail assets on the Isle of Wight for sale.

Mr. Freeman: We intend to franchise rail services on the Isle of Wight on a vertically integrated basis. The timetable for the sale of franchises is a matter for the Office of the Passenger Rail Franchiser, who will be formulating a franchising programme and submitting it to the Secretary of State.

Railways (Assaults)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents of violent crime and sexual assault were recorded at British Rail stations in Yorkshire and Humberside in each year since 1988; what is the national figure; and what are the figures expressed as percentages of the numbers of passengers.

Mr. Freeman: The figures for violent crime and sexual assaults before 1992, and the overall numbers of passengers are not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Figures for violent crime and sexual assault for 1992 and 1993 are as follows:

1992—118 Yorkshire and Humberside, 2,521 nationally
1993—84 Yorkshire and Humberside, 2,720 nationally.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were the victims of assault on a Network SouthEast train for each year from 1975; and how many of them were women.

Mr. Freeman: Figures are not readily available before 1992 and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. Figures for assaults on Network SouthEast trains during 1992 and 1993 are as follows:

	Number	*Women*
1992	843	164
1993	894	157
Total	1,737	321

Motorway Training

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage the development of extra motorway training at an affordable price.

Mr. Key: One of the proposals in the Department's recent consultation paper "New Driver Safety" was to develop post-test driver training schemes, including motorway tuition, in collaboration with the insurance industry. Tuition fees would not be regulated, but the aim would be to secure insurance discounts to offset the cost of the training. My right hon. Friend will be making a statement shortly on the outcome of the consultation.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce compulsory motorway tuition for all drivers.

Mr. Key: We have no such plans. Motorways are our safest roads: only 3 per cent. of accidents occur on them, though they carry 15 per cent. of traffic. Learners who live several miles from a motorway would face great inconvenience and cost if such tuition were made compulsory.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received regarding compulsory motorway tuition for drivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: About 12 per cent. of over 400 responses to the "New Driver Safety" consultation document included representations of various kinds on motorway tuition, either for learners or for newly qualified drivers. Other representations on this, as on many other road safety issues, have been made at various times by organisations or individuals, including the hon. Member.

Bus Routes, London

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London Transport bus routes have been put out to tender; and what is the latest estimate of the consequential savings.

Mr. Norris: London Transport operates some 650 bus routes. Of these, 279 have been competitively tendered. LT estimates that tendering has produced average cost savings, net of administrative costs, of 15 to 20 per cent.

Aylesbury to Wing Bypass

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of public consultation on his Department's initial proposals for the west of Aylesbury to Wing bypass.

Mr. Key: In response to the views expressed on proposals for a southern bypass of Aylesbury, my Department is today withdrawing from consultation. I have decided to look again at this issue, not ruling out the possibility of a northern corridor along the A41 towards the M40. Now that Buckinghamshire county council's southern bypass of Wing will not proceed as planned, I will commission a new and strategic study of the route between the A5 near Leighton Buzzard in the east and the M40 in the Oxford area in the West. This will be an early priority for the new Highways Agency.

London Underground

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual cost of regular maintenance undertaken of each major technical aspect of London Underground; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The distribution of maintenance expenditure is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd.

Toxic Loads

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to make it illegal for toxic loads to be transported through toll tunnels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: None. A list of restrictions is published and applied by companies operating as British Toll Tunnels under relevant tunnel byelaws. These restrictions are based on the UN recommendations on the transport of dangerous goods. Taken together with appropriate tunnel management systems, they ensure that any risks in transporting dangerous goods are kept to a minimum and such tunnels have operated safely for many years.

Aberystwyth to Machynlleth Rail Line

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the return to full service of the Aberystwyth to Machynlleth rail line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that rail services have now been restored between Aberystwyth and Machynlleth; and that British Rail hopes to restore through services to Shrewsbury during March, following repairs to the damaged bridge south of Welshpool.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *419-20*, what are the additional costs, net of any reduction in employers' national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 of the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Norris: The separate effects of the change in statutory sick pay provision and the reduction in employers' national insurance contribution rates cannot be estimated accurately, except at disproportionate cost. Reimbursements of national insurance contributions under the statutory sick pay arrangements currently run at approximately £1 million per annum and the reduction in the percentage contribution rates is expected to offer savings of approximately £1 million, so the overall effect of the changes in 1994-95 will be approximately neutral.

Cycles (Statistics)

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to oblige rail service providers to collate statistics on the number of cycles carried; and if he will make it a condition of the public service obligation grant or franchise agreement to do so.

Mr. Freeman: I have no plans to oblige rail service providers to collate such statistics.

We have, however, invited the cyclist public affairs group to produce guidance for rail service operators explaining how they can make their services more attractive to the growing number of cyclists. I shall ensure that copies of this guidance are sent to all bidders for rail franchises.

Railway Lines (Fox Hounds)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many reported incidents of fox hounds on railway lines there have been in the last three years; and how many resulted in prosecutions.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 14 January 1994]:* In the three years up to 31 December 1993, there were 24 reported incidents of fox hounds on railway lines and no prosecutions.

Taxi Services

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to which his Department sent and from which it has received responses, regarding the consultation paper on the future of taxi and private hire services in England and Wales, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department has issued about 4,500 copies of this consultation paper to organisations and individuals who have an interest in the subject. These include local authority associations and all individual county and district councils, local and national taxi and private hire vehicle organisations, the licensing officers organisation, the police, organisations concerned with people who have mobility problems and vulnerable members of society, consumer groups, transport interests, the press, car, taxi and taximeter manufacturers and those concerned with tourists. Copies were available in the Lobby of the House and in another place. The paper was also published in a trade newspaper.

It is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who respond to consultation exercises, and, in any event, the consultation period lasts until 1 March 1994.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to which his Department sent and from which it has received responses regarding the consultation paper on "Railway Privatisation: Passenger Rolling Stock", together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department issued 349 copies of the consultation paper to potential lessors and franchisees, rolling stock manufacturers, financial institutions, local authority associations, and other interested parties, and we received 31 responses from a similar range of organisations.

It is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who respond to consultation exercises.

Road/Rail Transport

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to which his Department sent and from which it has received responses regarding the consultation paper on heavier lorries for combined road/rail transport, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department issued over 3,000 copies of the consultation paper to more than 400 organisations, companies and individuals. These included transport industry associations, the local authority associations and many individual local authorities, transport and distribution companies and agents, user of freight services, environmental groups, the police associations and various institutes and universities with interests in transport. We received 48 responses from associations, 136 from individual organisations and five from individuals. It is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who respond to consultation exercises.

Buses

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to whom his Department sent, and from whom his Department has received responses, regarding the consultation paper on the operation of local bus services outside London, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department initially issued 56 copies of the consultation paper to individual bus operators, local authorities and to their associations and to bus user groups. We issued copies subsequently to all, including individuals, who requested it. We received 135 responses from organisations and 27 responses from individuals. It is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who respond to consultation exercises.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Know-how Fund

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent on the know-how fund 1992-93; how much has been spent in the current financial year; what projects were undertaken; and which consultancy companies were in receipt of know-how fund moneys in 1992-93 and in the current financial year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A total of £47,249,000 was disbursed through the know-how fund in the financial year 1992-93. Approximately £28,437,000 has been disbursed in the current financial year. A list of projects undertaken from the beginning of 1992-93 onwards, using know-how fund moneys, has been placed in the Library. This list also contains the names of the consultancy companies, other organisations and individuals contracted to carry out these projects.

Overseas Aid

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what considerations underlay the decision not to include details of United Kingdom overseas aid as a percentage of United Kingdom gross domestic product in "British Overseas Aid, Annual Review 1993" or in the statistical appendix forming part of the review.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British overseas aid annual review 1993 is intended to provide a broad overview of our aid activities in 1992-93. Comprehensive statistics including the United Kingdom's aid-GNP ratio are contained in British aid statistics 1988-89 to 1992-93, section D, which has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Eastern Europe (Aid)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring provision exists in regard to multilateral aid to former east European nations within the European Union framework; what are the comparable procedures for monitoring of bilateral aid given to developing nations in other parts of the world; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: European Commission procedures for monitoring EC aid financed activities in countries in central and eastern Europe under the Poland, Hungary Aid for Reconstruction of the Economy programme include regular reports from project managers and visits to projects by both EC staff and EC consultants. EC project staff and recipient Governments are both involved in monitoring physical and financial progress.

Arrangements for monitoring bilateral aid projects involve a combination of visits by ODA staff and embassy and high commission officials, together with reports from project personnel and recipient authorities. When the project implementation nears its conclusion, a completion report is prepared. The precise arrangements vary according to the needs of individual projects.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Attorney-General how many official Christmas cards were sent out in 1993 by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* civil servants and *(c)* staff of Government agencies working in or to his Department; and how much these cards cost (i) to buy, (ii) to post and (iii) in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes.

The Attorney-General: In 1993, *(a)* 150 Christmas cards were sent by Ministers, *(b)* 1,190 by civil servants in the Treasury Solicitor's Department, the Serious Fraud Office and the legal secretariat to the Law Officers and *(c)* 196 by staff of the Government Property Lawyers Agency. The approximate cost of these cards was (i) £1,100 to buy and (ii) approximately £255 to post. Figures are not available for the cost of staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes. Figures for the Crown Prosecution Service are not included and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Market Testing

37. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if it is Government policy to consider directly privatising departmental activities before giving consideration to market testing them.

Mr. Waldegrave: Where an activity does not need to be managed by Government, we will consider whether it needs to be carried out at all or whether it should be privatised.

Where we consider that ultimate responsibility for a function should remain within Government, its delivery may be contracted out or market tested in order to see whether value for money can be improved.

Science Budget

38. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the size of the science budget in each of the last three years.

Mr. Waldegrave: The science budget was £930 million in 1991-92 and £1,051 million in 1992-93 and the outturn for 1993-94 is estimated at £1,164 million.

Civil Service (Outside Recruitment)

40. **Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what opportunities exist within the civil service for recruiting specialists from private industry and the professions.

Mr. David Davis: There are opportunities at all levels of the civil service for recruits from a wide range of specialisms and professional backgrounds, from actuaries to zoologists. Government Departments and agencies are particularly interested in recruits with relevant outside experience.

"Back to Basics"

41. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the public policy objectives of the Government's "back-to-basics" campaign are monitored already by citizens charter standards.

Mr. Waldegrave: The citizens charter is based on fundamental principles which should underlie all good organisations—explicit standards of service, consultation with customers and a proper response if standards are not met. The charter is seeking to ensure that the basic public services on which we all depend—our schools, hospitals, local authorities, railways, utilities—are run in accordance with these principles.

Scientific Inventions

42. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new proposals he has to support scientific inventions.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government set out their policies for the support of science and technology in the White Paper "Realising our Potential"—Cm 2250—issued in May last year.

Charters

43. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what system is used by his Department to judge whether the standards set by individual charters can be tightened.

Mr. David Davis: Under the citizens charter, public services are required to publish their standards and their performance against these standards. As standards are met, so they are being raised.

My right hon. Friend regularly reviews progress in raising standards of service across the whole public sector.

Science Research

39. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of Government spending on science is distributed to research undertaken outside of universities.

Mr. Waldegrave: In 1991-92, the latest year for which data on the destination of Government R and D spending is available, 73 per cent. of the total was spent in non-university sectors.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to ensure that an adequate number of science lecturers will be available to undertake research in universities.

Mr. David Davis: It is primarily for the universities, as autonomous institutions, to determine how best to meet their future staffing needs. The research councils have a responsibility to help ensure the supply of highly-qualified scientists and engineers who might undertake research in universities or elsewhere.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* column *369,* what estimate he has made of the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 resulting from the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. David Davis: The additional cost to my departmental budget resulting from the change in statutory sick pay provision, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, is estimated to be £5,000 a year. The precise figure will, in any one year, depend on a number of factors including the level of sickness absence and the distribution of salaries across the national insurance bands.

Psychometric Testing

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement regarding the use of psychometric testing in the civil service and United Kingdom businesses in the assessment of individual employee performance ability and the removal from employment.

Mr. Waldegrave: Following the delegation of responsibility for personal review and promotion to Departments and agencies, information is not held centrally on the use of psychometric testing in the civil service. Neither is information held on the use of psychometric tests in United Kingdom businesses. However, the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency acts on behalf of some Departments and agencies, and uses psychometric tests when appropriate. This is always done under the direction of a chartered psychologist and in conformity with the Institute of Personnel Management and the British Psychological Society guidelines.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during the current year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to him on 21 January at col. *849*.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 21 January at col. *849*.

Inhumane Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects Her Majesty's Government to ratify the 1981 inhumane weapons convention.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom hopes to ratify the convention later this year.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will be the effect on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the export of anti-personnel mines of ratification of the 1981 inhumane weapons convention by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Ratification of the convention will not have any direct effects on our policy regarding mine exports. The convention relates to the use of mines, booby traps and other devices as defined, not to their export.

The United Kingdom already adheres strictly to the principles of the convention. We also adopt a responsible approach to the export of defence equipment, and have one of the most rigorous systems for scrutinising licence applications. The United Kingdom has not produced or exported anti-personnel mines for some time.

United Nations First Committee

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list Her Majesty's Government's voting record for each measure, and amendments thereto, on the agenda of the first committee of the United Nations General Assembly in 1993.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The voting record is as follows:

	Subject	*Voting record*
Item 57	New Types of Weapons of Mass Destruction	consensus
Item 58(B)	Transparency of Military Expenditures	consensus
Item 59	Compliance with Arms Limitation and Disarmament Agreements	consensus
Item 60	Education and Information for Disarmament	consensus
Item 61(B)	Biological Weapons Convention: Verification Experts' Report	consensus
Item 62	Science and Technology (India)	against
Item 63	Science and Technology (Germany/Brazil)	abstention
Item 64	Verification in all its Aspects	abstention
	Operative Paragraph 2	against
Item 65	Partial Test Ban Treaty Conference	against
Item 66	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty	consensus
Item 67	Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone	consensus
Item 68	South Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone	for
Item 69	Negative Security Assurances	abstention
Item 70	Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space	for
	Preambular Paragraph 18	abstention
	Operative Paragraph 8	abstention
	Operative Paragraph 10	abstention
Item 70	Study of Confidence Building Measures in Outer Space	consensus
Item 71C	Study on Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction	against
Item 71	Bilateral Nuclear Arms Negotiations	consensus
Item 71J	Conventional Arms Control	for
Item 71(C)	Prohibition of Production of Fissile Material	consensus
Item 71(D)	Dumping of Radioactive Waste	consensus
Item 71(E)	Disarmament and Development	consensus
Item 71(F)	Regional Disarmament (Germany)	consensus
Item 71(F)I	Regional Disarmament (Pakistan)	for

	Subject	*Voting record*
Item 71(G)	Transparency in Armaments	consensus
Item 71(H)	International Arms Transfers (Colombia)	consensus
Item 71(H)	International Arms Transfers (Afghanistan)	for
Item 71(J)	Moratorium on Export of Anti-Personnel Mines	consensus
Item 72(A)	UN Disarmament Fellowship	consensus
Item 72(B)B	Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons	against
Item 72(C)	UN Disarmament Information Programme	consensus
Item 72(E)A	Regional Confidence Building Measures	abstention
Item 72(F)	Regional Centres for Peace	consensus
Item 73(A)	UN Disarmament Commission Report	consensus
Item 73(B)	Conference on Disarmament Report	consensus
Item 74	Israeli Nuclear Armament	against
Item 75	Inhumane Weapons Convention	for
	Preambular Paragraph 5	abstention
Item 76	Question of Antarctica	did not participate
Item 77	Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean Region	consensus
Item 78	Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace	against
Item 79	Implementation of the Declaration on International Security	abstention
Item 80	Maintenance of International Security	for
Item 80	Maintenance of International Security (Balkan States)	consensus
Item 81	Treaty of Tlatelolco	consensus
Item 82	Denuclearisation of Africa	consensus
Item 156	Rationalisation of the First Committee Agenda	consensus

Copies of the statements and explanations of vote which we made with reference to the above have been sent to the House of Commons Library.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British subjects have been appointed to the provisional technical secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, formed under the chemical weapons convention; and what posts they have filled.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Three British citizens have been appointed to professional posts in the provisional technical secretariat. They occupy the posts of executive secretary, head of the chemical weapons branch of the verification division and head of the general services branch of the administration division. A further three British citizens are employed in the general services branch.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's time scale for the ratification of the chemical weapons convention.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We intend to ratify the chemical weapons convention as soon as the necessary implementing legislation is in place. The legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time becomes available.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many papers were presented by the United Kingdom Government to the disarmament negotiations for the chemical weapons convention disclosing details of its past chemical weapons programme; and when these papers were presented.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom has presented two papers disclosing details of its past chemical weapons programme. On 24 April 1979 the United Kingdom presented a paper titled "Visit to Britain by Chemical Weapons Experts" to the committee on disarmament, now known as the conference on disarmament. The second paper, titled "Past Production of Chemical Warfare Agents in the United Kingdom" was presented to the conference on disarmament on 17 August 1988.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the status of the British subjects who have been appointed to the provisional technical secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, formed under the chemical weapons convention, will change if the United Kingdom has not ratified the convention by the time it enters into force.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Only citizens of states which have ratified the chemical weapons convention will be eligible to work at the technical secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons after the treaty enters into force. The technical secretariat will replace the provisional technical secretariat on entry into force of the convention.

Cyprus

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he will use to promote the implementation of the United Nations Secretary-General's confidence-building measures in Cyprus.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We continue to encourage all parties to make progress on the package of confidence building measures proposed by the United Nations Secretary-General. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs stressed the urgency of progress during his trip to Ankara on

19-20 January, and will do so when he meets the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alecos Michaelides, on 2 February.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the number of Turkish citizens who have moved into the north of Cyprus since 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There is dispute and uncertainty about the number of Turkish settlers in northern Cyprus. A range of figures are quoted, usually by partisan groups. We have no means to compile our own statistics. Security Council resolution 789 of 25 November 1992 urged the parties to commit themselves to a number of confidence-building measures, including a Cyprus-wide census under the auspices of the United Nations.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice he intends to give the United Nations regarding the continued movement into the north of Cyprus of citizens of Turkey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The issue of residence rights is intrinsic to the UN-sponsored talks on Cyprus and would be an important element in any negotiated settlement.

GCHQ

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the research projects in universities which have been funded by the Government Communications Headquarters since 1989, including the duration, titles and value of each project; and what security classification applied to each such university project.

Mr. Hurd: The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

Year	*University and title*		*Cost £*	*Duration*
1989	Cambridge	Max Newman Fellowship	109,683	4 years
1990	Leicester	Testing and integration of direction finding sub-system	1,700	2 months
1991	Leicester	Analysis of high frequency radio propagation measurements	35,392	3½ years
	Leicester	Data collection and processing for analysis of high frequency radio propagation measurements	64,849	2 years
	York	Screened room measurements	101,823	2 years
	Oxford	Mathematical Research Fellowship	109,000	3 years
	Leicester	Development and construction of data collection and processing unit for high frequency radio propagation measurements	33,151	2 years
1992	York	Characterisation of facsimile	5,000	18 months
	York	Research support in field of communications simulation and modelling	14,547	1 year
1993	Leicester	Direction finding data analysis	67,075	1 year
	Cambridge	Max Newman Fellowship	99,000	3 years

In addition to the two university research projects listed for 1992 there was a project with Cheltenham and Gloucester college of higher education—cost £10,000, duration one year—on fax image orientation.

As I told the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) on 21 July 1993 at column *236*, the research commissioned is confined to unclassified subjects. We retain proprietary rights over the research, but the results may be published by the relevant academic institution, if it wishes.

Major General Mohnke

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report,* column *458,* what requests were received from the German authorities for co-operation in their investigation into Major General Mohnke's involvement in the murder of more than 80 British service men; and what was the response.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In 1988 we offered the German authorities full co-operation in this matter, including access to the British records. The offer was accepted. The German authorities' subsequent requests to visit the United Kingdom to interview survivors and others with relevant information and to have statements taken from them were granted. Full facilities were given by the relevant British authorities while the German prosecutor was in this country.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* column *356,* what estimate he has made of the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 resulting from the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Goodlad: In 1992-93 the Department of Social Security reimbursed the Foreign and Commonwealth office a sum of £167,586 in respect of statutory sick pay provision. The projected sum for 1994-95 is £148,089. The DSS have yet to advise what reduction is to be made to national insurance contributions. But it is clear that the overall cost to the FCO of the new arrangements will be relatively small and will be able to be absorbed within the Department's running costs.

Serbia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to raise with the Greek presidency of the European Union allegations of breaking of European Union-backed sanctions by Greek companies in providing oil and military equipment to Serbia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since the imposition of sanctions on Serbia and Montenegro we have been in close contact with the Greek Government over alleged sanctions breaches by Greek companies. As a result of our representations the Greek authorities have initiated a number of prosecutions against sanctions violators.

We shall continue to make representations where we receive reports of alleged breaches. We have seen no evidence of Greek involvement in the supply of military equipment to Serbia.

EMPLOYMENT

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during the current year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January 1994 at col. *849*.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 January 1994]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 21 January 1994 at col. *849*.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list job losses in each year since 1973 in the Houghton and Washington constituency and give the level of youth unemployment in the same years.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested. Comparable employment information for parliamentary constituencies is available only form the periodic censuses of employment, held between 1984 and 1991. This can be used to estimate the net change in the number of employees in employment.

Claimant unemployment statistics for local areas are available from July 1983. Statistics for particular age bands are available quarterly for the months of January, April, July and October.

Employment and unemployment statistics for parliamentary constituencies can be obtained from the NOMIS database available in the Library.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new jobs have been created in the Houghton and Washington constituency in each year since 1973.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested. Comparable employment information for parliamentary constituencies is available only from the periodic censuses of employment, held between 1984 and 1991. This can be used to estimate the net change in the number of employees in employment, and is given in the following table:

Employees in employment in Houghton and Washington constituency, September of each year

Year	Number
1984	28,400
1987	27,400
1989	27,800
1991	29,100

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of full-time manual workers, full-time non-manual workers and all full-time workers earned, including overtime, less than £203·07 per week in *(a)* the west midlands region and *(b)* Great Britain for (i) males, (ii) females and (iii) all adults in 1993.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is provided in the following table:

Full-time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence Proportion with gross weekly earnings below £203·07: April 1993

Per cent.

	West midlands region	*Great Britain*
Manual men	26·2	25·9
Non-manual men	13·9	11·6
All men	20·2	18·1
Manual women	76·8	73·9
Non-manual women	44·0	35·1
All women	51·1	42·0
Manual adults	35·4	34·7
Non-manual adults	27·7	22·4
All adults	30·8	26·7

Source: "New Earnings Survey".

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of part-time female manual workers, part-time female non-manual workers and all part-time female workers earned, excluding overtime, less than £5·42 per hour in *(a)* the west midlands region and *(b)* Great Britain in 1993.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is provided in the table:

Part-time employees on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence Proportion with gross hourly earnings, excluding overtime, below £5·42: April 1993

Per cent.

	West midlands region	*Great Britain*
Manual women	93·0	91·2
Non-manual women	66·7	64·2
All women	77·2	73·8

Source: "New Earnings Survey".

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

European Social Fund

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the number of *(a)* long-term unemployed people and *(b)* young jobseekers who have benefited, in each year since its establishment, from the European social fund's employment and training grants, giving each figure for (i) the northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figures show the numbers in Great Britain and Northern region of long-term unemployed and young people supported by the European social fund, for each calendar application year:

	1991	*1992*	*1993*
Great Britain			
long-term unemployed	—	763,829	1,241,328
young people	333,773	589,946	810,410
Northern region			
long-term unemployed	—	43,552	53,364
young people	40,690	47,579	66,921

1. Figures for 1990 are not available, and disaggregated figures for long-term unemployed are only available from 1992 onwards.
2. The European social fund in Northern Ireland is administered separately by the Department of Economic Development.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total budget awarded to the EC's European social fund in each year since its establishment; and what proportion of this was granted to (i) the northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figures set out below show the total value of European social fund payments across the Community. The figures are drawn from the published EC budget for each year since 1990, when the current arrangements for devolved management of the fund by member states came fully into operation:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
mecu	3,322	3,869	4,505	5,061

The following figures show the level of spend in Great Britain and northern region for each calendar application year:

Year	*Great Britain*	*Northern region £ million*
1990	269·2	—
1991	367·0	26·0
1992	374·0	26·5
1993	595·0	45·0

Notes:

1. Regional data is only readily available for 1991 onwards.
2. Final figures of spend for 1993 are not yet available, so figures for committed spend have been provided.
3. The European social fund in Northern Ireland is administered by the Department of Economic Development.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total value of the budgets provided by the European Community under the European social fund for *(a)* vocational training and guidance and *(b)* job creation in each year since its establishment; and what was the total allocation of each to (i) the Northern Region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Figures for the EC budget are not available separately for vocational training and job creation. However, the total value of the European social fund across the Community since 1990 is set out in the table. The figures are drawn from the published EC budget for each year since 1990, when the current arrangements for devolved management of the fund by member states came fully into operation.

Year	*Mecu*
1990	3,322
1991	3,869
1992	4,505
1993	5,061

The following figures show the level of spend in Great Britain and northern region for vocational training and guidance, and job creation for each calendar application year, where data is readily available, since the time when management of the fund by member states came fully into operation:

£ million

	1991	*1992*	*1993*
Great Britain			
Vocational training	350·0	355·4	576·2
Job creation	15·9	17·0	16·5
Northern region			
Vocational training	22·6	24·7	43·3
Job creation	3·4	1·7	2·0

Notes:

1. Regional data is only readily available for 1991 onwards.
2. Final figures of spend for 1993 are not yet available, so figures for committed spend have been provided.
3. The European social fund in Northern Ireland is administered separately by the Department of Economic Development.

Apprenticeships

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he is planning to take to ensure that the modern apprenticeship scheme will promote equal opportunities, and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that he wants to see modern apprenticeships open equally to young women and young men. We shall be asking industry training organisations to take into account all aspects of equal opportunities in apprenticeship models they develop, and shall continue to place a contractual requirement on training and enterprise councils to ensure equality of opportunity in all their activities.

Sikh Workers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to grant a general exemption to the British Sikh community from the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have given careful consideration to the representations that have been made for a complete exemption for Sikhs from health and safety requirements to wear head protection. Any exemption would be contrary to the EC directive on personal protective equipment, which the 1992 regulations implement. Attempts to secure a derogation from the directive failed in 1989 as the United Kingdom was unable to obtain the support of other member states. Now this directive is in force, the only way an exemption could be granted would be if the European Commission were to put forward an amending directive. This seems unlikely given the earlier lack of support from other member states.

Agism

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to bring forward proposals for legislation preventing companies from putting age limits on job vacancy advertisements; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 4 November 1993, *Official Report*, columns. *433-34*.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *695*, what are the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 of the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As indicated in my reply of 19 January 1994 to the hon. Member, *Official Report*, column *695*, the Department anticipates no net additional costs.

Access to Work Scheme

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the level of the ceiling for employer contributions and *(b)* the level of ceiling on allocations for individual employees within the new access to work scheme; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of employer contributions towards the purchase of specialist equipment and services for disabled employees upon *(a)* self-employed disabled people, *(b)* part-time disabled employees, *(c)* disabled employees working at home, *(d)* disabled employees on temporary contracts of one year or less and *(e)* disabled people contracted to work concurrently for two or more separate employers; and if he will make a statement;

(3) who will own equipment jointly purchased by employers and the Government for disabled employees under the access to work proposals; what advice will be issued to companies by his Department on *(a)* the declaration of equipment purchasing within the audited accounts of companies and *(b)* arrangements for insuring equipment; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will make it his policy to establish a mechanism enabling disabled employees to lodge appeals against capping limits set under the new access to work scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* In reaching final decisions about the details of the access to work scheme, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my noble Friend Lord Henley are considering carefully all the representations made by the disability and employer groups that we have met. My right hon. Friend hopes to announce decisions soon.

DEFENCE

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many official Christmas cards were sent out in 1993 by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* civil servants and *(c)* staff of Government agencies working in or to his Department; and how much these cards cost (i) to buy, (ii) to post and (iii) in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes.

Mr. Hanley: The information as requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Loans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, for each scheme operated by his Department under which loans are available, the objectives of the scheme, the number of unrecovered loans, the total value of unrecovered loans, the average number of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990, the average value of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990 and the annual cost of recovering loans.

Mr. Aitken: My Department operates a number of schemes whereby loans may be made available to its civilian staff. These are normally in the form of advances of salary, which are repayable. The schemes are:

Season Ticket Advance

To assist staff purchase a quarterly or longer season ticket for travel between home and office.

Advances for Staff Posted Overseas

An advance of up to three months' gross salary may be paid to assist staff with settling-in expenses on arrival overseas.

Holiday Advances

A salary advance of up to £300 may be made to staff once each year prior to taking annual leave to assist with holiday expenses.

House Purchase

Where all other means of funding have been exhausted up to six months gross pay may be advanced to assist staff purchase property following transfer.

Similarly in cases of "negative equity" and where an out-standing bridging loan exceeds the value of the sale property, advances of up to 12 months' gross salary may be made.

The information for 1990 to 1992 is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The number of advances in operation at December 1993 for the current financial year for each scheme and the balance still to be recovered was:

	Number of advances	*Balance outstanding (£)*
Season ticket advance	6,219	4,083,525
Advances for staff posted overseas	738	1,565,699
Holiday advances	12	3,600
House purchase	1,704	7,069,805

The annual cost of administering the schemes is £35,000 at present price levels.

Porton Down Officials (US Visits)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when officials from the Ministry of Defence or the chemical and biological establishment at Porton Down visited or were stationed at *(a)* Pine Bluff arsenal in Arkansas and *(b)* at the M687 binary metal parts facility at the Louisiana army ammunition plant in Shreveport, Louisiana, United States of America; what was the aim of these visits; and under which defence agreement they were organised.

Mr. Hanley: This matter is for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 24 January 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when officials from the Ministry of Defence or the chemical and biological establishment at Porton Down visited or were stationed at (a) Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas and (b) at the M687 binary metal parts facility at the Louisiana Army Ammunition Plant in Shreveport, Louisiana, United States of America; what was the aim of these visits; and under which defence agreement they were organised (Question 2, Order Paper 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. No collated records are kept of the visitors from the Ministry of Defence or the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment to these US defence facilities. I have consulted my staff and we are not aware of any visits to or staff stationed at the M687 binary metal parts facility at the Louisiana Army Ammunition Plant in Shreveport, USA. We are aware that there have been occasional infrequent visits to the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas. We are not aware of any staff being stationed at Pine Bluff Arsenal. It is probable that these visits would have taken place under one of the defence agreements referred to by the right hon. Archie Hamilton, MP, in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, columns 255-256.

Northern Ireland (Murders)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of the armed forces serving in Northern Ireland have been *(a)* charged with and *(b)* convicted of murder in the Province in each of the last 10 years;

(2) what was the interval between date of charge and date of trial in respect of each member of the armed forces serving in Northern Ireland charged with murder in the Province in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Hanley: Since 1974, 11 members of the armed forces have been charged with murder while on duty in Northern Ireland. Two service men have been found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment, while two service men are still awaiting trial.

The table shows those charged with murder in the last 10 years and the interval between the date of the charge and the date of the trial:

On duty murder cases involving armed forces

Year	*Personnel involved*	*Charge date*	*Trial date*	*Delay from charging to trial*	*Finding*
1974	1 soldier	1974	March 1975	Not available	Acquitted
1978	2 soldiers	Not available	Not available	Not available	Both acquitted

Year	*Personnel involved*	*Charge date*	*Trial date*	*Delay from charging to trial*	*Finding*
1982	2 soldiers	Not available	6 September 1983	Not available	Both acquitted
1983	1 soldier	10 August 1983	11 November 1984	408 days	Sentenced to life imprisonment —released on parole 27 February 1987
1990	1 soldier	31 July 1991	9 March 1993	588 days	Sentenced to life imprisonment —appeal to be heard 1994
1990	2 service men	5 February 1992	8 November 1993	643 days	Not guilty
1992	2 soldiers	5 September 1992	Set for April 1994	503 days as at 20 January 1994	—

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *445-46*, what are the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 of the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Aitken: Any assessment of the net effect of the changes to statutory sick pay provision and the reduction in employer's national insurance contributions for the financial year 1994-95 could be provided only at disproporationate cost.

Chartered Vessels

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the name, type, country of registration and gross registered tonnage of each vessel chartered for use by the British Government in *(a)* the Falkland campaign and *(b)* Operation Granby.

Mr. Hanley: Information for the Falklands campaign is not held in the form requested and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The name, type, country and registration and gross tonnage of the vessels chartered by the British Government during Operation Granby is as follows:

Name	*Type*	*Flag*	*GRT*
Antje	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	7,639
Antje, B.	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	4,134
Askania	RR/GC	Antigua and Barbuda	3,580
Calypso	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	4,145
Charlotta	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	12,710
Conro Trader	DCS	Antigua and Barbuda	3,000
Hove	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	2,560
Justine	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	3,065
Lena	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	7,286
Petra	RR/GC	Antigua and Barbuda	3,550
Running Bear	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	2,493
Sprante Rubin	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	6,550
Stevnsland	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	2,510
Tinto	GC	Antigua and Barbuda	4,100
Fremo Sirius	RR/GC	Bahamas	18,257
Hansa Link	RR	Bahamas	6,752
Hyde Park	GC	Bahamas	2,501
Merchant Princess	GC	Bahamas	19,035
Mungo	GC	Bahamas	15,599
Phoenix	GC	Bahamas	7,900
Ravel	RR	Bahamas	3,884
Satmars	GC	Bahamas	15,765
Sea Pearl	GC	Bahamas	3,600
Super Eight	GC	Bahamas	2,780
Clervaux	RR	Belgium	5,064
Ahlers Baltic	RR	Cyprus	13,772
Atlantic Cape	GC	Cyprus	2,537
Atlantic Rainbow	GC	Cyprus	2,535
Bayard	GC	Cyprus	3,600
Beaulieu	GC	Cyprus	3,600
Brabo	GC	Cyprus	3,600
Cape Blanche	GC	Cyprus	4,400
Cape Maleas	GC	Cyprus	16,023
Cape Patricia	GC	Cyprus	4,400
Evening Star	RR/GC	Cyprus	15,922
Guyane	RR/GC	Cyprus	15,922
Makiri	GC	Cyprus	3,777
Margaretha	GC	Cyprus	3,676
Mirach	GC	Cyprus	4,878
Roseanne	RR	Cyprus	4,106
Sea Intrepid	GC	Cyprus	6,208
Arktis Breeze	GC	Denmark	2,671
Arktis Carrier	GC	Denmark	2,671
Arktis Moon	GC	Denmark	1,630
Arktis Star	GC	Denmark	1,630

Name	*Type*	*Flag*	*GRT*
Arktis Sun	GC	Denmark	1,710
Arktis Trader	GC	Denmark	2,470
Dana Cimbria	RR	Denmark	7,057
Dana Corona	RR	Denmark	8,946
Dancia Violet	GC	Denmark	1,100
Elisabeth Boye	GC	Denmark	2,657
Greenland Saga	CR/RF	Denmark	3,200
Ice Flower	RF	Denmark	2,489
Jens Monk	GC	Denmark	1,742
Kathe Sif	GC	Denmark	4,446
Lottelith	GC	Denmark	1,630
Mercandian Duke	RR	Denmark	7,230
Mercandian Prince	RR	Denmark	7,200
Mercandian Queen	RR	Denmark	7,200
Mercandian Senator	RR	Denmark	7,200
Mercandian Trader	RR	Denmark	3,290
Nordland Saga	RF	Denmark	3,200
Pegasus	GC	Denmark	1,275
Sea Bird	GC	Denmark	4,270
Skodsborg	RR	Denmark	8,002
Stena Dan	RR	Denmark	13,925
Tor Caledonia	RR	Denmark	12,200
Senior M	GC	Egypt	3,910
Bore Song	RR	Finland	6,100
Degroe	RR	Finland	9,334
Paimpolaise	CT	France	3,458
Saint Gildas	GC	France	3,778
Ariana	GC/RR	Germany	7,190
Blue Bird	CR	Germany	4,000
Blue Sky	CR	Germany	4,000
Conti Britannia	GC	Germany	7,751
Fichtelberg	RR	Germany	7,597
Frauke	GC	Germany	4,145
Godewind	GC/RR	Germany	3,693
Regine	GC	Germany	7,765
Sylt	GC	Germany	3,050
Werner	GC	Germany	3,055
Aetos	RR/GC	Greece	4,700
St. Lucia	CR	Honduras	7,090
Merchant Promise	GC	Hong Kong (British)	21,215
Jokufell	RF	Iceland	3,068
Jolly Grigio	RR	Italy	10,665
Jolly Rosso	RR	Italy	27,720
Jolly Rubino	RR/GC	Italy	31,262
Jolly Turchese	RR/GC	Italy	31,262
African Wave	GC	Malta	13,750
Sea Lift	CR	Malta	3,500
Achtergracht	GC	Netherlands	12,150
Admiralengracht	GC	Netherlands	12,150
Alysta Smits	GC	Netherlands	6,100
Ankercracht	GC	Netherlands	12,150
Archangelgracht	GC	Netherlands	12,150
Artiscracht	GC	Netherlands	11,300
Bakengracht	GC	Netherlands	3,489
Barentzgracht	GC	Netherlands	3,444
Bataagratch	GC	Netherlands	3,444
Beurscratch	GC	Netherlands	3,448
Bouwerscratch	GC	Netherlands	3,445
Heemskerkcratch	GC	Netherlands	4,553
Houtmangratch	GC	Netherlands	4,553
Hudsongratch	GC	Netherlands	4,510
Kaapgracht	GC	Netherlands	8,038
Koggecratch	GC	Netherlands	5,022
Lee Francis	GC	Netherlands	3,980
Pijlgratch	GC	Netherlands	9,650
Prinsengratch	GC	Netherlands	9,498
Slotergratch	GC	Netherlands	3,482
Suglegratch	GC	Netherlands	3,482
Snoekgratch	GC	Netherlands	3,482
Stadiongratch	GC	Netherlands	3,414
Swallow	GC	Netherlands	4,816
Swan	GC	Netherlands	4,792
Jessica	RR/GC	Netherlands, Antibes and Aruba	3,502
Moon Bird	GC	Netherlands, Antibes and Aruba	3,787
Sky Bird	GC	Netherlands, Antibes and Aruba	4,305

Name	Type	Flag	GRT
Atlantica	RR/GC	Netherlands, Antibes and Aruba	3,548
Arcade Falcon	RR	Norway	6,670
Canis	RR	Norway	4,380
Euro Nor	RR	Norway	3,940
Geroro	RR/GC	Norway	4,514
Hual Margarita	RR	Norway	16,317
Kas Christina	RR	Norway	6,870
Kas Marianne	RR	Norway	6,871
Liftmar	GC	Norway	2,896
Nomadic Patria	GC	Norway	17,160
Nomadic Pollux	GC	Norway	7,161
Nornews Service	RR	Norway	3,927
Seahorse	RR	Norway	5,710
Beeco America	GC	Panama	9,292
Gala Atlantica	GC	Panama	12,628
Cecilia	GC	Panama	6,293
Hual Traveller	VEH	Panama	15,370
Hual Tribute	RR	Panama	16,317
Mizar	GC	Panama	3,610
Roro Runner	RR	Panama	4,838
Q I A Fuja's	CT	Qatar	35,615
Arroyo Frio Dos	RR	Spain	5,080
Conti Blue	GC	St. Vincent and Grenadines	3,510
Scheldemond	GC	St. Vincent and Grenadines	4,940
Bore Gothica	RR	Sweden	8,672
Nordic Pride	RR	Sweden	5,200
Salar	RR	Sweden	5,000
Skane Link	RR	Sweden	9,000
Stig Gorthon	RR/GC	Sweden	6,382
Tender	RR	Sweden	5,000
Atlantic Conveyor	RR/CT/VEH	United Kingdom	44,988
Baltic Eagle	RR	United Kingdom	9,450
Baltic Rider	RR	United Kingdom	12,830
Baltic Progress	RR	United Kingdom	5,615
Wolfsburg	RR	Union of Myanmar	9,600
Koh Jin	VEH	Vanatu	19,422

Ship type key:
RR=Roll on Roll off, GC=General Cargo, DCS=Deck Cargo Ship, CR=Cargo, RF=Refrigerated Cargo, VEH=Vehicle Carriers, CT=Containers.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost in today's prices, of chartering *(a)* British and *(b)* foreign merchant vessels for (i) the Falklands campaign and (ii) Operation Granby.

Mr. Hanley: The cost at today's prices of chartering British and foreign merchant ships during Operation Granby was £15,303,925 and £122,516,169 respectively. The information for the Falklands campaign is not held and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

"Options for Change"

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel, as defined in table 2.4 of "UK Defence Statistics 1993", will be retained by each of the services following the completion of the "Options for Change" force restructuring programme.

Mr. Hanley: On current plans, in 1995 the forecast requirement for service manpower will be around 52,500 in the Royal Navy, up to 122,000 in the Army—including Gurkhas and up to an additional 3,000 announced by [illegible] right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 1 December 1993—and around 70,000 in the Royal Air Force.

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many vessels, including those in refit and on standby, will be operated by the Royal Navy following the completion of the "Options for Change" force restructuring programme in the classes *(a)* offshore patrol, *(b)* patrol craft and *(c)* Royal Fleet auxiliaries, as defined in annex B of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1993.

Mr. Hanley: On current plans, the Royal Navy will, by the mid-1990s, operate eight offshore patrol vessels, 22 patrol craft—including the three Hong Kong patrol craft —and 21 ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The total given for patrol craft includes the five River class minesweepers which have been re-roled as patrol craft since the publication of the 1993 Statement on the Defence Estimates.

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many squadrons will be operated by the Royal Air Force following the completion of the "Options for Change" force restructuring programme in each of the *(a)* strike/attack, *(b)* offensive support, *(c)* air defence, *(d)* maritime patrol, *(e)* reconnaissance, *(f)* airborne early warning, *(g)* transport, *(h)* tankers, *(i)* search and rescue, *(j)* surface to air missiles and *(k)* ground defence roles, as defined in table 3.1 of "UK Defence Statistics 1993".

Mr. Hanley: On current plans the RAF will, by the mid-1990s, operate six strike/attack, five offensive support, six air defence, three maritime patrol, five reconnaise, one airborne early warning, 14 transport, two tanker, two search and rescue, five surface to air missile and four ground defence squadrons.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 21 January at col. *849.*

HEALTH

Entertainment Budget

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will itemise under heads of expenditure how the budget for entertainment within her Department was expended in the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health does not have a budget for entertainment. The nearest equivalent is hospitality, on which £246,374 was spent in 1992-93. A breakdown of this figure is shown in the table. Hospitality expenditure includes costs of refreshments for meetings of working groups and advisory committees and the high level of expenditure in some areas reflects activity on areas of work such as the Tomlinson review, specialist medical training, mental health, diet and nutrition, and the Warner report on the selection and recruitment of staff working in children's homes.

Department of Health hospitality expenditure 1992-93

	Budget £	*Expenditure* £
Ministers' Offices	40,000	31,178
Departmental Management	10,164	9,152
Economics and Operational Research	0	747
Finance—CFS, FHS, Admin.	795	1,043
Information Systems	2,600	1,259
Statistics	1,205	1,928
Community Services	2,717	13,833
Dental Services	400	1,120
Family Health Services	5,500	5,377
Health Care—Policy	15,021	16,661
Environment and Food	30,860	22,469
Health Promotion	8,571	19,088
Health and Social Services Coordination	2,090	751
International Relations	2,496	3,697
Medical Devices	4,462	4,318
Medical Support	2,570	5,754
Medicines Control	208	683
Pharmaceuticals	950	477
Information and Publicity	5,000	2,478
Research and Development	3,389	10,249
Nursing	0	6,661
Social Services Inspectorate	8,000	6,972
Corporate Affairs	26,359	29,571
HPSS Finance and Corporate Information	16,000	12,103
Health Authority Personnel	0	8,338
Health Care—Management	14,199	16,001
NHS Performance Management	7,555	12,703
Health Advisory Service	0	1,023
Mental Health Advisory Commission	500	611
Mental Health Review Tribunals	0	131
Departmental total	211,531	246,374

Notes:

1. These titles represent the organisational groups which deal with the subjects concerned.

2. Hospitality expenditure tends to consist of a large number of small payments—for example, refreshments for meetings of advisory committees, working groups etcetera.

[illegible]anagers are required to balance increased requirements in one area—such as hospitality—against reduced requirements in other areas.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the hospitality budget for her Department, the management executive and each regional health authority for each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the hospitality budget for regional health authorities is not available centrally. Figures for the Department of Health are shown in the table.

	1990-91 £	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £
Department of Health	121,579	163,670	211,531
National Health Service Management Executive	36,906	32,460	64,735

Notes:

1. Figures are not available prior to 1990-91.
2. Figures have not been adjusted for inflation.
3. Departmental figures include the NHS management executive figures.
4. Management executive figures are not directly comparable from year to year because of organisational changes.

GPs (Misconduct)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the procedures for determining allegations of professional misconduct against general practitioners were last subject to review.

Dr. Mawhinney: Professor Alan Wilson of Leeds university is chairing a full review of national health service complaints systems. We will consider the need to review the current NHS disciplinary arrangements for general practitioners in the light of Professor Wilson's recommendations on complaints.

The General Medical Council's preliminary proceedings committee and professional conduct committees operate disciplinary procedures under powers contained in the Medical Act 1983. Subject to that Act, the procedural rules under which these committees operate are the responsibility of the GMC, an independent statutory body, and are subject to periodic review. From time to time proposals for more substantial changes to the disciplinary machinery of the council are put forward, such as the recent GMC proposal for new performance procedures to extend its disciplinary remit beyond cases of serious professional misconduct to lesser offences of persistently poor performance. Changes in the underlying structure of the GMC's disciplinary powers would require an amendment to the Medical Act.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons she considers it to be appropriate and in the public interest for a general practitioner who has been struck off the register by the General Medical Council to be able to continue to practice pending an appeal.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for the General Medical Council's professional conduct committee to decide whether to order the immediate suspension of a doctor's registration where it has found the doctor guilty of serious professional misconduct and directed that his or her name should be erased from the register. Under the Medical Act 1983, this committee can order the immediate suspension of a doctor's registration only where it is satisfied that to do so is necessary to protect the public or is in the best interests of the doctor concerned. Unless such an order is made, the doctor can continue to practice until the erasure takes effect 28 days after the doctor is served with a notice of erasure, or a longer period if an appeal is lodged. Only where the committee orders an immediate suspension do family health services authorities have the power to remove the doctor's name from their list immediately.

The professional conduct committee decides whether to order an immediate suspension on the basis of the evidence put before it in each individual case. The General Medical Council is an independent statutory body charged under the Medical Act 1983 with responsibility for the registration of doctors and the regulation of the medical profession. It would not be appropriate for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to intervene in the way it carries out its responsibilities under the Act. Any change in the General Medical Council's powers described above would require primary legislation and would be a matter for Parliament to decide.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will review the procedures for suspension of general practitioners from the provision of national health service services in the light of the recent case raised with her by the hon. Member for Woolwich; on what date she became aware of the medical service committee hearing of the Greenwich and Bexley family health services authority held in July 1989; on what date she communicated the findings of that hearing to the General Medical Council; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what assessment she has made of the propriety of general practitioners continuing to practise in the NHS following findings of misconduct by a local medical service committee and by the professional conduct committee of the General Medical Council and the decision by the judical committee of the Privy Council on the merits of an appeal against such findings; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* The General Medical Council's professional conduct committee has the power under the Medical Act 1983, where it finds a doctor to be guilty of serious professional misconduct and directs that he or she should be struck off or suspended from the medical register, to order an immediate suspension of that doctor's registration. The exercise of this power is a matter for the professional conduct committee which may only use it where it is satisfied that it is necessary to do so for the protection of members of the public or would be in the best interests of the doctor concerned.

We are giving urgent consideration to the need for legislation to provide, in extreme cases, for a power of immediate suspension of general practitioners from provision of national health service services pending the outcome of investigations into allegations of serious misconduct.

In the case to which the hon. Member refers, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State became aware of a decision of Greenwich and Bexley family health services authority on 4 July 1989 when a copy of the decision was sent to the Department in accordance with regulation 10 of the National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunal) Regulations 1974. The practitioner appealed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend's decision on the appeal, together with the family health services authority decision and its service committee's recommendations, were passed on to the General Medical Council on 10 May 1991.

Redundancy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the redundancy entitlement of an officer of the national health service made redundant after 40 years service whilst on sick leave and having accumulated 6 per cent. performance-related pay.

Dr. Mawhinney: Redundancy payments for national health service staff employed on national terms and conditions of service are governed by section 45 of the General Whitley Council handbook, a copy of which is available in the Library. The amount to be paid will be calculated according to age, length of service and whether there is entitlement to early payment of superannuation benefits. The calculation may take account of performance-related pay when it is consolidated in annual salary; it is not affected by sick leave.

Dr. Kabir

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the case of Dr. Kabir was referred to the Privy Council; when a final decision was made to strike him off the register of general practitioners; what investigation she is making into the length of time it has taken for this case to be resolved; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The professional conduct registrar committee of the General Medical Council directed the register to erase Dr. Kabir's name from the medical register on 19 March 1993. Dr. Kabir lodged a petition of appeal with the Privy Council, within the statutory 28 days, on 16 April 1993. After two adjournments, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council dismissed his appeal on 12 January 1994. This decision remains subject to formal approval of Her Majesty in Council. We have asked the family health services authority and officials to report to us on the handling of this case.

Surveillance Cameras

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance has been issued by her Department to health authorities and national health service trusts regarding the use of hidden surveillance cameras to detect staff misdemeanours; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what data has been collected by her Department regarding the number of national health service trusts and directly managed units which currently use hidden surveillance cameras on their premises.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) who are the members currently appointed to the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment;

(2) who are the members currently appointed to the Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment;

(3) who are the members currently appointed to the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment;

(4) who are the members currently appointed to the Committee on Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment.

Mr. Sackville: The members of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment currently serving are:

Chairman
Professor B. Bridges, PhD FIBiol
Members
Professor E. Alberman MD FFCM FRCP
Professor V. Beral MB BS FRCP
Professor K. Boddy OBE PhD DSc FinstP FRSE
Professor R. Cartwright PhD MA MB BChir MFCM FFPHM
Professor K. Clayton CBE MSc PhD
Professor J. Denekamp BSc PhD DSc
Professor T. Dexter FRS PhD MRCPath DSc
Dr. G. Draper MA DPhil
Professor O. Eden MB BS DRCOG MRCP FRCP
Professor J. Evans BSc PhD FIBiol FRSE FRCPE
Dr. D. Goodhead MSc DPhil
Dr. J. Hendry PhD MSc BSc
Professor P. Jacobs BSc DSc FRSE FRCPath FRS
Professor P. Smith BSc DSc MSPHM
Dr. M. Spittle MSc MRCP FRCR
Dr. T. Wheldon PhD FinstP
Professor J. Whitehouse BA LRCP MRCS MA MB MRCP MD FRCP

The members of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment currently serving are:

Chairman
Professor H. F. Woods BSc MB BCh MRCP D Phil FRCP(Lon) FFPM FRCP(Edin)
Members
P. Aggett MB ChB FRCP MSc DCH
V. Beral MB BS FRCP
Professor A. D. Dayan BSc MD FRCPath FFPM CBiol FIBiol
Professor G. G. Gibson BSc PhD
G. Hawksworth BSc PhD
I. Kimber BSc MSc PhD FIMLS CBiol MIBiol
D. E. Prentice MA VetMB MVsc MRCPath MRCVS
A. G. Renwick BSc PhD DSc
F. M. Sullivan BSc
A. Thomas MB ChB MRCP PhD
Professor D. Walker BVSc FRCVS CBiol FIBiol
Professor R. Walker PhD FRSC CChem FIFST

The members of the Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment currently serving are:

Chairman
R. L. Carter, MA, DM, DSc, FRCPath
Members
Professor P. G. Blain, BMedSci, MB, PhD, FRCP(Lond), FRCP(Edin), MFOM, CBiol, FIBiol
Professor R. A. Cartwright, MA, MB, PhD, FFPHM
Professor C. E. D. Chilvers, BSc(Econ), MSc Hon, MFPHM
C. Cooper, BSc, PhD, DSc
Professor A. D. Dayan, BSc, MD, FRCP, FRCPath, FFPM, CBiol, FIBiol
P. B. Farmer, MA, DPhil, CChem, FRSC
Professor R. F. Newbold, BSc, PhD
Professor J. M. Parry, BSc, PhD, DSc
I. F. H. Purchase, BVSc, MRCVs, PhD, FRCPath, CBiol, FIBiol
A. G. Renwick, BSc, PhD, DSc
S. Venitt, BSc, PhD
Professor G. T. Williams, BSc, MD, FRCP, FRCPath

The members of the Committee on Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment currently serving are:

Chairman
Professor J. M. Parry, BSc, PhD, DSc
Members
Professor J. Ashby, BSc, PhD, CChem, FRCS
R. L. Carter, MA, DM, DSc, FRCPath
J. Cole, BSc, DPhil
C. Cooper, BSc, PhD, DSc
Professor D. S. Davies, BSc, PhD, CChem, FRCS, MRCPath
Professor H. J. Evans, PhD, FRSE, CBiol, FIBiol, FRCPE, FRCCSE
Professor R. F. Newbold, BSc, PhD
S. Venitt, BSc, PhD
R. M. Winter, BSc, MB, BS, FRCP

The membership of the committees on toxicity, mutagenicity and carcinogenicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment are published annually in their joint report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who are the members currently appointed to the Health Advisory Service.

Mr. Bowis: The responsibility for running the Health Advisory Service falls to Dr. Richard Williams, who is accountable to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The Health Advisory Service has no membership as such, but relies on secondments from the national health service and elsewhere to carry forward its work programme. Details are contained in the annual report of the director of the HAS for 1992-93 "A Unique Window on Change", copies of which are available in the Library.

Young People (Rent)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will take steps to ensure that local authority social services departments pay the rent of young persons being helped by the local authority under the terms of section 17 or section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Mr. Bowis: Young persons may be entitled to housing benefit if they have a legal liability to pay rent. Section 17 of the Children Act is about the provision of services for children in need, their families and others by local authorities, and does not have a bearing on the liability of a young person to pay rent. Section 20 of the Children Act sets out the duties and powers of local authorities to provide accommodation for those children or young persons in need who require it. The Departments of Health and of Social Security are jointly considering going out to consultation on guidance to clarify the responsibilities of local authority social services departments and the benefit position when a young person is helped by an authority under the Children Act.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those general practitioners who will become fundholders in each region on 1 April.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally. Regional health authorities manage the general practitioner fundholding scheme and are responsible for admitting practices to the scheme.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the procedure for the continuing treatment of patients when a GP fundholder has overspent his budget and therefore run out of funds.

Dr. Mawhinney: Patients of general practitioner fundholders will not suffer because a fundholder overspends his budget. Any overspending will be met from regional health authority contingencies, but where overspending is the result of mismanagement the GP fundholder may have fundholding status withdrawn.

Community Care (Transitional Grants)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations she has had, and what representations she has received, regarding the implications and operation of the special transitional grant to local authorities in respect of responsibilities arising under the community care policy; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: We have had discussions with, or received representations from, various people, including the local authority associations and representatives of private and voluntary sector community care service providers.

Standard Spending Assessment, Dorset

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be *(a)* the social service standard spending assessment for Dorset and *(b)* its mental health specific grant; and what it was in 1993-94.

Mr. Bowis: The personal social services standard spending assessments for Dorset for 1993-94 and 1994-95 are £59·481 million and, provisionally, £68·429 million respectively. The mental illness specific grant is £427,000 for 1993-94; the grant for 1994-95 has not yet been decided.

Dentistry

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental domiciliary visits involving a dental chair anaesthetist have been made in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Health Authorities

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the proceeds of health authority land are held at central, regional or local health authority level; and what changes are proposed when the regional authorities are reorganised;

(2) what are the rules governing the use of proceeds from the sale of health authority land;

(3) what restrictions are placed on health authorities with regard to the use of capital receipts in their area;

(4) what changes are proposed within the national health service reorganisation to the guidelines for the control of capital receipts;

(5) when health authority land or assets are sold, if the capital receipts are held centrally, regionally or at a local health authority level.

Mr. Sackville: Regional health authorities retain capital receipts as additions to their cash limits. Deployment of this resource to support RHA and trust capital programmes is agreed between RHAs and management executive outposts. In the case of assets which provided services for mentally ill people and people with learning disabilities, regions are expected to make sure that priority in the use of such proceeds is given to the development of services for these groups.

No decision has yet been taken on the handling of capital receipts following the proposed abolition of RHAs.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what capital receipts were realised from the sale of health authority land and buildings in the Trent region in 1992-93;

(2) what capital receipts have been raised in the Trent region over the last five years from the sale of land, buildings and assets.

Mr. Sackville: The available information on capital receipts that have been raised/realised is:

Year	*£ million*
1988-89	13·9
1989-90	18·7
1990-91	25·9
1991-92	4·8
1992-93	2·9

No breakdown of these figures into land, buildings and other assets is available centrally.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will happen to any surplus moneys not spent by district health authorities in the course of the current financial year; and what effect the fact of the DHA being in surplus will have on the calculation of funding allocation for future years.

Mr. Sackville: Surpluses at regional health authorities are carried forward. They are not taken into account when subsequent allocations are calculated.

Allocations to district health authorities are made by RHAs and there are some variations in the approaches adopted. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairmen of the RHAs for further information.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who are those people currently appointed to serve on district health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: The names of district health authority chairmen are listed in the table. Regional health authorities are responsible for the appointment of non-executive members. The appointment of executive members is a matter for individual district health authorities.

East Anglian regional health authority	
Cambridge	Mrs. M. Hardiment
Suffolk	Mr. N. Ridley
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	Mr. R. Duncan

Huntingdon	Mr. I. Langworthy
North West Anglia	Mr. J. Durance
Norwich	Mr. M. Falcon

Mersey regional health authority

Liverpool	Mr. D. Tod
St. Helens and Knowsley	Mr. G. Murray
Wirral	Mr. R. Gordon
Sefton	Mr. F. Ludlow
Chester	Mr. J. Ross
South and East Cheshire	Mr. S. Cussons
North Cheshire	Mr. C. Hamer

North East Thames regional health authority

Camden and Islington	Mr. R. Everington
Barking and Havering	Mr. B. Littlewood
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	Miss D. Patman
South Essex	Mr. D. Micklem
North Essex	Mr. A. Sexton
East London and The City	Mrs. F. Heidensohn
New River	Mr. D. G. Kleeman

Northern regional health authority

Northumberland	Mr. J. Baker
South Tees	Mr. P. A. Marsden
North Durham	Professor John Clarke
East Cumbria	Mr. I. Carr
Gateshead	(Vacancy)
South Cumbria	Mrs. A. Graham
Hartlepool	(Vacancy)
North Tees	Mr. D. Otter
North Tyneside	Mrs. S. Murray
Newcastle	Mr. A. Crute
Sunderland	Mr. G. Bedell
South Durham	Dr. John Marshall
South Tyneside	Mr. W. Darling
West Cumbria	(Vacancy)

North Western regional health authority

Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	(Vacancy)
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	Mr. R. Parkinson
Bolton	Mr. T. Taylor
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	Mr. W. Ashworth
Bury	(Vacancy)
Central Manchester	Mr. E. Parker
Chorley and South Ribble	(Vacancy)
Lancaster	Professor Alwyn Smith
North Manchester	(Vacancy)
Oldham	Mr. J. Downs
Preston	(Vacancy)
Rochdale	Mrs. P. Hawton
Salford	Dr. Frederick Beswick
South Manchester	(Vacancy)
Stockport	Mr. F. Russell
Tameside and Glossop	Mr. B. Leck
Trafford	Mrs. S. Alexander
West Lancashire	Dr. Kathleen Rowsell
Wigan	Mr. J. McDonald

North West Thames regional health authority

Barnet	Mr. A. Jacobs
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	Baroness Eccles of Moulton
North and East Hertfordshire	Mrs. C. Quest
Hillingdon	Mr. D. Evans
South Bedfordshire	Mr. A. Hendry
North Bedfordshire	Mrs. J. Swift
South West Hertfordshire	Mr. D. Rawlings
North West Hertfordshire	Mr. D. Bucknall
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	Mrs. J. Hughes

Oxford regional health authority

Berkshire	Mr. R. Eassie
Kettering	Mr. R. Button
Northampton	Mr. S. Schanschieff
Oxfordshire	Dr. P. Iredale
Buckinghamshire	Sir Norman King

South East Thames regional health authority

Bexley	Dr. Norbert Singer
Bromley	(Vacancy)
Canterbury and Thanet	Mr. H. Bragg
Dartford and Gravesham	Mr. C. Thornton
East Sussex	Mr. J. Wellesley
Maidstone	Mrs. A. Nelson
Medway	(Vacancy)
South East Kent	(Vacancy)
Tunbridge Wells	Mr. P. Edgley
South East London	Mr. I. Mills
Greenwich	Mr. P. Prior

South Western regional health authority

Plymouth and Torbay	Mrs. J. Leverton
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	Mr. J. Askham
Gloucestershire	Miss J. Trotter
Exeter and North Devon	Mrs. R. Day
Somerset	Mr. T. Ward
Bristol and District	Mr. M. Crowson

South West Thames regional health authority

Chichester	Mr. J. Hooley
East Surrey	Mr. J. Poole
Kingston and Richmond	Mr. R. Galley
Merton and Sutton	Mr. H. Cowd
Mid Downs	Mr. M. Long
Mid Surrey	Professor A. Holmes
South West Surrey	Sir Nicholas Hunt
Wandsworth	Dr. E. Vincent
North West Surrey	Professor J. Kennerley
Worthing	Mr. P. Lawson
Croydon	Mrs. A. Fresko

Trent regional health authority

North Nottinghamshire	Mr. A. Tolhurst
Barnsley	Mrs. A. Cook
Doncaster	Mr. J. Smith
Leicestershire	Mr. N. Townsend
North Derbyshire	Mr. R. Robinson
North Lincolnshire	Mrs. K. Hall
Nottingham	Sir David White
Sheffield	Mr. J. Neill
South Derbyshire	Mr. J. Rudd
South Lincolnshire	Dr. J. Brackenridge
Rotherham	Mr. D. Clark

Wessex regional health authority

Basingstoke and North Hampshire	Mrs. A. Sealey
Bath	(Vacancy)
Dorset	Major General R. Keightley
Isle of Wight	Mrs. A. Clarke
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	Dr. T. Taylor
Salisbury	(Vacancy)
Southampton and South West Hampshire	Professor J. Howell
Swindon	Mr. D. Hulme
Winchester	(Vacancy)

West Midlands regional health authority

Coventry	Mr. A. Guy
East Birmingham	(Vacancy)
Herefordshire	Mr. J. E. Bulmer
North Worcestershire	Mr. M. Cooper
Mid Staffordshire	Mr. B. Liss
North Birmingham	Mr. M. Skillicorn
North Staffordshire	Mr. M. Procter
Warwickshire	Mr. G. Jackson
Sandwell	Mr. C. Wilkinson
Shropshire	Mr. D. Lloyd
Solihull	Mr. R. Fordham
South Birmingham	Mr. B. Stoten
South East Staffordshire	Mrs. M. Stanhope
West Birmingham	Mr. G. Coghlan
Wolverhampton	Mr. R. Carver
Worcester and District	Mr. A. Prescott

Walsall	Mr. M. Wolverson
Dudley	Mrs. M. Fenton
Yorkshire regional health authority	
East Riding	(Vacancy)
West Yorkshire	Mr. P. Wood
Leeds	Mrs. P. Smith
Wakefield	Mr. B. Hayward
Bradford	Mrs. Z. Manzoor
North Yorkshire	Mrs. S. Wrigley
Grimsby and Scunthorpe	Mrs. V. Pettifer

Confidentiality

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements she has made to replace circular LAC(88)17 on social services confidentiality, which expired on 31 December.

Mr. Bowis: Circular LAC(88)17 was continued in force by virtue of local authority social services letter—LASSL—(92)9 issued to authorities in November 1992. I am arranging for copies of both circulars to be placed in the Library.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated cost of extending remission of national health service charges to disability working allowance claimants.

Dr. Mawhinney: The estimated cost of providing automatic remission of national health service charges for disability working allowance recipients with capital of £8,000 or less from 1 April 1995 is about £1 million in the first year.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people United Kingdom have been registered as suffering from ME.

Mr. Sackville: As there is no agreed case definition, accurate figures cannot be collected.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been allocated by Her Majesty's Government for research into the causes and treatment of ME.

Mr. Sackville: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC has been funding a study at the Institute of Psychiatry for four years where researchers are attempting to find ways to help myalgic encephalomyelitis sufferers to cope with their disease and regain their health. The estimated cost of this project is £91,000. The Department and the MRC are always willing to receive and consider soundly based research proposals in competition with other applications.

Clinicians

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance or advice has been issued on the activity rates to be undertaken by clinicians working within the NHS; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Guidance from the Department is issued to ensure that the national health service provides high quality, effective and efficient health care. Locally agreed contracts between purchasers and providers specify the level, quality and cost of services. Guidance stresses that clinicians should be involved in this process.

Working Parties

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many working parties she has set up since becoming Secretary of State; if she will list them; and if she will provide a breakdown of their cost.

Dr. Mawhinney: Collective discussion involving officials and outside experts, either in a formal or in an ad hoc meeting or series of meetings is an integral part of the way the Department conducts its business.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what visits she has made over the last 12 months; and what has been the cost of each visit.

Mr. Sackville: Information to this level of detail could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which land and buildings, currently in health authority ownership, will pass to the ownership of the new trust, on the formation of Community Health Sheffield NHS trust.

Mr. Sackville: A final decision on the land and buildings that will transfer to the Community Health Sheffield trust has not yet been made.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *393*, what estimates he has made of the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to her departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 resulting from the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Sackville: Current estimates suggest that the changes in statutory sick pay provision, offset by reductions in employer's national insurance contributions, will result in a net additional cost within the Department of some £50,000 in 1994-95. This additional cost will be absorbed within the Department's running costs of £253 million.

Organ Donations

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to bring forward legislation to increase the number of organ transplant donors by requiring individuals and their families to opt out of organ donation rather than opt in; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: None. Increasing the organ donation rate is a Government priority. We do not believe that opt-out legislation would achieve this. We believe that the decision to donate should continue to be a positive choice made by individuals rather than a presumed statutory right.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to increase the number of organ transplant donors; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Government actively and continuously pursue the promotion of organ donation; more resources are being devoted to publicity than ever before. Examples of current initiatives are:

The scheme for reimbursing costs to donor hospitals which has proved effective.

A programme of information and training for doctors and nurses developed by the European donor hospital education programme which is being piloted in two regions with the co-operation of the professions concerned.

Multi-organ retrieval teams which were introduced in October 1993 to speed up and increase the recovery of organs.

The survey into reasons why some relatives refuse permission to use organs; the results are expected this summer.

Consideration is being given to a computerised register of organ donors.

Patient S

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which hospitals Patient S, who recently died in Cossham hospital, Bristol, previously received care; and why he was transferred from those hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not hold confidential personal information of this nature.

Nuffield Trust Hospital

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions she or her Ministers or officials have discussed with the Brighton health care trust the role to be played in health care provision in the Brighton area by the new Nuffield trust hospital.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are aware of no such discussions.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for her Department during 1994.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what working definition of "back to basics" is used by her Department; and what her Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Sackville: *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Members to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 21 January at col. *849.*

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 25 January 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Hearsay Rule

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has in relation to the Law Commission's Report, "The Hearsay Rule in Civil Proceedings"—Cm 2321, Law Com. No. 216—which was published in September 1993.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government welcome the report and will introduce legislation implementing its recommendations when a suitable opportunity arises.

Judges' Accommodation

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost of accommodation for judges in 1992-93 and 1982-83; what were the major categories of cost; and what was spent in each category.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Figures for the cost of accommodation of judges when sitting in the courts are not separately maintained. The cost of accommodation in lodgings for judges on circuit was £5·02 million in 1992-93. These costs are in two categories, of fixed costs—including rents, hiring charges, maintenance and permanent staff—and variable costs, including fuel and utilities, and casual and itinerant staff. Fixed costs in 1992-93 were £4·14 million and variable costs were £0·88 million. The Property Services Agency was primarily responsible for the lodgings in 1982-83 and the figures for that year cannot be ascertained without disproportionate cost.

Medical Treatment (Consent)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what work has been undertaken by the Law Commission, in consultation with the British Medical Association or other bodies, on the production of draft Bills dealing with the subject of the withdrawal of consent to medical treatment or related matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Law Commission is reviewing the law and procedures relating to decision making on behalf of mentally incapacitated adults, which involves consideration of issues relating to consent to medical treatment by or on behalf of such persons.

Consultants

Ms Abbott: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if he will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which his Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. John M. Taylor: An answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Prisons Ombudsman

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to create a post of prisons ombudsman; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Proposals to revise the procedures under which prisoners in Scotland are able to make requests and complaints and to air grievances in relation to the Scottish Prison Service were contained in the report of a Scottish Prison Service working group entitled "Right and Just", which was published for comment in September 1992. The consultation exercise indicated a general consensus in favour of introducing an independent element to the system, and we have taken the view that this can best be achieved by the appointment of an external complaints adjudicator—an independent person on a fixed term contract, with advisory functions. This will fulfil the commitment in the justice charter for Scotland to introduce an independent element in the new procedures. Officials in the Scottish Office have been asked to start the process of advertising for such a person with a view to an appointment later this year.

In advance of that, however, proposals for revised internal grievance procedures have been fully worked up for implementation in establishments next month. The main features are that requests or complaints will be resolved as close as possible to the source of the matter at issue; those who take decisions will be accountable for them; prisoners will receive reasoned responses within a set time scale; and accurate and sufficiently detailed records will be maintained. Gallery officers and hall managers will have a key role to play in the day-to-day handling of requests and complaints, but issues which they cannot resolve will be referred to an internal complaints committee. Prisoners will be given the opportunity to appeal against the committee's decisions to the governor-in-charge. If they remain dissatisfied, they will have the right of appeal to the external complaints adjudicator. Under transitional arrangements there will be a right of appeal to Scottish Prison Service headquarters.

The external complaints adjudicator will take a case on board only when all previous stages in the procedure have been exhausted. He or she will review both the merits of decisions and the way in which requests and complaints have been handled in the internal system. Where the complaints adjudicator disagrees with a decision, he or she will have the power to recommend the questioning of any finding of guilt or remission of any punishment. The complaints adjudicator will make a report to the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service on each case with a reasoned recommendation.

I believe that this new appointment, taken with the overhauled internal procedures, will represent a significant advance in the way in which prisoners' requests and complaints are handled.

Sheriff Courts (Training)

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the organisation of training for the judiciary in the sheriff courts.

Mr. Lang: Responsibility for the content of judicial training rests with the judiciary and responsibility for its funding rests with me. I very much welcome the growth in recent years in the amount of training undertaken by the judiciary. To assist in its further development I have decided, following consultation with the Lord President of the Court of Session, to set up a group to co-ordinate the provision of training for the judiciary in the sheriff courts. The right hon. Lord Cameron of Lochbroom has kindly agreed to chair the group, the membership of which will be as follows:

Sheriff Iain Macmillan CBE, President, Temporary Sheriffs Association
Mr. Gordon Murray CB, Director, Scottish Courts Administration
Sheriff Principal Gordon Nicholson QC, Convener, Sheriffs Principal
Sheriff Gordon Shiach, Acting President, Sheriffs Association

Mountain Deaths

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set up an inquiry to ascertain the causes of deaths arising from incidents on Scottish mountains and to initiate action to avoid a repetition of such fatalities.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 14 January 1994]:* I am sure that the hon. Member is aware of the great concern I have repeatedly expressed about the loss of life in the Scottish mountains. He will no doubt have seen my Christmas message on mountain safety which was extensively relayed in the Scottish press. The Scottish mountain rescue committee publishes annual statistics which give a breakdown of accidents by type of incident and injury and provide details of resources expended in rescue. Relevant bodies incuding the Scottish mountain safety group and the Scottish Sports Council are actively considering the question of further research into safety in the Scottish mountains and I expect to receive their recommendations in due course. Until that time I have no plans to set up an inquiry.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Order Act 1986

Mr. Byers: To ask the Attorney-General how many times the Attorney General has refused his consent to a prosecution under part III of the Public Order Act 1986.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Solicitor General to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) on 17 December 1993, at columns 1050-51.

Public Interest

Mr. Byers: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases the Crown Prosecution Service has dropped in the public interest in each year since its establishment.

The Attorney-General: The information sought by the hon. Member is recorded only on individual case files and is not collected or collated centrally. The information requested could therefore be collected only at disproportionate cost. Many of the files on case completed since 1986 have been destroyed in accordance with the Public Records Acts.

A survey has been carried out of all prosecutions dropped during November 1993 and the results will be published very shortly.

ENVIRONMENT

Homelessness

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households were accepted as homeless and in priority need in the Greater Manchester area in each year since 1987.

Sir George Young: Information on households accepted by local authorities in the Greater Manchester area as homeless and in priority need, and covering the whole of the period, is readily available only for financial years. The information is as follows:

	Number
1987-88	8,960
1988-89	11,030
1989-90	10,630
1990-91	13,030
1991-92	13,280
1992-93	11,840

Source: Housing Investment Programme (HIP1) returns.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are homeless in the parliamentary constituencies of Sunderland, North, Sunderland, South and Washington and Houghton.

Sir George Young: The available data relate to local authority areas. The numbers of households accepted as homeless by Sunderland metropolitan district council are given in the supplementary table to the quarterly information bulletin "Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985: England"; copies of both are in the Library. The latest available statistics are for the third quarter of 1993.

Petrol Fumes

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has held about the environmental and health risk of vapour fumes from unleaded petrol.

Mr. Atkins: Government Ministers and officials have held discussions with interested parties at national and international level.

Environmental Standards

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made as to the effect of the GATT on environmental standards.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply by the then Minister for the Environment and Countryside to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 29 November, *Official Report*, column *381*.

Petrol Pumps

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to regulate to ensure that petrol pump nozzles are fitted with vapour controls to limit the dangers of carcinogenic fumes.

Mr. Atkins: None at present. However, a proposal from the European Commission to introduce a system of petrol vapour recovery during vehicle refuelling is expected in the near future. The proposal is likely to aim at controlling emissions of volatile organic compounds as precursors of ground level ozone.

Rent Arrears

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the findings of his Department's research on rent arrears as an update to "Preventing Rent Arrears", published in December 1983.

Sir George Young: I expect to publish the research findings in the summer.

Assured Shorthold Tenancies

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average duration of assured shorthold tenancies granted under the provisions of the Housing Act 1988.

Sir George Young: This information is not available at present. However, the survey of English housing will provide further information. The results of the first year of the survey are expected to be published in the autumn.

Waste Management Licensing

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the new waste management licensing provisions of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will be implemented before 1 May 1994; and when the necessary regulations will be laid.

Mr. Atkins: As the then Minister for the Environment and Countryside announced on 24 November 1993 at column *384* it is the Government's intention to bring the waste management licensing provisions of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 into force on 1 May 1994. The necessary regulations will be laid before Parliament before that date.

Disabled Access

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that no buildings or parts thereof will be secured for or on behalf of his Department unless there is adequate access for disabled people.

Mr. Atkins: It is already Government policy to take into account the needs of disabled people both in operating existing buildings and in acquiring new buildings.

Cetaceans

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received on draft guidelines prepared by the sea mammal research unit on precautions to minimise acoustic disturbance to small cetaceans.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has received no written representations on the draft guidelines, and three telephoned inquiries from two non-governmental organisations.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the expected total costs to public funds of the 16 enterprise zones that he announced on 18 January.

Mr. Baldry: The principal public sector costs of enterprise zones are rate relief and capital allowances. Neither can be accurately calculated in advance as they depend on the rate of development of the zones.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will detail the ownership of the sites of the 16 enterprise zones which he announced on 18 January; what measures he will use to evaluate the effectiveness of those enterprise zones; and how he will monitor their performance.

Mr. Baldry: Designation of the 16 sites proposed for enterprise zone status is subject to the agreement of the European Commission and to statutory consultation procedures. Precise site boundaries have yet to be determined. It would therefore be premature and potentially misleading to give details of land ownership at this stage. This information will be available as part of the statutory consultation process.

A programme of monitoring and evaluation for any new zones will be established on designation.

Portable Discounts

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many recipients of portable discounts paid for leaving their rented council property have subsequently received a further discount on purchasing a second council-owned property.

Sir George Young: No statistics on the matter are held by my Department.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many portable discounts were paid to tenants of *(a)* Westminster council and *(b)* Wandsworth council in each year of the operation of the scheme to date which did not result in the vacant property being relet to a homeless family or an applicant on the council's housing list.

Sir George Young: The table shows the number of cash incentive grants paid directly by Westminster council and Wandsworth council which did not result in the property vacated being relet to a homeless household or an applicant on the housing waiting-transfer list.

My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State approved these schemes on the basis that vacated properties could be sold to tenant purchasers, whose vacated properties would in turn be relet to a homeless household or waiting list applicant.

	Westminster	*Wandsworth*
1989-90	0	0
1990-91	13	0
1991-92	0	31
1992-93	34	29

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what responses he has received to the consultation paper on local government reorganisation, "Proposed Arrangements for 1994-95 Reorganisation Costs", issued to all local authorities on 2 December 1993; and what arrangements he has decided to adopt in relation to reorganisation costs to be incurred by authorities in 1994-95.

Mr. Curry: There have been some 40 responses to the consultation paper. We have carefully considered the responses, and have decided to confirm the proposals for 1994-95 with modifications. We shall issue to authorities supplementary credit approvals to enable them to borrow to meet specified reorganisation costs incurred in 1994-95, up to a limit. We shall determine the limit on the basis, inter alia, of information provided by the authorities concerned and the Government's public expenditure plans.

We have issued to authorities in the Isle of Wight and Cleveland notices requiring them to supply information about their reorganisation costs to be incurred in 1994-95. We intend, in the course of 1994-95, to issue further notices to any other authorities in respect on which reorganisation orders under section 17 of the Local Government Act 1992 are made that year. We do not expect reorganisation costs in 1994-95 to be significant for such authorities.

Pollution

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure the monitoring of pollution levels in Britain's larger towns; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* In the second anniversary report of the 1990 environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", the Government made a commitment to extend their urban air quality monitoring network to cover all major cities by 1997. In addition, the Government are currently considering responses to their recent consultation paper "The Future of Air Quality Monitoring Networks in the United Kingdom", which included proposals for a framework which draws local and national air quality monitoring together into a coherent quality assured network.

Waste Exports

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what quantities of waste have been exported annually from the United Kingdom since 1988 to non-OECD countries for *(a)* disposal and *(b)* recovery or recycling;

(2) if the Government intend to support a total ban on the export of all toxic waste to non-OECD countries at the forthcoming Basel convention meeting in March;

(3) if he will place in the Library the information supplied by the United Kingdom to the European Commission as its contribution to the review of waste exports for recovery, as requested at the Environment Council meeting in March 1993;

(4) which local and national authorities *(a)* were responsible for determining whether the United Kingdom waste exported to the Brazilian company Produquimica in August 1993 was a controlled waste and *(b)* are now responsible for the management of the waste subsequently returned to the United Kingdom recently;

(5) what measures he has taken or intends to take to ensure that wastes exported to non-OECD countries for the purposes of recycling and recovery are handled in an environmentally sound manner.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* My Department has no record under the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988 of any exports since 1988 of hazardous waste to non-OECD countries for disposal. A total of 16,300 tonnes of hazardous red and amber list waste were exported to non-OECD countries for recovery or recycling in 1991. Information for 1992 is as follows. Information for earlier years has not been analysed and would be available only at disproportionate cost.

I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) on 12 January at columns *200-201*.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 18 January, at column *567*. I understand that no documentation was submitted to the competent authorities under the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988 prior to the export of this material by London Metals Ltd. to the Produquimica Co. in Brazil. Humberside county council is aware that the material is being transported to a storage facility in its area.

The following information was supplied to the European Commission:

United Kingdom exports of hazardous recoverable red and amber list waste to non-OECD countries 1992

Country	*Tonnes*
Thailand	2,371
South Africa	1,393
South Korea	1,160
Dubai	925
India	748
Israel	269
Libya	187
Singapore	134
Burma	127
Taiwan	111
Qatar	103
Bolivia	102
Pakistan	99
Indonesia	73
Egypt	71
United Arab Emirates	62
Malta	60
Saudi Arabia	45
Abu Dhabi	40
Mexico	39
Brunei	22
Malaysia	21
Zambia	12
Ecuador	8
CIS (former Soviet Union)	7
Ghana	3
Sri Lanka	2
Venezuela	1
China	1
TOTAL FOR ALL NON-OECD COUNTRIES	8,196

Note: Figures rounded.
Source of information: United Kingdom Customs and Excise Department—May 1993.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for her Department during 1994.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 21 January 1994 *Official Report*, column *849*, by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what working definition of "back to basics" is used by her Department; and what her Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January 1994 *Official Report*, column *849*.

Animal Welfare

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made as to the effect of GATT on standards of animal welfare at home and abroad.

Mr. Soames: No such assessment has been made. However, the GATT Uruguay round agreement on agriculture does not change the basic GATT requirement that animal welfare measures should not place more stringent measures on third country imports than on domestic production.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which special advisers in her Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Jack: None.

Intervention Stocks

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the value of the intervention stocks for free distribution that were *(a)* allocated and *(b)* distributed, for each European Union member in 1993 in (i) pound sterling and (ii) ecus.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The maximum levels of expenditure allocated by the Commission for 1993 under the EC surplus food scheme were as follows:

Member state	*£ sterling*[1,2] *(millions)*	*ecus*[2] *(millions)*
Belgium	1·931	2·422
Denmark	1·595	2·000
France	22·771	28·560
Germany	nil	nil
Greece	9·567	12·000
Ireland	3·668	4·600
Italy	19·534	24·500
Luxembourg	0·062	0·078
Netherlands	2·392	3·000
Portugal	8·324	10·440
Spain	28·224	35·400
United Kingdom	19·932	25·000
Total	118·000	148·000

[1] ecu/£ conversion rate=0·797291 as at 1 October 1992.

[2] These total figures include transport and administration costs.

Final figures for actual expenditure for 1993 are not yet available.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Coe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 24 January; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This Council meeting, at which I represented the United Kingdom, formally adopted the legal texts implementing the package of decisions reached at its December meeting and as described in my reply of 17 December to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) *Official Report*, columns *1071-72*. As stated in that reply, I voted against the decision on oilseeds.

The Council also adopted unanimously a regulation permitting member states to impose a levy on milk production in order to fund promotional measures; considered the situation of beekeepers in the Community, on which the Commission will present a more detailed study in due course; and discussed, without reaching any specific conclusions, a report from the Commission on the sheepmeat market.

I took the opportunity to press the Commission to reach a speedy decision on the legality or otherwise of French national assistance to pig producers, an issue which I had first raised in the Council last October.

Hedgerows

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many agreements have been made, how much has been spent and how many kilometres of hedgerow were restored under the hedgerow incentive scheme by her Ministry in *(a)* 1992-93 and *(b)* 1993-94 in each region in England; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 January 1994]:* The table sets out by MAFF region the number of claims and the amount of money paid at November 1993 to farmers under the farm and conservation grant scheme—F and CGS—in support of the Countryside Commission's hedgerow incentive scheme—HIS. No such payments were made in the financial year 1992-93. Because these payments accompanied payments by the Countryside Commission it is not possible to identify separately the proportion of the hedgerow restored under the HIS which attracted grant under the F and CGS.

Government support for hedgerow restoration through the HIS is minor compared to the considerable support which is available also under the F and CGS. Under this scheme, since 1989, we have paid 3,500 farmers £5·24 million towards the restoration of 3,300 km of hedgerow.

1993-94

MAFF Regional Service Centre	*Number of Claims*	*Grant Paid £*
Anglia	1	455
East Midlands	8	3,290
North East	10	10,375
Northern	16	17,654
North Mercia	9	12,659
South Mercia	11	10,644
South East	8	6,073
South West	8	8,839
Wessex	7	5,433
England	78	74,972

Farm Incomes

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will publish the farm income figures for *(a)* English, *(b)* Welsh, *(c)* Scottish and *(d)* Northern Irish hill livestock farm enterprises in each of the past 10 years for which figures are available, at constant prices, shown as a percentage of full-time manual earnings for the United Kingdom for the same period.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 18 January 1993]:* None of the measures of farm income are comparable with those of manual worker's earnings. The tables show estimates of the level of cash income for each accounting year since 1986-87 and the average earnings of full-time adult workers as at April each year in terms of current prices and 1992-93 prices. Income data are not available for the new classification of farm types before 1986-87.

Cash income and average manual workers earnings

	Cash income on cattle and sheep farms (LFA)[1]				
[3]*Year*	*England £'000s per farm*	*Wales £'000s per farm*	*Scotland £'000s per farm*	*Northern Ireland £'000s per farm*	[2]*Full-time adult manual workers earnings in Great Britain £'000s*
Current prices					
1986-87	7·1	8·7	10·5	10·6	8·5
1987-88	10·8	7·7	14·3	11·7	9·0
1988-89	11·0	10·4	14·5	8·9	9·7
1989-90	14·1	13·5	14·9	12·0	10·6
1990-91	13·2	14·3	15·5	11·5	11·6
[4]1991-92	14·3	17·8	17·9	9·9	12·3
[4]1992-93	18·4	22·0	19·8	13·6	13·0
[4,5]1993-94	22·0	28·9	21·9	15·2	13·3
1992-93 prices[6]					
1986-87	10·0	12·3	14·8	15·0	12·0
1987-88	14·6	10·4	19·4	15·9	12·2
1988-89	14·1	13·4	18·6	11·4	12·5
1989-90	16·8	16·1	17·7	14·3	12·6
1990-91	14·3	15·5	16·8	12·5	12·6
[4]1991-92	14·8	18·4	18·5	10·2	12·7
[4]1992-93	18·4	22·0	19·8	13·6	13·0
[4,5]1993-94	21·7	28·4	21·6	15·0	13·0

[1] Sample averages for farms larger than 8 ESU. The system of farm classification is set out in appendix 3 of *Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom 1991-92*.

[2] As at April each year.

[3] March-February accounting year.

[4] Provisional and forecast figures based on the sample of farms in the survey for 1992-93.

[5] Forecast.

[6] Deflated by the retail prices index—all items (March 1992–February 1993 prices).

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Iran

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government have given to Iran to help refugees from Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since 1991 we have contributed £2,216,000 to helping Iraqi refugees in Iran. These sums include £200,000 to CARE; £320,000 to the Iraqi humanitarian relief committee; £52,000 to the South Manchester accident and rescue team; £20,000 to the Association of Pioneer Relief Officers; £1 million to the International Commission of the Red Cross and £624,000 to Iraqi civilian aid. This latter British based non-governmental organisation has used the funds for work in refugee camps in Iran and also for work with displaced marsh Arabs camped on the Iran-Iraq border. The United Kingdom has not given any funds directly to the Government of Iran to help Iraqi refugees.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government have given to Iran to help refugees from Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have given £3 million in 1993-94 to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for work with Afghan refugees. This includes the repatriation programmes from both Pakistan and Iran.

We are ready to consider funding proposals for humanitarian activities by non-governmental organisations; and are currently considering proposals for a river crossing on the Helmand river which would provide an additional border crossing for returning Afghan refugees.

Crown Agents for Overseas Governments and Administrations

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who are the members currently appointed to the board of the Crown Agents for Oversea Governments and Administrations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The board of Crown Agents is presently constituted as follows:

Mr. D. H. Probert (Chairman)
Mr. J. D. Andrewes
Mr. P. F. Berry (Managing Director)
Mr. F. Cassell CB
Baroness Miller of Hendon MBE
Miss K. Mortimer
Mr. A. K. Stewart-Roberts
Mr. F. I. Sumner

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Brooke: Mr. Bryan Jefferson acts as architectural adviser to the Secretaries of the State for National Heritage and for the Environment. His appointment to the Department of National Heritage is on a one day a week basis.

Film Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement setting out his policy and his objectives in relation to the British film industry.

Mr. Brooke: It is the Government's policy to create an economic framework which will allow the United Kingdom film industry to thrive. The Department's medium-term objectives in relation to film are to help reverse the decline in British film production since 1985; to promote the United Kingdom as a location for the filming of feature films, television programmes and commercials; to expand opportunities for access to high quality films from Britain and elsewhere; and to foster international co-operation in production, distribution and exhibition of films. Measures to achieve these objectives are under consideration, and I will make an announcement as soon as practicable.

Regional Sports Councils

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will publish a table showing the grant in aid for the last 10 financial years, this year and projections for the next two years, for each of the regional sports councils.

Mr. Brooke: The Sports Council's regional offices provide the secretariat for the regional councils for sport and recreation, but neither the Department nor the Sports Council makes grants to these bodies.

The Sports Council's support for regional sporting activity and development is delivered directly through its own regional offices.

Millennium Commission

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is his timetable for the setting up of the Millennium Commission; whether he will chair the commission; when he expects to hold the first meeting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I expect the Millennium Commission to be appointed by Her Majesty the Queen in February, and the Government Minister to chair the Millennium Commission will be announced at the same time. The first meeting of the commission will be held shortly thereafter.

Royal Opera House

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the Royal Opera house development plan.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that the board of the Royal Opera house is currently considering the outcome of a review it has commissioned of financial and other aspects of the present development scheme, which received Government consent in 1991. I will be advised of the board's conclusions and will then consider, in the usual way, the extent to which any new consents are required.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage who are the members currently appointed to the Sports Council.

Mr. Brooke: The current members of the Sports Council are:

Sir Peter Yarranton (Chairman)
Professor Allan Patmore CBE B.Litt MA (Vice-Chairman)
Julia Bracewell
Trevor Brooking MBE
Gerald Dennis
Jim Elms MBE
Tim Marshall MBE
Keith Oates BSc(Econ), BSC(FCT)
Michael Parker
Graeme Simmers OBE CA
David Simon CBE
Dr. Sarah Springman
Geoff Thompson
Ossie Wheatley MA

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage who are the members currently appointed to the board of Theatres Trust.

Mr. Brooke: The members of the board of the Theatres Trust are:

G. Laurence Harbottle (Chairman)
Peter Plouviez (Vice Chairman)
Sir Eddie Kulukundis
Ian Albery
Professor James Dunbar-Nasmith
Sir Michael Marshall MP
Sir Ronald Millar

Gayle Hunnicutt
John Drummond
A. W. P. Stenham
Baroness Birk
Sir Geoffrey Cass
Peter Longman
The Marchioness of Anglesey
Yvonne Brewster.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage who are the members currently appointed to the board of the Sianel Pedwar Cymru—S4C.

Mr. Brooke: The current members of Sianel Pedwar Cymru—S4C—are:

Mr. Ifan Prys Edwards (Chairman)
Dr. Gwenllian Mair Awbery
Mr. Dyfig John
Dr. Gwyn Jones
Mr. R. Gerallt Jones
Ms Janet Lewis Jones
Mrs. Elan Closs Stephens.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage who are the members currently appointed to the board of the Radio Authority.

Mr. Brooke: The current members of the Radio Authority are:

The right hon. Lord Chalfont OBE, MC (Chairman)
Mrs. Jill McIvor
Mrs. Margaret Corrigan
Mr. John Grant
Mr. Richard Hooper
Mr. Michael Moriarty CB
Mr. Ranjit Sondhi.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage who are the members currently appointed to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission.

Mr. Brooke: The current members of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission are:

Rev. Canon Peter Pilkington (Chairman)
Mr. Donald Allen CMG
Mr. Tony Christopher CBE
Baroness Dean
Ms Jane Leighton

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage who are the members currently appointed to the board of the national heritage memorial fund.

Mr. Brooke: The current members of the national heritage memorial fund are:

Lord Rothschild (Chairman)
Mrs. Catherine Porteous
Professor Palmer Newbould
Sir Richard Carew-Pole
Sir Martin Jacomb
Sir Nicholas Goodison
Mrs. John Nutting
W. Lindsay Evans Esq.
Lord Crathorne
Commander Michael Saunders Watson
Lord Macfarlane of Bearsden

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UN Plenary Session (Voting)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list Her Majesty's Government voting record for each measure, and amendments thereto, on the agenda of the plentary session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1993.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The 48th plenary session of the United Nations General Assembly met from 21 September to 23 December 1993. It adopted 232 resolutions and 37 decisions during that time. One hundred and sixty-eight resolutions and 35 decisions were adopted without a vote.

The 48th session voted on 64 resolutions and two decisions during its plenary meetings. The United Kingdom's voting record for these measures was as follows:

		Voting
Resolutions adopted without reference to a main committee		
RES/14	Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency	For
RES/15	Return or restitution of cultural property to countries or origin	Abstain
RES/16	Ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States against Cuba	Abstain
RES/23	Zone of peace and co-operation in the South Atlantic	For
RES/28	Law of the Sea	Abstain
RES/52	Implementation of the Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples	Against
RES/53	Dissemination of information on decolonisation	Against
RES/56	Question of Island of Mayotte	Abstain
RES/58	Middle East Peace Process	For
RES/59A	Situation in the Middle East	For
RES/59B	Syrian Golan	Abstain
RES/88	Situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina	Abstain
RES/158A	Committee on the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People	Abstain
RES/158B	Division for Palestinian rights of the Secretariat	Abstain
RES/158C	Department of Public Information of the Secretariat	For
RES/158D	Peaceful settlement on the question of Palestine	Abstain
Resolutions adopted on reports of the first committee		
RES/66	Scientific and technological developments and their impact on international security	Against
RES/67	The role of science and technology in the context of international security, disarmament and other related fields	Abstain
RES/68	Verification in all its aspects, including the role of the UN in the field of verification	Abstain
	Separate vote on Operative paragraph 2 of RES/68	Against
RES/69	Amendment of the Treaty banning nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, outer space and under water	Against
RES/72	Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South Asia	For
RES/73	Conclusion of effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons	Abstain
RES/74A	Prevention of an arms race in outer space	For
	Separate vote on preambular paragraph 2 of RES/74A	Abstain
	Separate vote on operative paragraph 8 of RES/74A	Abstain
	Separate vote on operative paragraph 10 of RES/74A	Abstain
RES/75C	General and complete disarmament	Abstain
RES/75H	Conventional arms control at regional and sub-regional levels	For
RES/75I	Regional disarmament	For
RES/75J	Conventional arms control at regional and sub-regional levels	For
RES/76A	Review and implementation of the concluding document of the 12th special session of General Assembly: confidence-building measures	Abstain
RES/76B	Convention on the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons	Against
RES/78	Israeli nuclear armament	Against

		Voting
RES/79	Convention on the prohibitions or restrictions on the use of certain conventional weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects	Abstain
	Separate vote on preambular paragraph 5 of RES/79	Abstain
RES/80	Question of Antarctica	[1]—
RES/82	Implementation of the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace	Abstain
RES/83	Review of the implementation of the declaration on the strengthening of international security	Abstain
RES/84A	Maintenance of international security	For
Resolutions adopted on reports of the second committee		
RES/182	Enhanced technical co-operation towards a durable solution to the external debt problems of all developing countries	For
RES/212	Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli settlements on the Palestinian people in the Palestinian territory, including, Jerusalem, occupied since 1967, and on the Arab population of the Syrian Golan	For
RES/168	Economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries	Against
Resolutions adopted on reports of the third committee		
RES/89	Status of the International Convention on the suppression and punishment of the crime of apartheid	Abstain
RES/92	Use of mercenaries as a means to violate human rights and to impede the exercise of the rights of peoples to self-determination	Against
RES/94	Universal realisation of the rights of peoples to self-determination	Against
RES/101	UN African Institute for the prevention of crime and treatment of offenders	Abstain
RES/123	Alternative approaches and ways and means within the UN system for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms	Against
RES/124	Respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of states and their electoral processes	Against
RES/131	Enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections	For
RES/142	Situation of human rights in Cuba	For
RES/144	Situation of human rights in Iraq	For
RES/145	Situation of human rights in Iran	For
Res/147	Situation of human rights in Sudan	For
Resolutions adopted on reports of the forth committee		
RES/40A	Assistance to Palestinian refugees	For
RES/40D	Offers by member states of grants and scholarships for higher education, including vocational training, for Palestinian refugees	For
RES/40E	Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967	For
RES/40F	Return of population and refugees displaced since 1967	For
RES/40G	Revenues derived from Palestinian refugees' properties	Abstain
RES/40H	Protection of Palestinian refugees	For
RES/40I	University of Jerusalem "Al-Quds" for Palestinian refugees	For
RES/40J	Protection of Palestinian students and educational institutions and safeguarding of the security of the facilities of UNWRA in the Near East and occupied territories	For
RES/41A	Report of the Special Committee to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories	Abstain
RES/41B	ditto	For
RES/41C	ditto	Abstain
RES/41D	ditto	Abstain
RES/45	Information from non-self-governing territories transmitted under article 73e of the Charter of the United Nations	Abstain
RES/46	Activities of those foreign economic and other interests which impede the implementation of the declaration on the granting of indpendence to colonial countries and peoples in territories under colonial domination and efforts to eliminate colonialism, apartheid and racial discrimination in Southern Africa	Against
Decision	ditto	Against
RES/47	Implementation of the declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples by the specialised agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations	Against
Decision	Implementation of the declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples	Against

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[1] Did not take part in the vote.

A copy of the United Nations information record of the resolutions and decisions of the 48th session of the General Assembly showing the texts and voting records will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as it is available.

Cyprus

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* Greek Cypriots and *(b)* Turkish Cypriots are employed by the United Kingdom high commission in Cyprus.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom high commission in Cyprus employs 28 Greek Cypriots and six Turkish Cypriots. It also has seven Armenian Cypriot employees.

Lot Airlines

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his latest assessment of the impact on United Kingdom-Polish relations of the suspension of the permit of Lot Airlines to land at Heathrow.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We remain concerned at the suspension of air services between Britain and Poland. This is an air services dispute and has no impact on our current friendly relations with Poland. We want to see the situation resolved as soon as possible.

There has been a number of contacts recently with the Polish Government and I hope there will be an early meeting of officials to discuss a framework for the resumption of services. We are making every effort to secure a settlement which will be in the interests of both the airlines involved and the travelling public, and be consistent with the principles which govern aviation in the European Union.

Hong Kong

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the Governor of Hong Kong to discuss the future of Hong Kong.

Mr. Goodlad: The Governor of Hong Kong visited London from 19 to 24 January. My right hon. Friend the

Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had a useful discussion with Mr. Patten on a wide range of Hong Kong issues, including the 1994-95 election arrangements.

The first stage of the draft legislation on election arrangements is now progressing through the Legislative Council in Hong Kong. We expect it to complete its passage next month.

It would clearly not be feasible to withdraw this draft legislation. But this should not preclude continued discussion with China on the remaining electoral issues; nor should it prevent our co-operating with China in the many other matters of importance to Hong Kong.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Goodlad: None.

Child Abduction

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries *(a)* are and *(b)* are not currently signatories to the international convention on child abduction.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are two international conventions on child abduction. The following countries have signed the European convention on recognition and enforcement of decisions concerning custody of children and on restoration of custody of children.

State	*Signed*	*Ratification/Acceptance*	*Entry into Force*
Austria	20 May 1980	12 April 1985	1 August 1986
Belgium	20 May 1980	1 October 1985	1 August 1986
Cyprus	20 May 1980	13 June 1986	1 October 1986
Denmark	11 April 1991	11 April 1991	1 August 1991
France	20 May 1980	4 August 1982	1 August 1986
Germany	20 May 1980	5 October 1990	1 February 1991
Greece	20 May 1980	8 March 1993	1 July 1993
Ireland	20 May 1980	28 June 1991	1 October 1991
Italy	20 May 1980	—	—
Liechtenstein	20 May 1980	—	—
Luxembourg	20 May 1980	25 May 1983	1 August 1986
Netherlands	20 May 1980	23 May 1990	1 September 1990
Norway	17 January 1989	17 January 1989	1 May 1989
Portugal	20 May 1980	18 March 1983	1 August 1986
Spain	20 May 1980	30 May 1984	1 August 1986
Sweden	28 March 1989	28 March 1989	1 July 1989
Switzerland	20 May 1980	27 September 1983	1 August 1986
United Kingdom	20 May 1980	21 April 1986	1 August 1986

The following countries have signed The Hague convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction.

State	*Signed*	*Ratification/Accession/ Succession/Extension*	*Entry into force between the United Kingdom and State*
Argentina	28 January 1991	19 March 1991	1 June 1991
Australia	29 October 1986	29 October 1986	1 January 1987
Austria	12 May 1987	14 July 1988	1 October 1988
Bahamas	(Accession)	1 October 1993	1 January 1994
Belgium	11 January 1982	—	—
Belize	(Accession)	22 June 1989	1 October 1989
Bosnia-Hercegovina	(Succession)	1 October 1993	7 April 1992
Burkina Faso	(Accession)	25 May 1992	1 August 1992
Canada	25 October 1980	2 June 1983	1 August 1986
Ontario	(Extension)	2 June 1983	1 August 1986
New Brunswick	(Extension)	2 June 1983	1 August 1986
British Columbia	(Extension)	2 June 1983	1 August 1986
Manitoba	(Extension)	2 June 1983	1 August 1986
Nova Scotia	(Extension)	27 February 1984	1 August 1986
Newfoundland	(Extension)	6 July 1984	1 August 1986
Prince Edward Island	(Extension)	12 February 1986	1 August 1986
Quebec	(Extension)	11 October 1984	1 August 1986
Yukon Territory	(Extension)	18 November 1984	1 August 1986
Saskatchewan	(Extension)	11 August 1986	1 November 1986
Alberta	(Extension)	4 November 1986	1 February 1987
Northwest Territories	(Extension)	26 January 1988	1 April 1988
Croatia	(Succession)	5 April 1993	1 December 1991
Czech Republic	1 January 1993	—	—
Denmark	17 April 1991	17 April 1991	1 July 1991
Ecuador	(Accession)	22 January 1992	1 April 1992

State	*Signed*	*Ratification/Accession/ Succession/Extension*	*Entry into force between the United Kingdom and State*
France	25 October 1980	16 September 1982	1 August 1986
Germany	9 September 1987	27 September 1990	1 December 1990
Greece	25 October 1980	19 March 1983	1 June 1993
Honduras	(Accession)	20 December 1993	—
Hungary	(Accession)	7 April 1986	1 September 1986
Ireland	23 May 1990	16 July 1991	1 October 1991
Israel	4 September 1991	4 September 1991	1 December 1991
Italy	2 March 1987	—	—
Luxembourg	18 December 1984	8 October 1986	1 January 1987
Macedonia	(Succession)	23 September 1993	1 December 1991
Mauritius	(Accession)	23 March 1993	1 June 1993
Mexico	(Accession)	20 June 1991	1 September 1991
Monaco	(Accession)	12 November 1992	1 February 1993
Netherlands	11 September 1987	12 June 1990	1 September 1990
New Zealand	(Accession)	31 May 1991	1 August 1991
Norway	9 January 1989	9 January 1989	1 April 1989
Poland	(Accession)	10 August 1992	1 November 1992
Portugal	22 June 1982	29 September 1983	1 August 1986
Romania	(Accession)	20 November 1992	1 February 1993
Slovak Republic	1 January 1993	—	—
Spain	7 February 1986	16 June 1987	1 September 1987
Sweden	22 March 1989	22 March 1989	1 June 1989
Switzerland	25 October 1980	11 October 1983	1 August 1986
United Kingdom	19 November 1984	20 May 1986	1 August 1986
United States of America	23 December 1981	29 April 1988	1 July 1988
Yugoslavia	27 September 1991	27 September 1991	1 December 1991

UNESCO

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress Her Majesty's Government have made in considering renewal of the United Kingdom's membership of UNESCO.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are continuing to keep this matter under close review.

Visas

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will hold discussions with the Governments of those commonwealth countries whose nationals are currently able to visit the United Kingdom without a visa about the European Commission's proposals to make a list of countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa when crossing the external frontiers of member states.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The European Commission's proposals will be a matter for discussion with European Union partners and the Commission. I do not propose, at this stage, to initiate discussions with those commonwealth countries whose citizens would be affected by the Commission's proposals as currently drafted.

Social Development Summit

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will be representing the United Kingdom Government at the preparatory committee meeting in New York on 31 January to 11 February for the world summit on social development; which non-governmental organisations have been invited to be members of the United Kingdom delegation; what plans Her Majesty's Government have to set up a national committee on the summit; and which organisations have been invited to participate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Her Majesty's permanent representative to the United Nations will represent the United Kingdom at the forthcoming preparatory committee for the world summit for social development. He will be supported by his local staff and experts from Whitehall. We have not invited any non-governmental organisations to be part of the United Kingdom delegation. The secretariat for the summit has made arrangements for any NGO's who wish to attend. There are no plans at present to establish a national committee on the summit. We will review this question following the preparatory committee meeting in February.

Iran

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many hon. Members have written to him concerning the human rights situation in Iran since April 1992; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how Her Majesty's Government have voted in the United Nations General Assembly on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Iran concerning the abuse of human rights in Iran; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have received 423 letters from hon. Members on the human rights situation in Iran since April 1992.

We remain seriously concerned about the human rights situation in Iran and repeatedly make this clear to the Iranian authorities, both with our European partners and bilaterally. In December 1993 we co-sponsored and voted in favour of a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly that reflected the critical report of the United Nations special representative on human rights in Iran.

Most recently we gave our full support to representations made by the European Union on behalf of the Rev. Mehdi Dibaj and two members of the Baha'i faith, all of whom were reportedly sentenced to death in Iran for their religious beliefs. We have also raised Dibaj's case with the Iranian embassy in London.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's current policy with respect to Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We restored relations with Iran on 27 September 1990 on the basis of mutual respect and non-interference in each other's affairs.

We and our European Community partners made clear at the European Council at Edinburgh in December 1992 that improvements in Iran's behaviour in a number of areas, particularly human rights, the fatwa on Mr. Rushdie and terrorism, would be important in determining the extent to which closer relations and confidence in Iran could be developed.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the circumstances of the recent shooting incident near the United Kingdom embassy in Teheran; what co-operation has been received from the Iranian authorities to investigate it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A number of shots were fired at the offices of the British embassy in Tehran late on 9 January 1994, after office hours. No one was injured. The Iranian authorities are investigating the incident and we are satisfied with their co-operation.

Flight ULE 966

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice was given by British officials at the United Kingdom post in Jamaica to Jamaican citizens booked to travel on flight ULE 966 chartered from Air UK Leisure to the United Kingdom when they sought advice on the suitability of their travel documents.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As prior entry clearance for visitors from Jamaica is not mandatory, they are not obliged to contact the British high commission in Kingston. When Jamaican citizens seek advice on documents required for entry into the United Kingdom, the high commission does not necessarily know details of the flights on which they intend to travel. This was so in the case of the visitors booked to travel on flight ULE 966, and it is not therefore known how many may have sought advice.

All visitors seeking advice from the British high commission are given the information which I described on 11 January at column *43* in reply to an earlier question from the hon. Member.

Lockerbie (Trial)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the United Nations the possibility of holding the trial of two Libyan nationals suspected of the Lockerbie Pan Am 103 crime in The Hague.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is clear from resolution 883 of 11 November 1993 that the United Nations Security Council envisages trial only before the appropriate United Kingdom or United States court.

Malaysia

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what agreements Her Majesty's Government made with the Government of Malaysia with respect to arms contracts and an overseas aid package; when those agreements were made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: During discussions in 1988 about the proposed memorandum of understanding on defence sales, the Malaysians expressed their wish to make a reference to aid. A protocol was signed during the visit to Kuala Lumpur in March 1988 by the then Defence Secretary, my noble Friend Lord Younger of Prestwick. This set out the Malaysian Government's intention to buy defence equipment from the United Kingdom, with the details to be elaborated in the later memorandum. The protocol included a reference to

> "aid in support of non-military aspects under this programme."

After consultation with ministerial colleagues in London, the Secretary of State for Defence wrote to the Malaysian Minister of Finance in June 1988 to say that aid could not be linked to defence sales. As a result, the issue was not taken up in the memorandum of understanding on defence procurement which the British and Malaysian Prime Ministers signed in September 1988, and which did not cover aid. Our aid programme is not linked to arms sales.

Malaysia has been eligible for support under the aid and trade provision since the scheme was introduced in 1977; and 23 of the 270 ATP projects financed since then have been in Malaysia. The Malaysian Government have been well aware of the availability of ATP, which was reaffirmed in 1988. Malaysia is expected shortly to graduate under OCED rules from eligibility for aid credits such as ATP. British aid has contributed to Malaysia's rapid economic development and to the productive relationship which we have with Malaysia in many fields of activity, including trade.

Angola

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy in relation to the Government of the Republic of Angola and to UNITA; and if he will indicate what specific support is being given by Her Majesty's Government to the Angolan peace process.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our policy in Angola is to support a negotiated settlement to the civil war. To this end we took an active part in drafting Security Council resolution 864, which imposed sanctions against UNITA. We fully support the United Nations brokered negotations taking place in Lusaka between the Government of Angola and UNITA. We have provided £10 million of humanitarian aid since June 1993, to all areas of Angola.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Value Added Tax (Further Education Courses)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Customs and Excise current consultative proposals on VAT in relation to training and education provide for the continued exemption from VAT for courses of further education for adults provided by local authorities under section 11 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

Sir John Cope: I can confirm that as part of their review of the VAT treatment of education and training services Customs and Excise are considering the VAT position of courses of further education for adults provided by local authorities. Consultation with interested parties is currently taking place and decisions on the review have not yet been made. However, at this stage it is not envisaged that such courses will be made subject to VAT.

Council Tax

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average cost of a valuation investigation for an appeal against council tax banding.

Mr. Nelson: The estimated average cost of processing a council tax appeal in the current financial year in England is £115. This estimate includes Valuation Office agency and valuation tribunal costs.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of outstanding appeals against council tax bandings at each valuation office as at 1 January.

Mr. Nelson: The number of outstanding appeals against council tax bandings in England and Wales as at 1 January 1994 is as follows:

	Number
East Anglia	
Bedford	7,548
Cambridge	7,327
Chelmsford	11,532
Colchester	13,075
Ipswich	8,260
Norwich	11,311
Peterborough	9,219
St. Albans	7,167
Stevenage	6,371
East Midlands	
Derby	8,729
Doncaster	4,408
Grimsby	5,053
Hull	6,439
Leicester	4,815
Lincoln	7,626
Loughborough	6,212
Mansfield	5,532
Northampton	5,409
Nottingham	5,473
Sheffield	6,009
London	
Barking	3,340
Bromley	14,122
Camden	6,095
City of London	199
Ealing	7,028
Enfield	15,634
Greenwich	9,315
Harrow	7,193
Islington	6,824
Kensington	12,386
Lambeth	10,137
Redbridge	4,864
Tower Hamlets	2,861
Westminster 1	2,403
Westminster 2	4,452
Wimbledon	9,841
North Western	
Bolton	4,207
Burnley	6,322
Chester	5,262
Crewe	7,786
Lancaster	6,957
Liverpool	6,697
Manchester	1,712
Preston	5,455
Rochdale	2,342
Salford	4,135
Stockport	5,457
Warrington	7,394
Northern	
Alnwick	5,464
Bradford	3,987
Carlisle	5,395
Durham	6,558
Halifax	7,490
Harrogate	9,742
Leeds	6,283
Middlesbrough	3,137
Newcastle	3,320
Sunderland	3,267
Ulverston	5,006
York	8,029
South Eastern	
Brighton	7,883
Chatham	5,228
Eastbourne	7,806
Folkestone	6,487
Guildford	9,033
Reigate	11,127
Tunbridge Wells	13,288
Worthing	11,217
Southern	
Aylesbury	12,178
Basingstoke	8,861
Bournemouth	9,259
Dorchester	7,034
Oxford	11,557
Portsmouth	5,135
Portsmouth (IOW)	3,083
Reading	13,038
Southampton	12,212
Swindon	9,988
Western	
Barnstaple	6,192
Bath	6,298
Bristol	8,647
Exeter	10,277
Gloucester	13,340
Plymouth	9,296
St. Austell	9,711
Taunton	9,968
West Midland	
Birmingham	6,335
Coventry	5,014
Kidderminster	5,283
Lichfield	4,651
Sandwell	1,197
Shrewsbury	8,934
Stoke-on-Trent	5,451
Warwick	8,026
Wolverhampton	4,083
Worcester	10,769
Wales	
Bangor	5,210
Cardiff	4,166
Carmarthen	10,186

	Number
Merthyr Tydfil	4,418
Newport	4,365
Pontypridd	2,861
Swansea	4,529
Wrexham	6,037

Mr. Straw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will show for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland separately the forecast of council tax receipts contained in line 5 of table 6.11 in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" 1994-95.

Mr. Portillo: Disaggregated projections of council tax receipts in 1993-94 and 1994-95 are not available.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account he took of the level of costs of local government reform in determining his allocation of resources to the Scottish Office.

Mr. Portillo: The total resources allocated to Scotland are determined in accordance with the established block and formula arrangements. Within those totals, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland set out the amounts he has made available for local authorities, including for the costs of local government reform, in replies to my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) on 7 December, *Official Report,* columns *187-88.*

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect he expects GATT to have on the rate of inflation.

Mr. Nelson: GATT will lead to an increase in world trade and benefit both business and consumers. More effective competition and lower tariffs should lead to some downward pressure on prices.

Health Insurance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated cost to his Department of exempting from income tax benefits payable under permanent health insurance policies in the first 12 months of disability.

Mr. Dorrell: Precise figures are not available centrally but is estimated that in 1994-95 the cost of exempting payments made in the first 12 months of disability will be around £10 million.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made, and what representations he has received, in respect of the impact of the air passenger duty charges on small municipally owned airports and the market for small turbo prop and regional class jet aircraft.

Sir John Cope: I have received a small number of representations about air passenger duty which mentioned the impact on small airports and turbo prop aircraft. The impact of air passenger duty on demand for air travel will vary by type of passenger and by route. Overall, the impact is expected to be small. No specific estimates have been made of the impct on small municipally owned airports nor on the market for small turbo prop and regional class jet aircraft, and any such estimates would be highly speculative.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Straw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will show for England only and for each year from 1992-93 to 1994-95, the local authority transactions contained within table 6.1 in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" 1994-95.

Mr. Portillo: The local authority transactions underlying table 6.1 are set out in table 6.9. Separate figures for England only on the basis of table 6.9 are not available.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will show for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland separately the amounts of local authority self-financed expenditure recorded in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" and identify the amounts within that figure of expenditure financed from council tax.

Mr. Portillo: Total local authority spending for 1988-89 to 1993-94 and total central Government support for 1988-89 to 1996-97 will be published by country in the statistical supplement to the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" 1994-95. Projections for total local authority spending in 1994-95 to 1996-97 are not available on a disaggregated basis.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what forecast he has made of when Britain will be economically strong enough to reconsider rejoining the ERM.

Mr. Nelson: Sterling's re-entry to the ERM could not be considered until there is greater convergence between the monetary policies appropriate for all the Community economies. I should also need to be satisfied that the system would be operated to the benefit of all its members. I do not expect these conditions to be met during this Parliament.

Westfield Contributory Health Scheme

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had from Westfield contributory health scheme as to the effect of the insurance premium tax on their membership.

Sir John Cope: Various representations have been made to Treasury Ministers seeking exemption from the proposed insurance premium tax by a number of contributory health schemes, including the Westfield contributory health scheme.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Nelson: Neither of the special advisers in the Treasury seconded from other organisations.

EC Programmes

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the the total budgets of the European Commission's educational mobility programmes of *(a)* ARION, *(b)* ERASMUS, *(c)* LINGUA, *(d)* the science plan, *(e)* SPES and *(f)* sectoral grants in each year since their establishment; and what proportion of each was granted to (i) the Northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Boswell: I have been asked to reply.

The science plan, SPES and sectoral grants are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The information requested on ARION, ERASMUS and LINGUA is as follows:

The ARION Programme started during the 1978-79 academic year. Complete records are only available from 1985-86. The table illustrates the number of bursaries awarded.

Year	*Total budget (value in ECU)*	*Total number of grants*	*Number of grants to United Kingdom*	*Number of grants to Northern region*[2]
1986-87	364,000	520	70	5
1987-88	364,000	520	70	6
1988-89	569,500	580	80	5
1989-90	[1]574,650	[1]600	80	4
1990-91	556,350	529	80	4
1991-92	587,800	651	95	7
1992-93	[1]807,050	[1]850	120	3

[1] Estimated figures.

[2] Northern region conforms to the Eurostat code R71 and consists of Cleveland, Durham, Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear.

LINGUA

Aggregate statistics by member state and region are not available in the form requested, but the United Kingdom share in 1992 of the budget directly administered by the Commission for Actions III and V was 20 per cent.

The budget administered by the UK LINGUA Unit for Actions IA and IV was as follows:

(Ecus)

	1991	*1992*	*1993*
Action IA—Measures to assist Modern Foreign Language teachers			
EC Budget	5,600,000	7,000,002	7,700,001
United Kingdom Share	588,629	946,369	1,057,074
Northern Region	n/a	n/a	n/a
Action IV—Exchange of young people			
EC Budget	6,000,000	8,400,000	10,500,000
United Kingdom Share	783,838	1,230,426	1,562,070
Northern Region	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a=Not Available.

ERASMUS

Year	*Total ERASMUS budget*[1,2]	*Student mobility grant allocated to UK*[1,3]	*Student mobility grant allocated to Northern region*[1,3,4]
1987-88	11·2	n/a	n/a
1988-89	30·0	2·1	0·05
1989-90	52·5	4·1	0·10
1990-91	60·6	5·1	0·22
1991-92	73·8	6·4	0·29
1992-93	97·2	8·5	0·34
1993-94	97·8	8·8	0·34

[1] Amounts quoted are in million ecu.

[2] Source: ERASMUS Bureau.

[3] Source: United Kingdom ERASMUS Student Grants Council.

[4] Northern region conforms to the Eurostat code R71 and consists of Cleveland, Durham, Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear.

PRIME MINISTER

Kashmir

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had in the last six months regarding Kashmir; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I discussed Kashmir at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in October with the Prime Minister of Pakistan. We regularly raise Kashmir in our discussions with the Indian and Pakistan Governments.

Arms Supplies (Iraq)

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister what action he has taken to ascertain who drew up the original draft of the letter about arms supplies to Iraq that he sent to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton on 17 February 1992 and who made deletions in that draft to alter it to the form in which the Prime Minister sent the aforesaid letter to the right hon. Member; what explanation he has received for the deletions; and what action he intends to take *(a)* in regard to responsibility for the deletions and *(b)* in regard to writing to the aforesaid right hon. Member to correct the false impression that he now acknowledges his letter gave.

The Prime Minister: My Office has supplied Lord Justice Scott's inquiry with the further information he requested. The issues arising are a matter for Lord Justice Scott. As will be apparent from my evidence to the inquiry, I do not accept that my letter to the right hon. Gentleman was misleading.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister which public appointments are handled by the No. 10 appointments secretary.

The Prime Minister: My appointments secretary assists me over a range of appointments in Church and state for which I am responsible, particularly those where the appointment is made by Her Majesty the Queen on my advice.

New Year's Honours List

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a list of the people included in this year's new year's honours list with their place of residence by standard region and their occupation.

The Prime Minister: No. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

British Empire Forces

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister where the records of all the soldiers of the British empire forces, who were sentenced to death during the first world war but whose sentences were subsequently commuted, are located; and if he will now arrange for them to be made available in the Public Record Office.

The Prime Minister: The courts martial records of British service men who were sentenced to death during the first world war but whose sentences were subsequently commuted have regrettably not survived. The available evidence suggests they were lost when a German bomb hit the main war office and Army repository in 1940.

The availability of the courts martial records of other British empire forces is a matter that should be pursued with each of the countries concerned.

Government Successes (Criteria)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what are the criteria by which Her Majesty's Government will measure their success in 1994 *Official Report,* column *849.*

The Prime Minister: By the success of our policies in all areas of national life.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement giving details of the Government's "back to basics" policy.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 21 January 1994 *Official Report,* column *849*

Ministers (Unsuitability for Office)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the circumstances which render Ministers unsuitable to retain office.

The Prime Minister: There can be a variety of circumstances but the main criterion should be whether the Minister can continue to perform the duties of office effectively.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 January.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if, when he next meets President Clinton, he will discuss the report of the Harvard medical school team on child malnutrition and disease in Iraq.

The Prime Minister: I expect to meet President Clinton during my visit to Washington at the end of February. The situation in Iraq may come up in our talks then. However, United Kingdom and United States officials are in regular touch over Iraq, including the humanitarian situation.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 20 January *Official Report,* column *814.*

Health Promotion, Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to place in the Library a copy of his efficiency unit's efficiency scrutiny of the delivery of health promotion in Wales.

The Prime Minister: Copies of the efficiency scrutiny of health promotion in Wales were placed in the Library of the House on 1 April 1993.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Bail Hostels

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bail and probation hostels and places are currently open and available in England and Wales.

Mr. Maclean: There are currently 115 approved hostels providing 2,690 places.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bail and probation hostels in England and Wales are due to close as a consequence of the most recent public expenditure survey.

Mr. Maclean: Seven hostels have been identified for closure: Bewsey Street, Cheshire; Dover, Kent; St. Vincents, inner London; Dudley centre, Devon; Fir Tree Grange, Durham; Windyridge, Essex; and Hollywood Manor, Kent—currently closed and not to reopen. In addition three probation areas have been asked to identify which of their hostels should be closed: west midlands —two hostels; south Yorkshire—one hostel; and inner London—one hostel.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what expenditure will be saved during the financial years 1994-95 and 1995-96 by the closure of certain existing bail and probation hostels arising out of the public expenditure survey.

Mr. Maclean: The expected savings in revenue grant expenditure are about £1·2 million in 1994-95 and about £2·5 million in 1995-96.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what capital and revenue expenditure will be available for bail hostel provision in inner London for 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Mr. Maclean: Revenue grant for inner London approved probation-bail hostels for 1994-95 and 1995-96 will be £1·9 million a year. The level of capital grant will depend on the scrutiny of spending proposals submitted by inner London hostels and the results of the current survey of the condition of all hostels.

Probation Trainees

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the intake of probation trainees to the diploma in social work courses in 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Maclean: The number of probation trainees sponsored by the Home Office starting diploma in social work courses was 451 in 1992 and 470 in 1993.

Social Work Courses

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many trainee places to diploma in social work courses will be lost in 1995, 1996 and 1997 as a consequence of the public expenditure survey.

Mr. Maclean: Decisions on the number of sponsorships in future years will be taken in the light of the conclusions of the forthcoming review of probation officer qualifying training.

Police (Press)

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provisions govern the use by members of the Metropolitan police of their position of advantage to sell stories to the press.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Under schedule 1, paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Police (Discipline) Regulations 1985, an offence against discipline is committed where a member of a police force without proper authority communicates to any person, any information which he has in his possession as a member of a police force; or improperly uses, or attempts so to use, his position as a member of the force for his private advantage.

European Parliamentary Constituency Committee

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the *Official Report* of the European Parliamentary Constituency Committee for England and Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The reports of both committees were published on 20 January.

Police, Northumbria

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of *(a)* murders, *(b)* murders of members of the police force, *(c)* attacks on police officers, giving level of seriousness of injury, and *(d)* policemen and women in post in each year since 1973 in the Northumbria police force area.

Mr. Maclean: The following table shows for Northumbria such information as is readily available centrally:

Year	*Offences decided at court to be murder*	*Cases in column (1) involving police*	*Assaults on police:* *Fatal*	*Serious*	*Minor/Other*	*Police strength* *Male*	*Female*
1982	—	—	..	..	..	3,124	205
1983	5	—	..	..	..	3,117	220
1984	6	—	..	..	..	3,113	231
1985	10	—	..	..	..	3,137	231
1986	4	—	..	..	..	3,108	253
1987	8	—	..	..	..	3,206	272
1988	5	—	..	..	..	3,166	294
1989	8	—	—	35	426	3,199	327
1990	14	—	—	24	653	3,186	342
1991	3	—	—	53	819	3,114	346
1992	5	—	—	68	436	3,198	388

Custodial Remand

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were remanded in custody in the west midlands in the latest year available broken down by *(a)* sex, *(b)* racial category, *(c)* aged under 17, *(d)* aged 17 to 21 and *(e)* aged over 21 years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Robert Ainsworth, dated 25 January 1994:

WEST MIDLANDS REMANDS

The Home Secretary has asked me to rely to your recent Question asking how many people were remanded in custody in the West Midlands in the latest year available broken down by (a) sex, (b) racial category, (c) aged under 17, (d) aged 17 to 21 and (e) aged over 21 years.

The latest available information is given in the attached table for 1992.

Receptions of remand prisoners into prison service establishments in England and Wales from west midlands courts, 1992[1]

	All	*White*	*Ethnic Origin* *Black African Caribbean*	*Asian Bangladeshi Indian Pakistani*	*Other Chinese not recorded (including refusals)*
MALE					
First received as untried not subsequently received as convicted unsentenced					
Under 17 years old	62	44	11	3	4
17-21 years old	757	555	87	81	34
Over 21	1,088	794	180	85	29
TOTAL	1,907	1,393	278	169	67
First received as untried subsequently received as convicted unsentenced					
Under 17 years old	39	26	7	3	3
17-21 years old	396	318	43	24	11
Over 21	330	259	42	25	4

			Ethnic Origin		
	All	*White*	*Black African Caribbean*	*Asian Bangladeshi Indian Pakistani*	*Other Chinese not recorded (including refusals)*
TOTAL	765	603	92	52	18
First received as convicted unsentenced					
Under 17 years old	10	6	3	1	—
17-21 years old	129	107	8	13	1
Over 21	121	99	14	8	—
TOTAL	260	212	25	22	1
All received on remand					
Under 17 years old	111	76	21	7	7
17-21 years old	1,282	980	138	118	46
Over 21	1,539	1,152	236	118	33
TOTAL	2,932	2,208	395	243	86
FEMALE					
First received as untried not subsequently received as convicted unsentenced					
Under 17 years old	—	—	—	—	—
17-21 years old	17	15	2	—	—
Over 21	22	17	4	1	—
TOTAL	39	32	6	1	—
First received as untried subsequently received as convicted unsentenced					
Under 17 years old	—	—	—	—	—
17-21 years old	6	4	1	—	1
Over 21	7	3	3	—	1
TOTAL	13	7	4	—	2
First received as convicted unsentenced					
Under 17 years old	—	—	—	—	—
17-21 years old	12	9	2	1	—
Over 21	6	4	2	—	—
TOTAL	18	13	4	1	—
All received on remand					
Under 17 years old	—	—	—	—	—
17-21 years old	35	28	5	1	1
Over 21	35	24	9	1	1
TOTAL	70	52	14	2	2

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[1] Provisional.

Firearms

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will tabulate the cost of renewing *(a)* a firearms certificate and *(b)* a shotgun certificate in real terms for each year since the introduction of the Firearms Act 1968, using 1968 as the base year.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Using the gross domestic product deflator, the cost of renewing *(a)* a firearm certificate and *(b)* a shotgun certificate in real terms for each year since 1968, using that year as the base year, are given in the following table:

Index	*Year*	*(a) Renewing firearm certificate (cash prices)* £	*1968 prices* £	*(b) Renewing shotgun certificate (cash prices)* £	*1968 prices* £
100	1968	0·125	0·125	0·125	0·125
105·22	1969	1·25	1·19	0·375	0·36
113·89	1970	1·25	1·10	0·375	0·33
124·29	1971	2·50	2·01	0·50	0·40
134·43	1972	2·50	1·86	0·50	0·37
143·66	1973	2·50	1·74	0·50	0·35
171·88	1974	2·50	1·45	0·50	0·29
215·60	1975	4·50	2·09	1·50	0·70
244·73	1976	10·00	4·09	4·00	1·63

Index	*Year*	*(a) Renewing firearm certificate (cash prices)* £	*1968 prices* £	*(b) Renewing shotgun certificate (cash prices)* £	*1968 prices* £
278·02	1977	10·00	3·60	4·00	1·44
309·09	1978	13·00	4·21	5·00	1·62
360·74	1979	13·00	3·60	5·00	1·39
426·84	1980	20·00	4·69	8·00	1·87
468·12	1981	20·00	4·27	8·00	1·71
501·47	1982	20·00	3·99	8·00	1·60
524·72	1983	20·00	3·81	8·00	1·52
551·09	1984	20·00	3·63	8·00	1·45
581·66	1985	20·00	3·44	8·00	1·38
598·69	1986	33·00	5·51	8·00	1·34
630·59	1987	33·00	5·23	8·00	1·27
672·92	1988	33·00	4·90	8·00	1·19
719·72	1989	33·00	4·59	8·00	1·11
777·74	1990	46·00	5·91	11·00	1·41
826·99	1991	46·00	5·56	11·00	1·33
858·74	1992	46·00	5·36	11·00	1·28
886·65	1993	46·00	5·19	11·00	1·24
922·11	1994	46·00	4·99	11·00	1·19

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will tabulate the cost of acquiring *(a)* a firearm certificate and *(b)* a shotgun certificate in real terms for each year since the introduction of the Firearms Act 1968, using 1968 as the base year.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Using the gross domestic product deflator, the cost of acquiring *(a)* a firearm certificate and *(b)* a shotgun certificate in real terms for each year since 1968, using that year as the base year, are given in the following table:

Index	*Year*	*(a) Acquiring firearm certificate (cash prices)* £	*1968 prices* £	*(b) Acquiring shotgun certificate (cash prices)* £	*1968 prices* £
100	1968	0·25	0·25	0·25	0·25
105·22	1969	2·50	2·38	0·75	0·71
113·89	1970	2·50	2·20	0·75	0·66
124·29	1971	3·50	2·82	1·00	0·80
134·43	1972	3·50	2·60	1·00	0·74
143·66	1973	3·50	2·44	1·00	0·70
171·88	1974	3·50	2·04	1·00	0·58
215·60	1975	7·00	3·25	2·00	0·93
244·73	1976	12·00	4·90	5·00	2·04
278·02	1977	12·00	4·32	5·00	1·80
309·09	1978	16·00	5·18	7·00	2·26
360·74	1979	16·00	4·44	7·00	1·94
426·84	1980	25·00	5·86	12·00	2·81
468·12	1981	25·00	5·34	12·00	2·56
501·47	1982	25·00	4·99	12·00	2·39
524·72	1983	25·00	4·76	12·00	2·29
551·09	1984	25·00	4·54	12·00	2·18
581·66	1985	25·00	4·30	12·00	2·06
598·69	1986	33·00	5·51	12·00	2·00
630·59	1987	33·00	5·23	12·00	1·90
672·92	1988	33·00	4·90	12·00	1·78
719·72	1989	33·00	4·59	12·00	1·67
777·74	1990	46·00	5·91	17·00	2·19
826·99	1991	46·00	5·56	17·00	2·06
858·74	1992	46·00	5·36	17·00	1·98
886·65	1993	46·00	5·19	17·00	1·92
922·11	1994	46·00	4·99	17·00	1·84

Crime, Northumbria

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of cars damaged and the level of house burglary, theft from cars and burglary in each year since 1973 in the Northumbria police area.

Mr. Maclean: The available information is contained in the table. Police force area boundaries changed in 1974 so figures are given from 1975 onwards. Information on the number of cars damaged is not collected centrally.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in Northumbria

Number of offences

Year	*All burglary*	*Burglary in a dwelling*	*Theft from a motor vehicle*
1975	25,057	11,622	8,158
1976	24,316	10,792	7,707
1977	28,381	12,768	10,092
1978	28,476	13,109	11,169
1979	27,014	12,285	11,186
1980	31,068	14,557	13,955
1981	34,665	16,581	16,442
1982	43,274	22,806	19,079
1983	44,116	22,148	18,559
1984	50,900	24,229	20,893
1985	51,176	24,630	22,213
1986	52,006	25,880	27,105
1987	50,444	25,186	31,961
1988	46,052	23,257	29,261
1989	49,585	24,955	33,117
1990	54,746	27,092	34,452
1991	66,101	31,413	32,680
1992	66,072	32,499	28,030

Mr. Brian Charrington

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been convicted of drug offences where assistance in the police investigation and detection was given by Brian Charrington.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Operational matters are the responsibility of the chief officer of the police force concerned and it would not be appropriate for me to provide information on any particular case.

Video Outlets

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to license video outlets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Where the sale and hire of sexually explicit material comprise a significant degree of the business of video outlets, such establishments are already subject to licensing by local authorities under section 2 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. These adoptive powers enable local authorities to vet those seeking to run sex establishments and to exclude such establishments altogether from unsuitable areas. We have no present plans to extend these provisions nor are we persuaded that compliance with the provisions of the Video Recordings Act 1984 would be improved by a more general licensing system.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding clamping companies; whether he proposes to have consultations on the subject of clamping companies; if he will introduce legislation or guidelines to control clamping companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: During the consultation exercise carried out last year concerning wheel clamping on private land, the Government received a number of different views, including some from the companies themselves and a representative association, about the activities of clamping companies and about ways of reducing concerns that exist about those activities.

In considering what, if any, action it may be appropriate to take, the Government's aim continues to be to ensure that any measure introduced to prevent or deter irresponsible and heavy-handed wheel clamping on private land does not prevent sensible measures being taken to control genuine parking problems.

Vehicle Identification

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which manufacturers and importers have given him commitments in respect of the introduction of visible vehicle identification numbers; and if he will detail those commitments.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No specific commitments have been made to the Home Office by motor manufacturers on this issue. However, following representations from the Home Office and the police, a number of manufacturers and importers—including BMW, Ford, Honda, Jaguar, Porsche, Rolls-Royce, Rover, Saab and Volvo—have introduced visible vehicle identification number plates into some or all of their models. A number of others—including Peugeot and Vauxhall—are etching the vehicle identification number into the front and rear window glass.

Information provided by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders in March 1993 showed that, in 1992, visible vehicle identification numbers were provided on 49 per cent. of vehicle models—of which 61 per cent. were on the structure of the vehicle and the rest etched into the window glass.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision he is making for local emergency planning in 1994-95; and if he will make a statement regarding training for volunteers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During 1994-95 a maximum of £15 million will be available from the Home Office as a contribution towards expenses incurred by local authorities in carrying out their responsibilities under the Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1993.

The Home Office no longer provides funds for the training of volunteers for civil defence but encourages local authorities to develop and maintain relationships with established voluntary organisations. Some authorities have chosen to keep their volunteer groups and to provide training.

British Caledonian Flight

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passengers were on a charter flight by British Caledonian from the Caribbean arriving at Gatwick on 14 December; how many passengers were *(a)* allowed to enter the United Kingdom as visitors, *(b)* given temporary admission as a visitor to the United Kingdom, *(c)* refused entry, *(d)* detained and *(e)* deported; how many passengers remain in detention; and what was the (i) minimum and (ii) the maximum period for which the passengers sought to visit the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information is as follows. I understand that 353 passengers arrived on flight BA 1262—KT 310—at Gatwick on 15 December. Most were citizens of Jamaica who sought entry as visitors. Thirty-eight people were refused leave to enter of whom 33 have been removed. Twelve of those refused were detained, none of whom remain in detention. Those admitted as visitors were given leave to enter for six months.

St. Vincent's Bail Hostel

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the residents of St. Vincent's bail hostel for the last 12 months to the latest available date were *(a)* aged under 17, *(b)* aged 17 to 20 inclusive and *(c)* aged 21 years or over.

Mr. Maclean: *(a)* none, *(b)* 25, *(c)* 94.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the average cost per week of a place in St. Vincent's bail hostel, *(b)* the average length of stay in St. Vincent's bail hostel and *(c)* the average cost per week of a prison remand place in the inner London area, at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: *(a)* £222. *(b)* This information is not available. *(c)* For 1992-93, the average weekly net operating cost per prisoner at prisons in inner London was £566. Remand prisoners represent just over 40 per cent. of these prisoners but costs for remand prisoners are not kept separately.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the occupancy rate of St. Vincent's bail hostel for each of the last 10 quarters.

Mr. Maclean: The occupancy figures for the period April 1991 to March 1992 are not available in a quarterly form. The figures from April 1992 to September 1993 are as follows:

	Per cent.
April 1992 to June 1992	64
July 1992 to September 1992	56
October 1992 to December 1992	31
January 1993 to March 1993	27
April 1993 to June 1993	34
July 1993 to September 1993	43

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who has been and who will be consulted about the proposed closure of St. Vincent's bail hostel in inner London.

Mr. Maclean: The chief probation officer for inner London and the chair of the hostel's managing committee were notified on 1 December of the proposed closure and given the opportunity to comment.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what he expects to be the annual saving as a result of the proposed closure of St. Vincent's bail hostel in inner London.

Mr. Maclean: I expect the saving to the Home Office in 1994-95 to be approximately £100,000 and in 1995-96 approximately £200,000.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what capital expenditure was planned for St. Vincent's bail hostel prior to his Department's statement of 30 November.

Mr. Maclean: A proposal for capital expenditure on the conversion of dormitory to single bedroom accommodation had been submitted and was under consideration prior to the 30 November statement; but no plans for improvements to the hostel had been approved.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were *(a)* rearrested and charged or *(b)* breached for failure to comply with requirements at St. Vincent's bail hostel in each of the last 10 quarters.

Mr. Maclean: The information supplied by the hostel is in the table.

	Rearrested and charged	*Breached*
August to October 1991	2	2
November to January 1992	2	0
February to April 1992	2	3
May to July 1992	0	3
August to October 1992	0	2
November to January 1993	0	0
February to April 1993	0	6
May to July 1993	2	4
August to October 1993	2	3
November to 24 January 1994	5	4
Totals	15	27

Note: In addition, during this period 41 residents are recorded as having absconded.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people he expects to be remanded into custody per annum as a result of the proposed closure of St. Vincent's bail hostel in inner London.

Mr. Maclean: It is for the courts to decide who should be remanded in custody. There are other approved hostel facilities available to them throughout London.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were remanded in St. Vincent's bail hostel during the last 12 months to the latest available date; and how many of these people were *(a)* black males and *(b)* black females.

Mr. Maclean: Between February 1993 and 24 January 1994, 150 bailees were admitted to the hostel. The information requested at *(a)* and *(b)* is not held centrally and is not readily available.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are expected to be made redundant by the proposed closure of the St. Vincent's bail hostel; and at what financial cost.

Mr. Maclean: It will be for the managing committee to decide how to handle the consequences of closure in terms of redeployment or redundancies; we have not yet received a full account of its conclusions.

Carl Bridgewater

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reach a decision on whether to refer the convictions in the Carl Bridgewater case to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Maclean: The latest representations about this case were received between June and December 1993. We understand that more are to follow. We have already asked the police to make inquiries into some of the matters raised. When those inquiries have been completed and any further representations have been considered, my right hon. and learned Friend will consider in the light of all the information available to him whether it would be right for him to refer any of the convictions to the Court of Appeal or to take any other action.

Mrs. Joy Gardner

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the name of the immigration officer involved in the deportation of Joy Gardner; what was his or her rank; and whether this officer has been suspended from duty pending the Police Complaints Authority investigation into the death of Joy Gardner.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A male immigration officer accompanied the police officers to Mrs. Joy Gardner's home. No complaint has been made against this officer, and he has not been suspended. It would not be appropriate to name him while an investigation by the Police Complaints Authority remains in progress.

Flight ULE 966

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the immigration service received advance knowledge of charter flight ULE 966 which landed at Gatwick airport on 21 December; when the immigration service received from the charter company a passenger list; whether this list was volunteered or requested; how many people named as passengers had *(a)* previously been refused entry to the United Kingdom and *(b)* previously been refused entry clearance to the United Kingdom; how many passengers, in either category, were (i) refused entry as a visitor, (ii) detained and (iii) deported on 25 December; and how many passengers in either category were given (1) entry to the United Kingdom and (2) given temporary admission.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The immigration service was informed about flight ULE 966 on 16 December and the passenger list was requested subsequently. It was received on 21 December, three and a half hours before the aircraft's arrival. Of those passengers listed, two were identified as having previously been refused entry; eight were identified as having been refused entry clearance and one of whom had also been refused entry.

Of those nine passengers, five were refused entry and four were granted leave to enter. Four passengers were detained for at least one night; five were granted temporary admission. Three passengers were removed on 25 December.

May Inquiry

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the report from the inquiry presently being conducted by Mr. Justice May.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that Sir John May hopes to submit his report into the case of the Guildford Four in March.

Somali Nationals

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the concessionary policy operated by his Department to facilitate family reunion for Somali nationals resident in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Somali family reunion concession was introduced to make it easier for those Somalis with relatives in the United Kingdom who had been displaced to refugee camps in Ethiopia and Djibouti to seek entry clearance to the United Kingdom. It took account of the fact that fighting in both Somalia and Ethiopia at that time had made it difficult to travel to any British diplomatic post in the area in order to apply for entry clearance.

The concession allowed the United Kingdom sponsor to seek advice in advance from the Home Office on whether his or her relatives seemed likely to qualify for a visa if they made a formal application at their nearest post. It thus reduced—usually to one—the number of journeys they needed to make to the post in order to pursue their application.

The concession had its origins in a period when both Somalia and Ethiopia were torn by civil war and any movement by civilians in the area was potentially hazardous. The situation in Somalia itself remains grave, but over 95 per cent. of cases now raised under the concession concern people who are in Ethiopia. That country has been at peace for nearly three years now, and the evidence is that Somali nationals in Ethiopia can move about safely there. People in Somalia itself are able to move into Ethiopia, Kenya or Djibouti if they wish. In these circumstances it is open to applicants to seek entry clearance at our posts in Addis Ababa, Nairobi of Djibouti in the normal way. I have therefore decided that the concession should be withdrawn with effect from midnight on 27 January 1994.

This decision applies to new cases only. All cases which have already been raised with us under the concession, including any received between now and 27 January 1994, will be considered under the existing arrangements.

Prison Visits (Homosexuals)

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will allow homosexual partners to benefit from the assisted prison visits scheme on similar terms to other partners.

Mr. Howard: No. I do not believe that taxpayers' money should be used for this purpose.

Car Crime

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to improve the protection from car crimes on public roads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 24 January 1993]:* The Home Office continued with its car crime prevention campaign during 1993, to build on the success achieved in 1992. Evaluation of the campaign showed a very high awareness of the campaign's message. We shall continue to encourage the motor manufacturers to improve vehicle security. We shall also continue our efforts to make motorists aware of car crime and the measures they should take to keep themselves and their vehicles safe.

DEFENCE

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which his Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. Aitken: Those firms identifying themselves as having accountancy as their principal business awarded centrally placed consultancy contracts valued at over £10,000 by the Ministry of Defence in 1992 and 1993 were as follows:

KPMG
Touche Ross
Coopers and Lybrand
PE International
Price Waterhouse
Arthur Andersen
PA Consulting
Ernst and Young

Merchant Banks awarded centrally placed consultancy contracts by the Ministry of Defence in 1992 and 1993 were as follows:

Kleinwort Benson Investment Trust Ltd.

The total value of these consultancy contracts amounted to £14·9 million. A breakdown of these contracts is as follows. To protect commercial confidentiality, the individual contract values have been omitted.

A number of other low-value contracts will have been placed with such firms in the period in question but these could be identified only at disproportionate cost. Furthermore, a number of consultancy contracts may be placed as part of specific projects but are not separately accounted. These are not recorded centrally and, similarly, could be identified only at disproportionate cost.

Date	*Contract title*	*Company*
March 1992	Housing Task Force	Coopers and Lybrand
March 1992	Policy Changes—RAF Officers Aircrew	PE International
April 1992	Outplacement (MODOPS) for Senior Grades	KPMG
April 1992	Cost Allocation Model for Director General Ships Refitting (DGSR)	Coopers and Lybrand
June 1992	Activity Based Costing in HQ BAOR	Ernst and Young
July 1992	AWE Tender Evaluation	Touche Ross
July 1992	Army Static Workshops Review	Touche Ross
August 1992	Consultancy Support to Director General Supply Management (DGSM) (RAF)	Touche Ross
August 1992	Consultancy to Royal Dockyards (DGSR)	Coopers and Lybrand
August 1992	Consultancy Support to Defence Research Agency Implementation Team (DRAIT)	Price Waterhouse
October 1992	Consultancy Support to Director General Supply and Transport (Naval) (DGST(N)) for Spearfish Bid	Coopers and Lybrand
October 1992	Attitude Survey to Military Survey	PA Consulting
October 1992	Marine Services Pay, Conditions of Service and Grading	Coopers and Lybrand
October 1992	Consultancy Report for MOD(PE) Remodelling Study	Coopers and Lybrand
December 1992	Consultancy Assistance for Cost Allocation Model	Coopers and Lybrand
January 1993	Consultancy Support to Prepare Land Systems Technical Publications Authority and Army Scaling and cataloguing Authority for Market Testing	Coopers and Lybrand
January 1993	Review of RAF Command Staff and Air Warfare Training	Arthur Andersen
January 1993	Army Static Workshops Industrial Pay Grading	Touche Ross
February 1993	Relocation of Warrior Test Facility	Coopers and Lybrand
March 1993	Advice on Applicability of Activity Based Costing within DGST(N)	Coopers and Lybrand
May 1993	Support to CIRPLS Study Team	Coopers and Lybrand
June 1993	Future Management Arrangements of Service Married Quarters	Coopers and Lybrand
June 1993	Study into the Repair and Overhaul of Naval Gas Turbine Engines	PE International
June 1993	Marine Services Follow On Review of Pay and Grading	Coopers and Lybrand
August 1993	Merchant Bank Support to Director General Fleet Support	Kleinwort Benson Investment Trust Ltd.
August 1993	Defence Agencies Consultancy Support for the Framework Team	KPMG
August 1993	Consultancy Support—Business Study for FMRA Corporate Plan	Coopers and Lybrand
August 1993	Consultancy Support for DRA Owners' Secretariat	Price Waterhouse
August 1993	Defence Agencies—Consultancy Support for the Framework Team	Ernst and Young
September 1993	Business Process Review—Naval Logistics	Coopers and Lybrand

Date	*Contract title*	*Company*
October 1993	Army Personnel Centre Functional Analysis	Price Waterhouse
October 1993	Independent Evaluation of Four Purchasing courses at the Contracts Training Centre	PE International
October 1993	REME Tools and Workshops Equipment Procurement Process Study	PA Consulting
October 1993	Consultancy Support for Training in Contract Management	PE International
December 1993	Support for Market Testing of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE)	Coopers and Lybrand
December 1993	Defence Exports Services Organization Customer Satisfaction Survey	Touche Ross
December 1993	Consultancy Support to CBDE In-House Bid Team	PA Consulting

Airports and Aerodromes

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the airports or aerodromes other than RAF Northolt that his Department owns or controls in south-east England; and if he will list the length of each airport or aerodrome runway, together with details of the annual volume of flights in and out of each location.

Mr. Hanley: Airfields other than RAF Northolt which the Department owns or controls in south east England are: RAF Manston, RAF Odiham and Farnborough. The length of their runways together with details of the annual volume of flights in and out of each location are as follows:

(a) RAF Manston—One main runway, RW 28/10 (2,752 metres), and one secondary grass strip, RW 24/06 (792 metres). Landings and take-offs during 1993 were: military 19,708, civilian 36,797.

(b) RAF Odiham—One runway, RW 28/10 (1,830 metres). Landings and take-offs during 1993 were: military 20,054, civilian 137.

(c) Farnborough—One main runway, RW 07/25 (2,400 metres), and two secondary runways, RWs 11/29 (1,370 metres) and 18/36 (1,282 metres). Landings and take-offs during 1993 were: military 7,932, civilian 5,380.

RAF Northolt

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft have landed or taken off from RAF Northolt for each of the past five years.

Mr. Hanley: Landings and take-offs from RAF Northolt for each of the past five years were as follows:

Year	*Military*	*Civilian*	*Total*
1989	9,500	5,600	15,100
1990	9,300	5,400	14,700
1991	9,100	4,700	13,800
1992	9,608	4,893	14,501
1993	8,310	4,650	12,960

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the length of the runway at RAF Northolt airport;

(2) what scope there would be to extend the existing runway at RAF Northolt within the airport's existing curtilage.

Mr. Hanley: The length of runway at RAF Northolt is 1,684m, there is no scope for its extension within the existing curtilege.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which is the largest military aircraft to have landed, or taken off, at RAF Northolt since 1964.

Mr. Hanley: The largest military aircraft to have landed, or taken off at RAF Northolt since 1964 is a United States Air Force C141 Starlifter.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which is the largest civil aircraft to have landed, or taken off, at RAF Northolt since 1964.

Mr. Hanley: The largest civil aircraft to have landed or taken off at RAF Northolt since 1964 was a European Airbus A320 on a demonstration flight; the aircraft was both lightly fuelled and loaded.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which is the largest civil aircraft that could be landed at RAF Northolt in normal operating conditions.

Mr. Hanley: Under current regulations specified in the United Kingdom aeronautical information publication—AIP—RAF Northolt can accept an approved quiet turbo jet powered civilian aircraft with a maximum capacity of 20 seats, subject to specified load, runway and pavement classifications. The largest aircraft on the civil register to operate routinely from RAF Northolt is the BAe 146.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total annual cost of running the airport at RAF Northolt.

Mr. Hanley: Of the total running costs for RAF Northolt, £11,960,000 per annum is spent on operating the airfield: this includes the costs of personnel; air traffic control; fire, crash and rescue services, heating and lighting.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total area of the airport at RAF Northolt.

Mr. Hanley: The total area of the RAF Northolt base is 448·4 acres—181·5 hectares.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the distance between RAF Northolt and the nearest Heathrow airport terminal building.

Mr. Hanley: The distance between RAF Northolt and the nearest Heathrow terminal building is 8·7 miles—14 km—by road, or 6·2 miles—10 km—in a straight line.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the primary function of the airport at RAF Northolt.

Mr. Hanley: The primary function of RAF Northolt is to meet the air transport needs within Europe of members of the royal family, and senior members of Her Majesty's Government and the armed forces.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review there has been into the requirement of the airport at RAF Northolt for military purposes *(a)* before the publication of "Options for Change" and *(b)* since the publication of "Options for Change".

Mr. Hanley: The requirement for RAF Northolt has frequently been examined and confirmed in the normal course of business, both prior to and after "Options for Change". This process has involved a number of studies and is continuing with the current front line first initiative.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what non-governmental organisations had use of the royal yacht Britannia; for what purpose; on whose authority; and at what cost in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)*1992-93.

Mr. Hanley: Government Departments sponsor the use of the royal yacht by non-governmental organisations in order to promote British exports and attract inward investment to the United Kingdom. Such use is authorised by Buckingham palace and the Cabinet Secretary. All additional costs of these events are paid for by the organisations concerned. For the period in question the events were as follows:

1991-92	British Invisibles at London
1992-93	British Invisibles at Rome
	British Invisibles at Stockholm
	Scottish Financial Enterprise at Leith

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the result of the review of the future of the royal yacht Britannia.

Mr. Hanley: In view of the age of the royal yacht, its future is currently under review, with a range of options being considered. The future of the yacht will be made clear in due course.

Flag Officer Royal Yachts

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role and responsibilities of the flag officer royal yachts.

Mr. Hanley: Flag officer royal yachts—FORY—is both an independent fleet flag officer and the commanding officer of HM yacht Britannia. He is generally accountable, as a member of the royal household, to Sir Robert Fellowes, private secretary to Her Majesty the Queen. He is responsible for Britannia's safe and efficient operation at all times and for the detailed planning of her programme keeping First Sea Lord and Commander in Chief, Fleet informed. He acts as the host at official receptions on behalf of the Queen when Britannia visits countries when no member of the royal family is embarked, and also hosts receptions on behalf of the Queen during sea days or commercial seminars held on board in support of British industry. These events bring FORY into direct and frequent contact with Heads of State and Government, and captains of industry.

In addition, he also exercises tactical control over RN, Commonwealth and foreign warships and RFAs forming the Royal Squadron when the Queen or other members of the royal family are embarked.

EDUCATION

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to extend the scope of exemptions to CCT requirements for cleaning contracts to more schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Travellers

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list, for each relevant education authority, the amount of the bid for grant towards traveller education in 1994-95 and the actual grant awarded.

Mr. Robin Squire: Twenty-six local education authorities and one grant-maintained school in England were invited to bid for specific grant in 1994-95 for traveller education projects. Details of the bids and of the expenditure actually approved for support are as follows:

LEA	*Bid*	*Allocation*
Barnsley	57,488	31,195
Bolton	68,900	50,025
Brent	159,967	46,409
Bromley	120,404	53,188
Chalvedon GM	21,190	Nil
Cleveland	70,303	25,421
Cumbria	50,000	35,000
Ealing	9,528	8,775
Hammersmith	45,500	38,850
Hampshire	184,470	166,520
Havering	24,027	Nil
Kent	586,180	405,500
Leicestershire	104,543	34,355
Newcastle	33,544	24,024
Norfolk	166,907	138,295
Northamptonshire	266,670	211,996
North Yorkshire	157,000	116,200
Nottinghamshire	75,829	71,929
Oldham	52,540	28,740
Rochdale	109,208	70,817
Rotherham	47,210	30,221
Sefton	65,250	22,750
Somerset	25,000	22,000
Sunderland	28,594	24,094
Tameside	128,050	94,644
Trafford	4,700	Nil
Wiltshire	15,550	15,510

Support for a further £8·48 million of expenditure has been approved for the continuation of existing traveller education projects in 68 local education authorities and one grant-maintained school. Unsolicited bids from two of these authorities for new projects in 1994-95 were rejected. Grant is payable at the rate of 75 per cent. on all approved expenditure.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list for each relevant education authority the amount of grant towards traveller education in *(a)* 1990-91, *(b)* 1991-92 and *(c)* 1992-93.

Mr. Robin Squire: Local education authorities receive allowance in their revenue support grant to meet the basic educational needs of travellers in the same way and at the same rate as for other pupils. Grant is also payable under section 210 of the Education Reform Act 1988 in respect of extra provision made by LEAs to meet the additional educational needs of travellers. The total approved expenditure in England, on which grant was payable at the rate of 75 per cent. for each of these three financial years was as follows:

LEA	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Avon	260,200	272,600	284,900
Barnsley	Nil	15,000	26,900
Bedfordshire	207,100	216,900	226,700
Berkshire	212,400	222,500	232,500
Boiton	Nil	35,800	37,400
Bradford	165,800	173,700	181,500
Brent	26,700	66,000	69,000
Bromley	84,100	64,350	Nil
Buckinghamshire	245,500	257,200	268,800
Bury	9,100	9,500	9,900
Cambridgeshire	249,100	260,900	272,600
Cheshire	Nil	24,500	53,000
Cleveland	62,900	88,000	92,100
Cumbria	13,800	54,000	56,500
Derbyshire	145,200	152,100	158,900
Devon	139,500	146,100	152,700
Doncaster	58,100	60,900	63,600
Dorset	57,000	59,700	62,400
Durham	110,700	116,000	121,200
Ealing	12,000	17,000	17,800
East Sussex	54,400	27,700	46,500
Essex	509,500	533,700	557,700
Gateshead	35,800	37,500	39,200
Gloucestershire	59,800	73,000	Nil
Greenwich	75,400	79,000	82,600
Hammersmith/Fulham	9,600	41,900	43,800
Hampshire	Nil	156,900	164,000
Haringey	78,100	81,800	85,500
Harrow	40,700	42,600	44,500
Havering	8,800	17,100	17,900
Hertfordshire	600,200	628,700	657,000
Hillingdon	nil	30,500	44,300
Hounslow	96,100	100,700	105,200
Humberside	226,700	237,500	248,200
Kensington/Chelsea	8,000	8,400	8,800
Kent	173,000	376,000	393,000
Lambeth	16,500	17,300	18,100
Lancashire	293,600	307,500	321,300
Leeds	193,900	203,100	212,200
Leicestershire	85,000	131,000	136,900
Lewisham	49,000	51,300	53,600
Lincolnshire	162,800	170,500	178,200
Liverpool	30,100	25,300	26,400
Manchester	286,100	299,700	313,200
Newcastle	16,000	19,900	20,800
Newham	46,800	49,000	51,200
Norfolk	65,300	200,500	209,500
Northamptonshire	184,000	183,700	192,000
Northumberland	32,000	33,500	36,000
North Yorkshire	105,000	110,700	115,700
Nottinghamshire	28,800	96,100	100,500
Oxfordshire	282,000	295,400	308,700
Richmond	14,600	15,300	16,000
Rochdale	nil	50,900	53,200
Salford	nil	46,200	48,300
Sefton	39,900	41,800	43,700
Sheffield	156,400	163,800	171,200
Solihull	22,100	23,200	24,200
Somerset	58,600	81,400	85,100
Southwark	200,500	179,400	187,500
Suffolk	122,500	128,300	134,100
Surrey	322,900	338,200	253,400
Tower Hamlets	17,800	18,600	19,400
Trafford	19,200	22,400	23,400
Wakefield	86,400	73,700	77,000
West Sussex	114,800	120,300	125,700
Wigan	56,300	59,000	61,700
Wiltshire	76,000	93,500	97,700
Wolverhampton (West Midlands Consortium)	739,100	774,200	809,000

Nursery Education

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the number of full-time equivalent places in nursery education for each of the London boroughs; and what proportion of under-fives in each borough attend a nursery school or class.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 21 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *857-59*, which gave the latest information about the numbers of pupils below compulsory school age and under-fives participation rates in maintained nursery provision in each local education authority in England. Information about nursery places is not held centrally.

Sports Facilities

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to ensure that the Further Education Funding Council encourages schools and colleges to gain maximum use for the local community from their sports facilities.

Mrs. Boswell: The Further Education Funding Control, which is reponsible for the funding of colleges in the further education sector, including sixth form colleges, already encourages college governing bodies to utilise their facilities efficiently. There is nothing to deter colleges from making their sports facilities available to the community when they are not required for other college purposes. The Further Education Funding Council does not have funding responsibilities for schools.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make it his policy to encourage schools and colleges to share their sports facilities with the local community.

Mr. Forth: The Government do encourage schools and colleges to make their premises, including sports facilities, available for use by the community when they are not required for school or college purposes.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what applications were received from grant-maintained schools for capital grant for the financial year 1994-95; what was the level of grant approval in each case; what is the total value of (i) applications and (ii) approvals; and how much has been set aside for the second round of bids closing on 28 January.

Mr. Robin Squire: I have placed in the Library copies of papers detailing the applications received from grant-maintained schools for 1994-95 and the allocations approved.

Applications from grant-maintained schools incorporated up to September 1993 totalled £315 million for funding in 1994-95 and £133 million for subsequent years.

Allocations worth over £40 million have so far been made and projects worth over £30 million are being funded for extra development work in 1994-95.

A minimum of £8 million has been set aside for 1994-95 starts in the next round of bids open to schools incorporated between September 1993 and January 1994.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the planned level of capital expenditure on grant-maintained schools for 1994-95 published in the DFE's departmental report, Cm 2210 in February 1993; what is the level of capital expenditure on grant-maintained schools for 1994-95 published in DFE press notice 425-93 in December 1993; and what is the reason for the difference between the two figures.

Mr. Robin Squire: The two sets of figures are not strictly comparable. The figure of £165 million in Cm 2210 relates to the total planned expenditure in 1994-95. The figure of £150 million in press notice 425-93 relates to the allocation of funds in particular projects within the capital programme and also includes allocations brought forward into the current financial year and projects of high priority for 1995-96.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if the 82 grant-maintained schools where bids for more than £30 million of capital grant were unsuccessful for 1994-95, but which were identified in the DFE press notice 425-93 as high priorities for funding in 1995-96, and which have been awarded funds to start development work on the projects, are being given advance priority over other grant-maintained schools which will be submitting bids for capital grant in 1995-96.

Mr. Robin Squire: Funding for 1995-96 is not guaranteed at this stage. The allocations for 1994-95 are intended to enable the schools to develop proposals which have been identified as high priorities for a future year. These schools, and all other grant-maintained schools, will be able to bid for funding in 1995-96 in the usual way.

Higher Education Funding Council for England

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the annual cost of administering the Higher Education Funding Council for England for every year of its existence; and what is the cost to the HEFCE of the quality assessment process.

Mr. Boswell: The HEFCE was set up during the financial year 1992-93 while the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council and Universities Funding Council were still in existence. The cost of setting up and administering the HEFCE for that period was £500,000. Now in its first operational year, the cost of administering the HEFCE is £10·1 million. The cost of the HEFCE of quality assessment this year is £2 million.

Manchester University Drama Society

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when the hon. Member may expect to receive an answer to his letter of 16 December with regard to Colin Child, chairman of Manchester University drama society.

Mr. Boswell: An interim reply to the hon. Member's letter was sent on 23 December 1993. I expect to send a full response shortly.

Postgraduate Fees

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he will announce the maximum level of postgraduate fees payable through the awards system for 1994-95.

Mr. Boswell: The maximum level of postgraduate fees payable through the Department for Education postgraduate awards schemes will be £2,350 for 1994-95. This represents an increase of 4 per cent. on the rate of 1993-94 and preserves the level of postgraduate fees in real terms.

Funding Reductions

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for what reasons universities which have increased the admission of science and technology students and reduced arts and social science admissions are now advised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England that they will be subject to a larger than average reduction in funding; what effects this will have on universities which have achieved the targets for the admission of a higher proportion of science and technology students; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: No such advice has been given. The Higher Education Funding Council for England will publish its approach to funding and student numbers for 1994-95 shortly, including the position of institutions whch have increased science and technology intakes.

Office for Standards in Education

Mr. Hoon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education in which national newspapers the Department of Education places advertisements for appointments to the Ofsted inspectorate.

Mr. Robin Squire: Since its establishment in September 1992, Ofsted has been responsible for its own appointments procedures for inspectors and the Department for Education places no advertising on its behalf.

Cost-place Multipliers

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the cost-place multiplier is in respect of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools; and what was the outturn capital expenditure in each local education authority in England in each category in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: The cost multiplier used to calculate the basic need elements of LEA's annual capital guidelines for 1994-95 are: *(a)* for five to 11 age-range places, £3,747; *(b)* for 11 to 16 places, £5,116; and for 16 plus places, £6,128.

The outturn capital expenditure by LEAs, as notified to the Department of the Environment, for the financial year 1991-92 is shown in the following table:

LEA Capital Expenditure 1991-92

£ thousands

	Nursery and primary	*Secondary*	*Special*	*Total schools*	*Polys*	*FE*	*Youth*	*Other*	*Total*
Barking and Dagenham	1,395	4,784	0	6,179	0	977	0	93	7,249
Barnet	825	1,303	51	2,179	0	116	5	0	2,300
Bexley	998	993	81	2,072	0	261	27	5	2,365
Brent	1,788	1,077	462	3,327	0	108	89	203	3,727
Bromley	1,397	5,434	81	6,912	0	219	7	77	7,215
Croydon	3,153	4,672	128	7,953	0	379	24	83	8,439
Ealing	1,006	379	24	1,409	17	474	0	26	1,926
Enfield	446	10,612	1,832	12,890	0	3,201	44	11	16,146
Haringey	876	886	67	1,829	0	111	0	107	2,047
Harrow	2,822	481	1	3,304	0	215	19	0	3,538
Havering	468	4,123	58	4,649	0	97	1	101	4,848
Hillingdon	225	1,060	0	1,285	0	50	30	352	1,717
Hounslow	2,871	1,492	466	4,829	0	217	44	214	5,304
Kingston upon Thames	888	2,861	96	3,845	0	237	80	51	4,213
Merton	1,430	1,848	281	3,559	0	89	67	240	3,955
Newham	6,310	3,822	4	10,316	0	17	220	289	10,662
Redbridge	906	1,486	30	2,422	0	94	129	619	3,264
Richmond upon Thames	[illegible]	2,208	37	2,724	0	156	62	4	2,946
Sutton	[illegible]	2,508	1,563	7,329	0	29	1	23	7,292
Waltham Forest	2,473	759	79	3,311	0	1	10	119	3,441
Corporation of London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Camden	560	1,935	72	2,567	0	115	0	137	2,819
Westminster	244	351	210	805	0	55	0	988	1,848
Greenwich	970	248	192	1,410	0	75	0	16	1,501
Hackney	637	0	2	639	0	552	2	10	1,203
Hammersmith and Fulham	579	111	685	1,375	0	119	0	577	2,071
Islington	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,947	1,947
Kensington and Chelsea	758	1,085	177	2,020	0	325	3	450	2,798
Lambeth	623	385	377	1,385	0	158	0	44	1,587
Lewisham	1,042	329	160	1,531	0	3	0	0	1,534
Southwark	1,048	39	89	1,176	0	548	23	412	2,159
Wandsworth	2,317	832	426	3,575	0	255	74	402	4,306
Tower Hamlets	7,012	6,157	176	13,345	0	3,736	0	22	17,103
Birmingham	9,292	3,546	468	13,306	0	889	0	312	14,507
Coventry	2,591	2,440	191	5,222	0	1,461	0	194	6,877
Dudley	1,037	2,958	17	4,012	0	2,518	13	124	6,667
Sandwell	2,049	522	48	2,619	0	78	3	40	2,740
Solihull	801	1,519	26	2,346	0	949	2	92	3,389
Walsall	1,289	805	13	2,107	0	107	28	205	2,447
Wolverhampton	1,031	1,047	65	2,143	0	155	91	242	2,631
Knowsley	295	129	560	984	0	252	0	61	1,297
Liverpool	1,269	909	39	2,217	0	156	0	104	2,477
St. Helens	368	4,054	3	4,425	0	2,534	0	125	7,084
Sefton	1,697	1,411	5	3,113	0	515	0	8	3,636
Wirral	1,763	2,714	96	4,573	0	2	17	38	4,630
Bolton	699	166	17	882	0	631	0	17	1,530
Bury	389	371	261	1,021	0	20	44	0	1,085
Manchester	4,302	1,280	274	5,856	0	684	49	318	6,907
Oldham	1,261	9,638	0	10,899	0	47	0	43	10,989
Rochdale	1,492	4,234	21	5,747	0	1,525	72	18	7,362
Salford	670	1,577	9	2,256	0	100	0	1,295	3,651
Stockport	1,533	799	19	2,351	0	201	0	0	2552
Tameside	687	545	169	1,401	0	276	0	272	1,949
Trafford	1,718	3,233	26	4,977	0	327	19	10	5,333
Wigan	169	4,848	16	5,033	0	219	0	70	5,322
Barnsley	984	623	8	1,615	0	295	0	0	1,910
Doncaster	236	133	0	369	0	1	40	0	410
Rotherham	435	729	69	1,233	0	76	22	0	1,331
Sheffield	3,141	2,190	104	5,435	249	366	102	150	6,302
Bradford	2,448	5,917	122	8,487	0	2,510	3	1,505	12,505
Calderdale	696	1,052	0	1,748	0	314	0	91	2,153
Kirklees	1,974	1,550	7	3,531	0	853	7	72	4,463
Leeds	14,664	3,685	161	18,510	0	1,854	49	16	20,429
Wakefield	2,460	796	9	3,265	0	27	7	0	3,299
Gateshead	2,581	1,161	362	4,104	0	942	5	27	5,078
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,918	932	288	3,138	0	132	116	1	3,387
North Tyneside	333	1,315	139	1,787	0	166	0	10	1,963
South Tyneside	1,153	2,633	5	3,791	0	608	176	9	4,584
Sunderland	1,928	718	35	2,681	0	1,387	0	155	4,223
Isles of Scilly	42	8	0	50	0	0	0	0	50
Avon	7,511	2,545	364	10,420	0	4,474	43	386	15,323
Bedfordshire	1,098	551	132	1,781	0	74	15	2	1,872
Berkshire	4,575	1,917	367	6,859	0	230	207	61	7,357
Buckinghamshire	3,868	5,441	90	9,399	0	2,860	476	577	13,312

	Nursery and primary	*Secondary*	*Special*	*Total schools*	*Polys*	*FE*	*Youth*	*Other*	*Total*
Cambridgeshire	8,758	11,929	466	21,153	0	1,356	204	0	22,713
Cheshire	4,827	5,976	1,403	12,206	0	3,354	89	816	16,465
Cleveland	1,385	939	1,447	3,771	0	941	18	224	4,954
Cornwall	5,576	3,339	435	9,350	0	1,787	116	182	11,435
Cumbria	4,568	4,749	33	9,350	0	391	44	315	10,100
Derbyshire	2,454	10,091	225	12,770	0	1,530	101	58	14,459
Devon	19,370	9,779	763	29,912	0	1,704	88	895	32,599
Dorset	7,791	4,199	303	12,293	0	548	238	116	13,195
Durham	3,307	2,690	145	6,142	0	688	59	270	7,159
East Sussex	7,538	8,091	475	16,104	0	623	1	547	17,275
Essex	5,597	9,132	277	15,006	0	6,388	395	2,203	23,992
Gloucestershire	3,333	5,364	286	8,983	0	944	590	52	10,569
Hampshire	10,423	10,200	1,482	22,105	0	2,729	112	67	25,013
Hereford and Worcester	4,217	4,782	255	9,254	0	825	244	333	10,656
Hertfordshire	2,509	4,519	1,674	8,702	0	3,815	163	1,411	14,091
Humberside	4,447	1,638	304	6,389	0	1,981	182	26	8,578
Isle of Wight	2,224	767	136	3,127	0	27	24	121	3,299
Kent	9,509	10,671	273	20,453	0	3,874	104	533	24,964
Lancashire	9,776	6,489	454	16,719	0	2,438	606	492	20,255
Leicestershire	8,056	2,283	160	10,499	0	1,551	24	469	12,543
Lincolnshire	7,182	9,141	679	17,002	0	756	85	620	18,463
Norfolk	2,883	1,542	405	4,830	0	1,252	70	0	6,152
North Yorkshire	2,844	1,676	29	4,549	0	731	2	178	5,460
Northamptonshire	2,484	7,076	37	9,597	0	1,226	21	0	10,844
Northumberland	2,053	1,000	843	3,896	0	43	0	27	3,966
Nottinghamshire	2,534	2,596	349	5,479	0	526	168	145	6,318
Oxfordshire	2,106	688	180	2,974	0	219	13	318	3,524
Shropshire	3,000	3,973	155	7,128	0	239	17	0	7,384
Somerset	1,763	2,559	26	4,348	0	578	0	844	5,770
Staffordshire	3,433	4,050	43	7,526	0	1,398	53	1,183	10,160
Suffolk	2,736	5,346	436	8,518	0	2,258	146	187	11,109
Surrey	4,045	8,594	985	13,624	0	2,303	344	1,095	17,366
Warwickshire	1,496	987	156	2,639	0	895	68	0	3,602
West Sussex	6,374	6,607	555	13,536	0	596	249	372	14,753
Wiltshire	4,664	1,577	2,460	8,701	0	685	214	409	10,009

Notes:

1. 1991-92 is the latest year for which final outturn figures are available.
2. Figures come from the Department of the Environment's capital outturn return forms.
3. Nursery and primary figures cannot be disaggregated.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received in relation to the cost-place multipliers used in relation to the basic need formula in determining annual capital guidelines for local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Since 1991 we have received representations from a number of LEAs, the Association of Metrolitan Authorities and the Association of County Councils about the level of the cost multipliers and our procedures for applying them to LEAs' bids in the basic need category.

The cost multipliers are derived from an analysis of nearly 500 school building projects between 1987 and 1991 and include a mix of both new schools and extension projects to existing schools. The cost elements of the multipliers was based on a value known as the "target basic building cost", which represents a level of performance being achieved by about a third of authorities.

For 1994-95 the cost multipliers have, in cash terms, remained broadly at the same level as 1993-94, when they rose in value by 9 per cent. on average over those used in 1992-93. This is at a time when building tender prices have shown a dramatic decline, by over 20 per cent. since 1990. This means that school building costs should have been falling and very competitive tenders should continue to be received.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Boswell: There are no special advisers seconded to the Department from other organisations.

Capital Guidelines

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment his Department has made in respect of each local education authority in determining annual capital guidelines for 1994-95 of anticipated capital receipts.

Mr. Forth: LEAs bid for annual capital guidelines in a number of categories, including projects to remove surplus places. The success of bids in that category depends on whether the projects meet our published cost-effectiveness tests. The latter take into account LEAs' own estimates of any capital receipts which may arise. But in no categories are LEAs' ACGs reduced or adjusted in the light of anticipated capital receipts.

Seat Belts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make additional resources available to schools to allow them to offset the cost of fitting seat belts to their school transport.

Mr. Forth: This is a matter on which each local authority needs to assess its priorities for use of the resources available. The Government's proposals for the 1994-95 grant settlements allow local education authorities in England an increase of 2·4 per cent. for education over the previous year; that should allow them some latitude in view of the continuing fall in inflation.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he will reply to the letter dated 22 November from the hon. Member for Pendle on the subject of seat belts in school transport.

Mr. Forth: An interim reply was sent to the hon. Member on 13 December, and I sent the hon. Member a final reply on 21 January.

Taught Week

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education in how many *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* primary schools the taught week falls below the minimum acceptable level; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: The minimum hours of taught lesson time per week recommended by the Department are 21 hours for five to seven-year-olds—key stage 1—23·5 hours for eight to 11-year-olds—key stage 2—and 24 hours for 12 to 16-year-olds—key stages 3 and 4. The numbers of maintained primary, middle and secondary schools in January 1993 reporting fewer hours per week than the recommended minima at each key stage were: 1,000 at key stage 1; 7,900 at key stage 2; 1,100 at key stage 3 and 800 at key stage 4. There may be some "double counting" in these results because schools generally provide for two and possibly three key stages.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received on the subject of the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: Between April 1993 and January 1994 the Department of Social Security headquarters and the Child Support Agency headquarters received in the region of 10,750 written representations covering a range of views about child support policy and Child Support Agency operations.

The number of written representations made to Child Support Agency centres and field offices could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the turnover of staff has been for each of the Child Support Agency centres in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mrs. Llin Golding, dated 24 January 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking for details about the turnover of staff for each Child Support Agency Centre (CSAC) in England and Wales.

There are four CSACs in England, and none in Wales. Staff turnover is shown in the following table. The figures show the staff in post at each CSAC on 18 January 1994, and the number of staff who have left since the Agency began on 5 April 1993. They include casual staff and staff employed on fixed term contracts.

CSAC	*Staff in post*	*Departures*
Birkenhead	592	7
Dudley	614	61
Hastings	690	62
Plymouth	576	29

I hope you find this information useful.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time staff the Child Support Agency employs in (i) England and (ii) Wales.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mrs. Llin Golding, dated 24 January 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking for details about the staffing of the Child Support Agency in England and Wales.

At 1 January 1994, the Agency employed 3,413 full-time and 688 part-time staff in England, and 99 full-time and 25 part-time staff in Wales.

I hope you find this information useful.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost of providing office accommodation for the Child Support Agency in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) by the chief executive of the Child Support Agency on 17 December 1993 at columns *1060-61*.

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 14 January, *Official Report,* column *297,* how many lone parents who were receiving no regular maintenance in April 1993 are now receiving maintenance as a result of action by the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) by the chief executive of the Child Support Agency on Monday 24 January, *Official Report,* column *15*.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of *(a)* council tenants, *(b)* housing association tenants, *(c)* private tenants and *(d)* owner occupiers were in receipt of housing benefit for each of the London boroughs at the latest available date.

Mr. Burt: The percentages of local authority tenants, housing association tenants and other private tenants in receipt of housing benefit in London, in November 1992, the latest date for which figures are available, were approximately 60 per cent., 50 per cent. and 50 per cent. respectively. Information for individual local authorities and owner-occupiers is not available.

Sources: Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit Management Information Statistics quarterly case load information for November 1992 and Department of the Environment tenancy statistics December 1992.

Notes:

(i) Owner-occupiers, in England and Wales have not been eligible for Housing Benefit—(rate rebates)—since April 1990 when community charge benefit was introduced.

(ii) The quarterly case load figures include estimates for non-responding boroughs.

VAT (Domestic Fuel)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to compensate fully people with learning disabilities and their carers for the increase in their domestic heating bills resulting from VAT on fuel.

Mr. Burt: Our policy is to help poorer households, pensioners and disabled people on income-related benefits meet the extra cost of VAT on domestic fuel. A substantial package of measures was announced in the budget including increases above the normal uprating in invalidity benefit, severe disablement allowance and the disability premium in the income-related benefits.

Disabled people, including people with learning disabilities, who are receiving these benefits will receive the above-inflation increases.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average payment per recipient per week of housing benefit for each year since 1985, and his projected figure for 1994-95 for private sector, housing association and local authority tenancies.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the table.

Average amounts (£/week) of housing benefit[1] in Great Britain

Year	Certificated/with income support			[2]Standard/ no income support			All housing benefit		
	Local authority tenants	Private tenants	[3]Housing association tenants	Local authority tenants	Private tenants	Housing association tenants	Local authority tenants	Private tenants	Housing association tenants
1985	14·60	17·20	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1986	15·60	19·50	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1987	16·50	20·90	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1988	18·16	21·88	—	12·33	14·47	—	15·85	18·78	—
1989	19·75	25·14	—	14·00	15·42	—	17·36	21·06	—
1990	22·60	30·88	—	15·95	18·72	—	19·80	25·45	—
1991	26·16	37·20	—	18·37	24·98	—	22·76	32·57	—
1992	29·88	46·18	35·35	21·73	30·92	25·81	26·45	40·69	32·24

Sources:

1985 to 1987 supplementary benefit quarterly statistical inquiry dated November/December.

1988 to 1992 housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample dated May.

[1] For all years housing benefit has been defined as rent rebate and rent allowance.

[2] Information for standard/cases with no income support is not available prior to 1988.

[3] Separate figures for housing association tenancies is not available prior to 1992; until then the information is included with that of private tenancies.

Notes:

1. The average amounts are per benefit unit not per individual. A benefit unit may be a single person or a couple.
2. Projected figures for 1994-95 are not available.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of people who have ceased to receive benefit following changes to the benefit law in each year since 1979.

Mr. Burt: Information on why individuals cease to claim benefit is not available. A comparison of estimates of the total number of current social security benefit awards at any one time shows an overall increase of around 18 million between 1979 and 1992-93.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Unemployment Benefit

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the value of unemployment benefit for a couple with two children under 11 years in relation to prices and earnings since 1976.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Rate of Unemployment Benefit for a Married Couple with two Children under 11 years

	Total UB	Average Real Value of Benefit at April 1993 Prices over the Period	Equivalent Value of Benefit at April 1993 Prices at Date of Uprating	As a percentage of all adults average earnings
November 1976	27·50	89·09	92·00	40·6
April 1977	26·50	79·99	81·52	38·0
November 1977	30·30	88·67	89·68	41·1
April 1978	28·20	78·98	80·38	35·9
November 1978	29·20	78·36	79·98	34·7
April 1979	27·20	66·90	70·43	30·5
November 1979	33·35	71·80	77·82	33·2
November 1980	35·90	68·78	72·65	29·9
November 1981	38·00	66·41	68·68	28·7
November 1982	41·05	68·50	69·82	28·8
November 1983	44·05	70·00	71·46	28·1
November 1984	46·00	68·99	71·11	27·5
November 1985	49·25	71·49	72·19	27·6
July 1986	49·80	70·65	71·80	26·3
April 1987	50·85	69·60	70·23	25·6
April 1988	52·95	68·38	70·37	24·2
April 1989	56·10	67·19	69·01	23·4

	Total UB	*Average Real Value of Benefit at April 1993 Prices over the Period*	*Equivalent Value of Benefit at April 1993 Prices at Date of Uprating*	*As a percentage of all adults average earnings*
April 1990	60·40	65·96	67·88	23·0
April 1991	66·95	69·80	70·72	23·5
April 1992	69·70	70·45	70·60	22·9
April 1993	72·20	—	72·20	22·8

Notes:

1. Child dependency addition was abolished from November 1984
2. Earnings are derived from the Employment Department's new earnings survey estimates of all adult earnings.
3. The number of weeks between uprating dates is not always the same as the number of weeks between reference dates for the general index of retail prices (RPI). No adjustment is made for this.
4. The average real value of benefit at April 1993 prices is calculated over the period between uprating dates (e.g. July 1986-March 1987).

Source: Abstract of statistics for social security benefits and contributions and the indices of retail prices and average earnings.

Benefits

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated saving to his Department of delaying payment of the child dependant's allowance payable with incapacity benefit until the 52nd week of incapacity.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated that there will be a net saving of £5 million a year as a result of the effect on entitlement to child dependency increases of the 52nd week qualifying period for long-term incapacity benefit.

Note:

Estimate expressed in constant 1993-94 prices, rounded to nearest £5 million and is net of offsetting changes and expenditure on income-related benefits.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of invalidity benefit are *(a)* in receipt of the higher rate of the care component of disability living allowance and *(b)* are currently over the age of 57 years.

Mr. Scott: On 4 April 1992, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 726,000 people aged 57 or over receiving invalidity benefit[1]. Reliable estimates of the number of invalidity benefit claimants also receiving the higher rate of care component of disability living allowance are not available.

Note:

[1] Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants in Great Britain, rounded to the nearest thousand.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes he intends to make the 80 per cent. disablement test for severe disablement allowance.

Mr. Scott: None.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people *(a)* claimed and *(b)* were awarded non-contributory sickness benefit (i) between April 1992 and April 1993, (ii) since April 1993 and (iii) in total since April 1983.

Mr. Scott: Information is not routinely kept in the form requested. Information that is readily available is in the table. An estimate of the total since April 1983 will require researching of archived data. I shall write again to the hon. Member as soon as the figure is available. Information from April 1992 is currently unavailable.

Spells of sickness benefit which commenced in the statistical period as the result of an industrial accident or prescribed disease where the contribution conditions were deemed satisfied

Statistical Period	*Number of sickness benefit spells commencing where the contribution position was deemed satisfied*
2 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	6,000
1 April 1991 to 4 April 1992	3,000

Notes:

1. Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants in Great Britain, rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. A spell of incapacity is a single period of sickness for which an individual may have more than one in the statistical period.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what extent the rules permitting therapeutic work will continue after April 1995 for *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* severe disablement allowance; what will be the rules concerning limitations on (i) the amount of earnings which can be kept before benefit entitlement is affected and (ii) the hours per week which may be worked; and what other restrictions will be introduced.

Mr. Scott: Proposals contained in the Incapacity for Work Bill provide for the therapeutic work rule to continue both for the new incapacity benefit and for severe disablement allowance when work undertaken would be of benefit to a person's condition. We intend that current arrangements for limitation of earnings will continue—present level £42·00 per week—and that there should be a weekly limit of 16 hours.

The Incapacity for Work Bill also introduces provision to allow all incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance recipients to undertake voluntary work for up to 16 hours a week with no effect to their benefit.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to alter the two-year linking rule allowing claimants on disability working allowances to requalify for incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance.

Mr. Scott: We have no such plans.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people receive invalidity benefit following an award of non-contributory sickness benefit *(a)* between April 1992 and April 1993, *(b)* since April 1993 and *(c)* in total since April 1983.

Mr. Scott: Information is not routinely kept in the form requested. Information that is readily available is in the table. An estimate of the total since April 1983 will require researching of archived data. I shall write again to the hon. Member as soon as the figure is available. Information from April 1992 is currently unavailable.

Spells of invalidity benefit, following an award of sickness benefit, which commenced in the statistical period as the result of an industrial accident or prescribed disease where the contribution conditions were deemed satisfied

Statistical period	*Number of invalidity benefit spells commencing where the contribution position was deemed satisfied*
2 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	4,000
1 April 1991 to 4 April 1992	1,000

Notes:

1. Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants in Great Britain, rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. A spell of incapacity is a single period of sickness for which an individual may have more than one in the statistical period.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated saving of his Department of delaying payment of the full rate of adult dependant's allowance payable with incapacity benefit until the 52nd week of incapacity.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated that there will be a net saving of £5 million a year as a result of the effect on the payable rate of adult dependency increases of the 52-week qualifying period for long-term incapacity benefit.

Note:

Estimate expressed in constant 1993-94 prices, rounded to the nearest £5 million and is net of offsetting changes and expenditure on income-related benefits. Estimate takes account of other planned changes in the qualifying conditions for adult dependency increases of incapacity benefit.

Child Support

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the value of child support for each child in a standard rate tax-paying family expressed in 1993-94 prices for each year since 1964.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table. While child benefit helps all families with children, there is a comprehensive range of other social security benefits which can provide additional help for some families according to their circumstances.

Value of Child Support[1] for each child in standard rate tax paying families at April 1993[2] prices

Date[3]	*Children under age 11*			*Children aged 11-15*			*Children aged 16 and over*		
	1st child £	*2nd child* £	*3rd*[4] *child* £	*1st child* £	*2nd child* £	*3rd*[4] *child* £	*1st child* £	*2nd child* £	*3rd*[4] *child* £
April 1964	8·62	11·33	12·13	10·43	13·13	13·93	12·33	15·14	15·85
April 1965	8·64	11·30	11·87	10·54	13·11	13·77	12·44	15·01	15·68
April 1966	8·35	10·91	11·46	10·18	12·66	13·30	12·01	14·49	15·14
April 1967	8·04	10·60	10·92	9·89	12·29	12·91	11·66	14·07	14·69
April 1968	7·75	9·72	10·31	9·46	11·42	11·94	11·17	13·05	13·64
April 1969	7·35	9·61	10·17	8·97	11·23	11·79	10·58	12·85	13·33
April 1970	6·96	9·11	9·63	8·49	10·63	11·17	10·02	12·16	12·62
April 1971	8·11	10·28	10·76	9·37	11·60	12·10	10·69	12·87	13·35
April 1972	7·63	9·67	10·13	8·81	10·91	11·38	10·06	12·10	12·56
April 1973	6·92	8·67	9·10	8·19	9·88	10·30	9·21	10·90	11·31
April 1974	7·94	9·41	9·77	9·15	10·51	10·92	10·14	11·50	11·92
April 1975	6·96	9·62	9·62	7·94	10·62	10·62	8·81	11·51	11·51
April 1976	7·30	9·57	9·57	8·13	10·41	10·41	8·88	11·13	11·13
April 1977	7·01	8·03	8·03	7·72	8·74	8·74	8·33	9·32	9·32
April 1978	8·36	8·36	8·36	9·01	9·01	9·01	9·55	9·55	9·55
April 1979	10·36	10·36	10·36	10·36	10·36	10·36	10·36	10·36	10·36
November 1980	9·61	9·61	9·61	9·61	9·61	9·61	9·61	9·61	9·61
November 1981	9·49	9·49	9·49	9·49	9·49	9·49	9·49	9·49	9·49
November 1982	9·95	9·95	9·95	9·95	9·95	9·95	9·95	9·95	9·95
November 1983	10·54	10·54	10·54	10·54	10·54	10·54	10·54	10·54	10·54
November 1984	10·58	10·58	10·58	10·58	10·58	10·58	10·58	10·58	10·58
November 1985	10·26	10·26	10·26	10·26	10·26	10·26	10·26	10·26	10·26
July 1986	10·24	10·24	10·24	10·24	10·24	10·24	10·24	10·24	10·24
April 1987	10·01	10·01	10·01	10·01	10·01	10·01	10·01	10·01	10·01
April 1988	9·63	9·63	9·63	9·63	9·63	9·63	9·63	9·63	9·63
April 1989	8·92	8·92	8·92	8·92	8·92	8·92	8·92	8·92	8·92
April 1990	8·14	8·14	8·14	8·14	8·14	8·14	8·14	8·14	8·14
April 1991	8·71	7·66	7·66	8·71	7·66	7·66	8·71	7·66	7·66
October 1991	9·63	7·81	7·81	9·63	7·81	7·81	9·63	7·81	7·81
April 1992	9·78	7·90	7·90	9·78	7·90	7·90	9·78	7·90	7·90
April 1993	10·00	8·10	8·10	10·00	8·10	8·10	10·00	8·10	8·10

Notes:

[1] The combined value of child tax allowance after clawback and family allowance/child benefit.

[2] Based on the movement in the general index of retail prices at April 1993.

[3] Child tax allowance ceased after the 1978-79 tax year and uprating dates are shown from 1979 onwards.

[4] And subsequent children.

TRANSPORT

Ministerial Cars

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will quantify the cost of the factors which led to an increase in the cost of cars for Ministers in his Department since 1990-91.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government car service charges for 1990-91 did not cover the full cost of the provision of cars for ministers. Rates have since been increased by 12 per cent. from 1 July 1990 and again by 10 per cent. from 1 January 1991. Other factors are:

(i) Value added tax on GCS invoices increased from 15 per cent. to 17·5 per cent. from 1 April 1991.

(ii) The GCS introduced new charging arrangements from 1 April 1992 leading to greater use of the more expensive "Outside Core Hour" provision.

Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider an addition to the transport supplementary grant to assist with the exceptional problems on the Isle of Wight and to improve and install additional highway damage drainage works.

Mr. Key: It is not possible to change the allocations that were given to local highway authorities, including the Isle of Wight, when the local transport capital settlement for 1994-95 was announced on 15 December. The island's council will have the opportunity to bid for resources to deal with current conditions on its roads when it makes its transport policies and programme submission for 1995-96 later this year. In the meantime, it has discretion to use its minor works allocation for 1994-95 on transport infrastructure of its choice. Resources allocated for structural maintenance on principal roads can also be used on any such road.

Rail Travel, London

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of a child's fare for a return journey by rail from Lewisham to London for each year from 1975.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the information requested is as follows:

	Child return current prices £	*Child return 1975 prices* £
January 1975	0·12	0·12
May 1975	0·13	0·12
September 1975	0·13	0·11
March 1976	0·15	0·12
January 1977	0·18	0·13
January 1978	0·22	0·14
January 1979	0·23	0·13
January 1980	0·28	0·14
November 1980	0·35	0·15
November 1981	0·38	0·15
January 1983	0·40	0·15
January 1984	0·45	0·16
January 1985	0·45	0·15
January 1986	0·50	0·16
January 1987	0·55	0·17
January 1988	0·60	0·18
January 1989	0·65	0·18
February 1990	0·70	0·18
January 1991	0·75	0·18
January 1992	0·80	0·18
January 1993	0·80	0·18
January 1994	0·85	0·18

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of passengers travelling by rail from Lewisham to London and back in each year since 1975 were commuters travelling to or from work.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not collected by British Rail.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of a return journey by rail from Lewisham to London at *(a)* the off-peak rate and *(b)* the standard rate for each year from 1975.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the information requested is as follows:

	Adult standard return		*Adult cheap day return*	
	Current prices £	*1975 prices* £	*Current prices* £	*1975 prices* £
January 1975	0·32	0·32	0·24	0·24
May 1975	0·36	0·32	0·25	0·22
September 1975	0·40	0·34	0·26	0·22
March 1976	0·46	0·37	0·30	0·24
January 1977	0·56	0·39	0·35	0·24
January 1978	0·66	0·42	0·41	0·26
January 1979	0·72	0·42	0·45	0·26
January 1980	0·86	0·42	0·55	0·27
November 1980	1·12	0·49	0·70	0·31
November 1981	1·20	0·47	0·76	0·30
January 1983	1·40	0·52	0·80	0·29
January 1984	1·40	0·49	0·90	0·31
January 1985	1·60	0·53	0·90	0·30
January 1986	1·80	0·57	1·00	0·32
January 1987	2·00	0·61	1·10	0·33
January 1988	2·20	0·65	1·20	0·35
January 1989	2·40	0·66	1·30	0·36
February 1990	2·60	0·66	1·40	0·35
January 1991	2·80	0·65	1·50	0·35
January 1992	3·00	0·67	1·60	0·36
January 1993	3·20	0·71	1·60	0·35
January 1994	3·40	0·73	1·70	0·36

Network SouthEast

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money was spent on *(a)* engineering improvements and *(b)* improving rolling stock on Network SouthEast rail lines for each year from 1975.

Mr. Freeman: As Network SouthEast did not exist as an organisation until 1986-87, there are no figures available before that year. I understand that figures for subsequent years are as follows:

Year	*Rolling stock (£s million-current prices)*	*Other investment (£s million-current prices)*
1986-87	26	208
1987-88	140	233
1988-89	160	285
1989-90	139	310
1990-91	88	320
1991-92	142	271
1992-93	323	222

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people used Network SouthEast rail services for each year from 1975.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the table shows the average daily number of passengers entering central London on BR services during the morning peak. Of these total figures BR estimates 6 per cent. of passengers would have arrived on InterCity services and 94 per cent. on Network SouthEast. I understand that some 70 per cent. of all BR passengers to London begin their journeys during the morning peak.

Total numbers entering Central London by BR each day (07.00 to 09.59)

Year	*Number of passengers*
1975	402,913
1976	400,984
1977	400,325
1978	409,524
1979	420,903
1980	411,869
1981	393,912
1982	390,306
1983	383,908
1984	386,037
1985	400,972
1986	420,864
1987	449,072
1988	468,316
1989	472,583
1990	457,699
1991	425,718
1992	401,146

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* platform staff, *(b)* ticket sellers, *(c)* ticket inspectors, *(d)* cleaning staff and *(e)* train drivers were employed by the Network SouthEast rail division for each year from 1975.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not available in the Department.

Train Crashes

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were killed in train crashes *(a)* in Britain and *(b)* on Network SouthEast lines for each year from 1975.

Mr. Freeman: The numbers of deaths resulting from all train accidents in Britain for each year from 1975 are as follows:

Year	*Fatalies*
1975	57
1976	18
1977	12
1978	22
1979	20
1980	7
1981	7
1982	11
1983	10
1984	30
1985	6
1986	27
1987	10
1988	40
1989	18
1990	4
1991[1]	3
1991-92	11
1992-93	5

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[1] From 1991 onwards the figures shown are for the period 1 April to 31 March covering the financial year. The statistics shown for the first quarter 1991 allow for this adjustment.

These figures for fatalities include accidents to railway staff and contractors, passengers and other persons.

The figures have been obtained from the Health and Safety Executive's HM railway inspectorate's annual report on the railway safety of Great Britain, copies of which have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Figures for Network SouthEast lines are not available.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total number of train crashes *(a)* in Britain or *(b)* on Network SouthEast lines for each year from 1975.

Mr. Freeman: The numbers of train accidents, which include all accidents to trains and rolling stock, for each year from 1975 are as follows:

Year	*Total train accidents*
1975	1,310
1976	1,122
1977	1,056
1978	1,044
1979	1,035
1980	930
1981	1,014
1982	998
1983	1,255
1984	1,359
1985	1,240
1986	1,171
1987	1,165
1988	1,330
1989	1,434
1990	1,283
1991[1]	242
1991-92	960
1992-93	1,152

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[1] From 1991 onwards the figures shown are from 1 April to 31 March covering the financial year. The statistics shown for the first quarter 1991 allow for this adjustment.

The figures have been obtained from the Health and Safety Executive's HM railway inspectorate's annual report on the railway safety of Great Britain, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Separate figures for Network SouthEast lines are not available.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were injured in train crashes *(a)* in Britain and *(b)* on Network SouthEast lines for each year from 1975.

Mr. Freeman: The total numbers of injuries resulting from train accidents for each year from 1975 are as follows:

Year	*Major*	*Minor*
1975	62	384
1976	14	276
1977	20	288
1978	14	219
1979	26	396
1980	38	409
1981	21	174
1982	18	246
1983	21	197
1984	42	433
1985	53	327
1986	77	433
1987	25	371
1988	84	621
1989	58	346
1990	22	221
1991[1]	38	531
1991-92	30	361
1992-93	13	140

[1] From 1991 onwards, the figures shown are for the period 1 April to 31 March covering the financial year. The statistics shown for the first quarter 1991 allow for this adjustment. These figures are high due to the Cannon Street accident which occurred on 8 January 1991.

These figures for major and minor injuries include accidents to railway staff and contractors, passengers and other persons.

The figures have been obtained from the Health and Safety Executive's Her Majesty's railway inspectorate's annual report on the railway safety of Great Britain, copies of which have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Figures for Network SouthEast are not available.

Airports (Capacity)

Mr. Kenneth Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many listed buildings would be demolished or rendered uninhabitable if an additional runway were built as indicated in the report of the runway capacity in the south-east working group at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick and *(c)* Stansted.

Mr. Norris: RUCATSE stated that were runways to be developed as indicated in the report, the numbers of listed buildings demolished would be: 43 at Heathrow, 13 at Gatwick and 25 at Stansted. The RUCATSE report estimated that a further 55 listed buildings would be rendered uninhabitable in the case of development at Gatwick. No comparable figure is provided in the report for development at Heathrow or at Stansted.

Traffic (Schools)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria highway authorities are instructed to take into consideration when determining traffic speed limits in the vicinity of schools.

Mr. Key: Revised guidance was issued to local authorities in January 1993, setting out the general principles recommended in setting local speed limits. This places more emphasis on the environment, including for example the presence of a school, through which the road passes and less on the need for an accident record on the road in question. Trials are also being conducted on some trunk and local authority roads of variable speed limits outside schools, whereby the limit can be temporarily reduced at arrival and departure times; if these trials show that the variable limits are successful in reducing vehicle speeds and accidents, they may be introduced more widely.

Cyclists (Accidents)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents involving cyclists were reported in each year since 1991.

Mr. Key: The Department collects data from personal injury road accidents. There were 25,042 injury accidents in 1991 and 24,962 injury accidents in 1992 involving pedal cyclists.

Speedboat Regulations

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those regulations which apply to the use of speedboats in inshore waters surrounding the United Kingdom; how many prosecutions hav been brought by *(a)* individuals and *(b)* local authorities against owners or users of speedboats in the context of the breach of national legislation or local byelaws in each of the past five years; and what consideration is being given to additional restrictions applicable to the onwership or use of such speedboats.

Mr. Norris: There are no national regulations governing the ownership and use of recreational craft in inshore waters. Local authorities in England and Wales have powers to make byelaws under section 231 of the Public Health Act 1936 for the regulation of vessels used for pleasure purposes; under section 76 of the Public Health Act 1961, for the regulation of seaside pleasure boats; and under section 235 of the Local Government Act 1972, for the regulation and suppression of nuisances by district and borough councils where no other powers are available. In Scotland, local authorities have powers under section 121 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 to make byelaws in relation to the sea shore, adjacent waters and inland waters. Separate provisions exist for local authorities in Northern Ireland.

Figures for prosecutions under byelaws are not collected centrally and no information is readily available on prosecutions by individuals.

In its first report the National Maritime Safety Steering Committee has drawn attention to problems identified by the district marine safety committees with the making of effective byelaws to control recreational craft on inland and inshore waters. These problems are also considered in a consultation document published in October 1993 by the

Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office—"Managing the Coast—A review of Coastal Management Plans in England and Wales and the powers supporting them".

The report of the NMSSC has also drawn attention to a number of recommendations referred to it by the DMSCs relating to the further regulation of recreational craft and their users in the interests of safety. These recommendations are currently under consideration by the Department.

Seat Belts

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what review he has undertaken of mandatory seat belts in coaches and in vehicles transporting school children; and what conclusions he has reached.

Mr. Key: We are currently reviewing the full technical and cost implications of seat belts in all coaches and minibuses, not just those used to carry children. This review is not yet complete.

Light Rapid Transit Schemes

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding has been made available from the private sector towards the development and implementation of light rapid transit schemes in *(a)* Manchester, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* south Yorkshire and *(d)* Leeds and Nottingham.

Mr. Freeman: The private sector contributes to the development and implementation of light rapid transit schemes in three ways: expenditure on bids in competitive tenders and associated design work; developer contributions to the construction costs of schemes; and concession payments for contracts to undertake any or all of the design, building, operation and maintenance of a light rapid transit system. Some or all of these types of contribution have been received or are planned in all of the schemes listed. The amounts involved are commercially confidential.

Heathrow Terminals

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the distance between each of the terminals at Heathrow.

Mr. Norris: BAA plc has informed me as follows:

The central terminal area comprises terminals 1, 2 and 3. Walking distances between the terminals using subway connections are:

	Metres
Terminal 1 to terminal 2	392
Terminal 1 to terminal 3 (arrivals)	680
Terminal 1 to terminal 3 (departures)	676
Terminal 2 to terminal 3 (arrivals)	590
Terminal 2 to terminal 3 (departures)	568

The shortest journey from the central terminal area to terminal 4 is by the airside coach route from gate 80 to the transfer passenger point in terminal 4 and is some 3,379 m long. From landside in the central terminal area, the journey to terminal 4 would be about double—some 6,800 m.

Runway Length

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the length of the runway at *(a)* Gatwick airport, *(b)* Glasgow airport, *(c)* Edinburgh airport, *(d)* Manchester airport, *(e)* Luton airport, *(f)* Birmingham airport, *(g)* London city aiport, *(h)* Belfast international airport and *(i)* Belfast city airport.

Mr. Norris: The effective length of a runway depends on direction of use and whether it is being used for takeoff or landing. Takeoff run and landing distance are set out in the table:

Aerodrome	*Runway*	*Takeoff Run (metres)*	*Landing distance (metres)*
Gatwick	08R	3,159	2,766
	26L	3,098	2,831
Glasgow	05	2,658	2,658
	23	2,658	2,353
Edinburgh	07	2,560	2,347
	25	2,560	2,347
Manchester	06	3,048	2,621
	24	3,048	2,865
Luton	08	2,160	2,160
	26	2,160	2,075
Birmingham	15	2,405	21,34
	33	2,405	2,134
London City	10	1,199	1,199
	28	1,199	1,199
Belfast Int.	07	2,777	2,777
	25	2,777	2,777
Belfast City	04	1,829	1,737
	22	1,767	1,767

Pedestrian Safety

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the Serjeant at Arms and hon. Members about pedestrian safety at the junction of Bridge street and Parliament square; and what action he has taken to improve pedestrian safety at this junction.

Mr. Norris: The Serjeant at Arms and the hon. Member have made several representations regarding the timing of pedestrian phases within the traffic lights at Bridge street-Parliament square. Details were passed on to Westminster city council, which is the responsible highway authority. The city council has extended the pedestrian green phase at the corner of Bridge street and Parliament square and installed supplementary signals to assist pedestrians.

Roads Policy

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the documents which set out his Department's policy on roads issued during the last six years and those sections of the documents which no longer represent Government policy.

Mr. Key: The two main documents setting out current roads policy are the 1989 White Paper "Roads for Prosperity" and the 1990 roads report "Trunk Roads, England into the 1990's". The aims of the Government's expenditure on roads can be found in the "Department of Transport Report 1993". I will write to my right hon. Friend shortly with a more detailed list of road policy documents.

Kingsferry Bridge

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the interruption of power to the Kingsferry bridge on the A249 trunk road between the mainland and the Isle of Sheppey and the announcement, later countermanded, that all road traffic could be delayed for hours to allow a ship to pass; if he will make it his policy to give priority to road and rail traffic in such circumstances; and if he will speed up construction of the second Swale crossing.

Mr. Key: On Thursday 20 January, because of a loss of power from the electricity suppliers, Seeboard Electricity, British Rail intended to use an emergency generator to open Kingsferry bridge to allow a ship to pass. The generator takes 20 minutes to raise and 20 minutes to lower the bridge.

At the request of the local Sittingbourne police and after consultation with the British Transport police, BR decided not to open the bridge, because of the extensive traffic congestion this would have caused during the peak traffic period.

The operation of Kingsferry bridge is a matter for BR in consultation with the British Transport police and the port authorities. They are best placed to judge the conditions prevailing at the time and the limitations placed on their powers to close the bridge for emergency maintenance.

Public consultation on proposals to improve the A249 between Iwade and Queensborough, which include a second crossing of the Swale, ended on 7 January and we are now considering the response. Start of construction will depend on the completion of design work and the statutory procedures and the availability of funds.

Direct Flights

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to which countries with which the United Kingdom has no diplomatic relations there are direct flights from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have been asked to reply.

The following are the states recognised by Her Majesty's Government, but with which we do not currently have diplomatic relations:

Bhutan
Iraq
Korea (North)
Libya

There are no direct flights from the United Kingdom to any of these.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to restore diplomatic relations with Taiwan; when direct flights from the United Kingdom to Taiwan were resumed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan. EVA Airways and British Asia Airways commenced services from the United Kingdom to Taiwan in March 1993.

We welcome the increasing development of business links and tourism with Taiwan.

Airline Regulations

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which airline regulations relate to air passengers being handcuffed or bound by arm or leg restraints or a body belt during takeoff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* The only aviation legislation relating to the restraint of passengers is section 94 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 which authorises the commander of an aircraft in flight to take reasonable measures, including bodily restraint, against someone who jeopardises the safety or good order of the aircraft.

National Air Traffic Control System

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to study the options for the privatisation of the national air traffic control system; and what is his timetable for the study.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* A working group of officials from my Department, the Ministry of Defence, the Treasury and the Civil Aviation Authority are examining the options for transferring national air traffic services to the private sector. They are looking at the operational, legal, financial and other implications of the options and expect to report to Ministers at the end of February.

British Merchant Fleet

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vessels there were in the British merchant fleet in 1964, 1970, and each year since 1980; and what was the total gross registered tonnage of the British fleet in each year.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* The table gives the information available for merchant—trading—vessels of 100 grt or above.

Merchant (trading) vessels on registers of United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man

100 grt or more

Mid-year	*Number of vessels*	*Gross registered tons (thousand)*
1964	n/a	21,900
1970	n/a	24,896
1980	1,698	26,070
1981	1,552	24,417
1982	1,422	21,447
1983	1,260	18,148
1984	1,151	14,860
1985	1,074	13,339
1986	961	10,572
1987	846	7,490
1988	801	7,211
1989	688	6,413
1990	638	5,564
1991	610	5,266
1992	566	4,916
1993	494	4,804

Source: Lloyd's register.

Transport Safety

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to which his Department sent, and from which it has received responses regarding the consultation paper on new safety regulations for small passenger ships, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department issued over 1,000 copies of the consultation paper to shipowners associations, ship builders, ship repairers, classification societies and individuals. We received 128 responses from organisations and 11 responses from individuals. It is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who respond to consultation exercises.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to which his Department sent, and from which it has received responses regarding the consultation paper on options for the future of ship survey and certification work, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department issued 233 copies of the consultation paper to employees' representatives, Members of Parliament and the House of Lords, shipowners, classification societies, consultants, insurers, equipment suppliers and individuals. We received 73 responses from organisations and seven responses from individuals. It is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who respond to consultation exercises.

Merchant Shipping Act 1993

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to whom his Department sent, and from whom it has received responses, regarding the consultation letter on draft regulations pertaining to the Merchant Shipping Act 1993, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department issued over 200 copies of the consultation papers to trade associations, trading companies, trade unions, academic institutions and central and local government departments, and we received 34 responses —11 from trade associations, 13 from trading companies, one from trade unions, two from academic institutions and seven from central and local government departments. It is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who respond to consultation exercises.

Transport Schemes

Mr. Dobson To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish a full list of all schemes announced by his Department as having potential for funding by private finance which are still considered as having potential but which have yet to begin, together with the date on which his Department first announced that it would be inviting expressions of interest from the private sector for each potential scheme;

(2) if he will publish a full list of all schemes announced by his Department as having potential for funding by private finance which are not now to be undertaken, together with the date on which his Department first announced that it would be inviting expressions of interest from the private sector for each potential scheme;

(3) if he will publish a full list of all schemes announced by his Department as having potential for funding by private finance which have begun but have yet to be completed, together with the date on which his Department first announced that it would be inviting expressions of interest from the private sector for each potential scheme;

(4) if he will publish a full list of all schemes announced by his Department as having potential for funding through public-private joint finance which are still considered as having potential but which have yet to begin, together with the date on which his Department first announced that it would be inviting expressions of interest from the private sector for each potential scheme.

(5) if he will publish a full list of all schemes announced by his Department as having potential for funding through public-private joint finance which have begun, but have yet to be completed, together with the date on which his Department first announced that it would be inviting expressions of interest from the private sector for each potential scheme;

(6) if he will publish a full list of all schemes announced by his department as having potential for funding through public-private joint finance which are not now to be undertaken, together with the date on which his Department first announced that it would be inviting expressions of interest from the private sector for each potential scheme.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* The information is as follows:

Dates are given for the invitation of expressions of interest from the private sector for each scheme:

(a) Public/private joint finance schemes	*(b) Private finance schemes*
I. Begun but not yet completed	
1. Jubilee line extension, announcement 26 July 1989, that it would proceed if developers' contribution forthcoming. Now being constructed.	1. Second Severn crossing—28 July 1988. Being constructed.
2. Heathrow Express agreement between parties—16 March 1993. Being constructed.	2. Birmingham northern relief road—22 May 1989. Going to public inquiry.
	3. Ashford international passenger station—22 March 1993. Construction soon to begin.
II. Yet to begin	
3. Channel tunnel rail link—16 March 1993.	4. New Scottish air traffic control centre—30 November 1993.
4. Crossrail—16 March 1993.	5. Modernisation of WCML—30 November 1993.
5. Birmingham western orbital route—12 November 1992.	6. New Tamar crossing—4 April 1990.
6. Croydon tramlink, London Transport announced private sector interest—25 November 1991.	7. Lower Thames crossing—4 April 1990.
	8. Mersey crossing—4 April 1990.
	9. A1–M1 Scratchwood link—4 April 1990.[1]
	10. Chelmsford-M25 link—4 April 1990.[1]
	11. Rayleigh-M25—4 April 1990.[1]
III. Not now to be undertaken None.	12. New motorway in Birmingham–Manchester corridor —22 May 1989.

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[1] Subject to decisions on road programme review.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Landmines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what controls currently exist on the export of landmines and their designs from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Needham: Export from the United Kingdom of landmines and their designs is prohibited without a licence issued under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992. Landmines are controlled under head ML 4 of the order; technology—which includes engineering designs—for their production is controlledf under head ML 18, and that for their development or use is controlled under head PL 5027. Equipment for their development is controlled under head PL 5017, and software for their development, production or use is controlled under head ML 24. Any application for an export licence under these headings is subject to stringent checks.

EC Feasibility Awards

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total budget of the European Community's BRITE/EURAM feasibility awards in each year since their establishment; and what proportion of this was granted to *(a)* the northern region and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. McLoughlin: The European Community's budget for BRITE-EURAM feasibility awards since its establishment were:

Year	*Ecu*	*(£)*
1989	1,500,000	(1,110,000)
1990	1,925,000	(1,424,500)
1991-94	5,631,109	(4,167,020)

(a) Feasibility awards are not analysed by region so figures are not available.

(b) *(b)* The United Kingdom as a whole won the following proportion of feasibility awards:

Year	*Per cent.*
1989	30
1990	17
1991-94	12

Feasibility awards represent only 1 per cent. of the total BRITE-EURAM budget.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer of 11 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *175*, by the Minister for Industry, what preparations his Department has carried out for the implementation of the chemical weapons convention in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Department of Trade and Industry is preparing for the establishment of a national authority, to oversee the implementation of the chemical weapons convention in the United Kingdom. The national authority will be located within the DTI. The DTI is in the process of drawing up detailed arrangements for the operation of the chemical weapons convention in the United Kingdom.

Durham Coalfield

Mr. Etherington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the projected total annual cost for each year from 1994 to 2000 of the Durham coalfield inland pumping stations.

Mr. Eggar: The costs of future pumping operations at these locations will depend on the use to which the land is put, the legal obligations of the owners, and any relevant decisions or policy of environmental regulatory bodies, in particular the National Rivers Authority.

Collieries (Pumping)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give the projected annual costs of pumping arrangements for each year from 1994 to 2000 for the Westoe and Wearmouth collieries.

Mr. Eggar: The costs of future pumping operations at these will depend on the use to which the land is put, the legal obligations of the owners, and any relevant decisions or policy of environmental regulatory bodies, in particular the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will publish a breakdown of the annual cost of pumping arrangements for each year from 1990 for the Westoe and Wearmouth collieries;

(2) what were the total annual costs for each year since 1985 of the Durham coalfield inland pumping stations.

Mr. Eggar: These are matters for British Coal.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to each of the regional industrial development boards.

Mr. Sainsbury: The following is the information:

North East Industrial Development Board
Chairman
Mr. R. F. Bishop CBE
Members
Mr. E. Bostwick
Mr. I. R. Dewhirst
Mr. C. J. Fleetwood
Miss S. Guy
Dr. R. Iley CBE
Mr. D. R. C. Kelly CBE
Mr. M. F. Leonard
Mr. R. A. N. McKechnie MBE
Sir Paul Nicholson
Mr. P. Vassallo
Miss S. Wilson

North West Industrial Development Board
Chairman
Mr. D. L. Davies
Members
Mr. J. B. Ashworth MBE
Mr. E. J. Billington
Mrs. C. Coates
Mr. G. N. Elliott CBE
Mr. E. P. Foden CBE
Mr. R. G. Ffoulkes-Jones
Mr. A. Manning
Mr. A. C. Pilkington
Mr. A. K. Ruia
Mr. I. C. Sellars
Mr. D. Weir

South West Industrial Development Board
Chairman
Mr. R. J. Harris CBE
Members
Mr. J. I. Dodds
Mr. N. C. H. Falls
Mr. P. G. Fitzgerald OBE
MR. P. W. Gregory
MR. D. R. Hancock
MR. M. J. Jordan
Mr. A. Loze
Mr. V. P. Parsons MBE
Dr. G. S. Stirling

West Midlands Industrial Development Board
Chairman
Mr. R. J. Dickens

Members
Mr. B. W. Baker
Mr. K. D. Day
Mr. S. A. S. Eccleston
Mr. G. J. Green
Mr. R. G. Hodgson, CBE
Mr. T. S. Kelleher
Mr. J. H. Millett
Mr. M. J. Price, CBE
Dr. A. J. Scanlon
Mr. B. M. Sedghi
Mr. M. W. Taylor, OBE

Yorkshire and Humberside and East Midlands Industrial Development Board

Chairman
Mr. P. W. Barker, CBE

Members
Mr. J. Clarke
Mr. J. R. Corrin
Mr. E. A. K. Denison, OBE TD
Mr. P. Flesher
Mr. R. S. Lasseter
Mr. N. H. W. Lee
Mr. P. A. Lowe
Mr. W. McCosh
Mr. B. Ruffell-Ward
Mr. A. B. Wilbraham, CBE
Mr. D. K. Wilkinson

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Standing Advisory Committee on Industrial Property.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Standing Advisory Committee on Industrial Property comprises representatives of business, consumers and the professions. Membership of the committee, whose terms of reference are

> "to advise on industrial property matters",

consists of organisations rather than individuals.

The following organisations are members: the Law Society; the Law Society of Scotland; the Bar Council; the Institute of Patentees and Inventors; the Trade Marks, Patents and Designs Federation; the Confederation of British Industry; the British Retail Consortium; the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers; the Chartered Society of Designers; the Chartered Institute of Patent Agents; the Institute of Trade Mark Agents; the Association of British Chambers of Commerce; the Consumers Association; the National Consumer Council; the Licensing Executives Society of Great Britain and Ireland; academic—university departments specialising in industrial property law, currently represented by university of London, Queen Mary and Westfield college; small firms —Federation of Small Businesses.

The choice of representative(s) at meetings is a matter for the organisation concerned, and varies according to the subject to be discussed.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Design Council.

Mr. McLoughlin: Current membership of the Design Council is as follows:

John Sorrell (Chairman)
Helen Auty
Duncan Biggin
Robert Bischof
Mary Bromley OBE
John James
James Kincade CBE
Michael Ryall
Anthony Snow
Barry Weaver
Ivan Yates CBE

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Information Technology Advisory Board.

Mr. McLoughlin: The current membership of the Information Technology Advisory Board is as follows:

Name	*Position*
Professor Michael Brady (Chairman)	Department of Engineering Science, Oxford University
Professor Malcolm Atkinson	Department of Computer Science, University of Glasgow
Dr. Keith Baughan	Nokia Mobile Phones
Professor Michael Cardwell	Department of Electrical Engineering and Applied Physics Aston University
Professor Michael Denham	Department of Computing, University of Plymouth
Professor William Eccleston	Electronic and Electrical Engineering, Liverpool University
Mr. Geoff Hayes	Head of Computer Security TSB Bank plc
Professor Ronald Perrott	School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, University of Belfast
Professor John O'Reilly	University College of North Wales
Dr. Ian Robertson	Electronics and Information, Technology Division British Technology Group Ltd.
Dr. John Taylor	Executive Director Hewlett Packard Laboratories
Mr. Martyn Thomas	Chairman Praxis plc
Ms Jane Tozer	Chief Executive Softwright
Mr. Anthony Ward	Head of ITSU British Aerospace

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Aviation Committee.

Mr. Sainsbury: The current membership of the Aviation Committee is as follows:

Chairman
Professor J. L. Stollery
College of Aeronautics
Cranfield Institute of Technology.

Members
N. V. Barber, Esq
Chairman
Aerospace and Defence Group
Smiths Industries plc
R. H. L. Clark, Esq
Managing Director
Flight Refuelling Ltd.
A. C. D. Cumming, Esq
Engineering Director
British Airways plc
C. C. Gustar
Managing Director
Westland Aerospace Ltd.
D. L. Bernstein, Esq
Joint Managing Director
Monarch Airlines
K. H. Coates, Esq
Executive Chairman
Meggitt plc
L. A. Edwards, Esq
Chief Executive, Dowty
T. I. Group plc
Professor K. Hayward
Senior Course Tutor
School of Social Sciences
Staffordshire University
Mr. L. Lynn
Vice President
Airlines and Aerospace Department
Citibank, NA.
J. E. V. Rose, Esq
Director—Corporate Development
Rolls-Royce plc
F. Turner, Esq
Managing Director
Lucas Aerospace Ltd.
R. W. R. McNulty, Esq
President
Short Brothers plc
B. S. G. Tucker, Esq
Director of Programmes
GEC-Marconi Avionics plc

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Domestic Coal Consumers Council.

Mr. Eggar: The members of the Domestic Coal Consumers Council as at 21 January 1994 are:

Mrs. Ann Scully (Chairman)
Mr. Douglas G. Barrett, MBE
Dr. Peter Clarke
Professor Ralph T. Hart
Mr. Noel Hunter
Mrs. Juliet Jowitt, JP
Mr. Brian G. Luker
Mr. Donald J. Mockett
Mrs. Nuala P. O'Loan
Mrs. Winifred Parry, MBE
Ms Rosemarie A. Pell, JP
Mr. Lawrence I. Speare

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the British Overseas Trade Board.

Mr. Needham: The current members of the British Overseas Trade Board are:

Sir Derek Hornby—Chairman
HRH The Duke of Kent KG—Vice Chairman
Sir Hugh Bidwell GBE—Chairman—British Invisibles
G. J. Bull—Chief Executive Grant Metropolitan plc
R. S. Burman CBE DL—Chairman and Managing Director—Teledictor Ltd.
Sir Colin Chandler—Chief Executive—Vickers plc
Sir Alan Cockshaw—Chairman AMEC plc

Mrs. H. M. Cropper—Chief Executive—F. I. Group plc
I. L. Dave OBE—Chairman Dale Electric International plc
H. J. Davies—Director General Confederation of British Industry
Ms J. Hall—Chairman and Chief Executive—Coley Porter Bell
Dr. A. Hayes CBE—Director (retired) ICI plc
D. Lanigan CBE—Non-Executive Director—Marks and Spencer plc
F. R. Mingay CMG—Director General Export Promotion, Department of Trade and Industry
H. B. G. Montgomery—Chairman—Andy Montgomery Ltd.
The Right Hon. Sir Michael Palliser GCMG PC—Deputy Chairman—Samuel Montague and Co. Ltd.
D. Peake—Chairman—Kleinworth Benson Ltd.
C. W. Roberts CB—Deputy Secretary—Department of Trade and Industry
B. D. Taylor CBE—Executive Chairman—Medeva plc
D. J. Wright CMG LVO—Deputy Under Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
W. B. Willott—Chief Executive—Export Credit Guarantee Department

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Industrial Development Advisory Board.

Mr. Sainsbury: The following is the information:

Chairman
Sir Anthony Cleaver
Members
Mr. M. R. Bates
Mr. P. Benton
Mr. M. P. D. Bullock
Mr. C. N. Davies
Sir David Hardy
Mr. J. Hewitt
Mr. G. Mackenzie
Mr. M. Taylor
Mr. L. J. Weaver CBE

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Gas Consumers Council.

Mr. Eggar: The members and regional councillors of the Gas Consumers Council as at 21 January 1994 are:

Mr. Samuel J. Cooper (Chairman)
Mr. Graham E. Andrews (Regional Councillor)
Mrs. Catherine Blight (Member)
Mr. David T. Bowers (Regional Councillor)
Mr. John. K. M. Gilbert (Regional Councillor)
Professor Gerald J. Goodhardt MA (Regional Councillor)
Mr. John K. Hosker (Member)
Mrs. J. M. Lang (Regional Councillor)
Mr. Stephen Macey BA (Member)
Mrs. S. P. Matthews BSC (Regional Councillor)
Mrs. Eileen G. Polgreen (Member)
Mr. Alan P. Preece (Regional Councillor)
Mr. Nicholas A. Ridley (Member)
Professor (Arthur) John Surrey (Member)
Mrs. Ruth K. Thorley (Regional Councillor)
Mrs. Wendy Witter (Regional Councillor and Deputy Chairman)
Mrs. Patricia Wynne OBE (Regional Councillor)

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Copyright Tribunal.

Mr. McLoughlin: The current members of the Copyright Tribunal are as follows:

Chairman
Mr. Michael Bowers OBE

Deputy Chairmen
Mr. Brian Gill QC PHD
Mr. Hugh Laddie QC

Ordinary Members
Mr. Hugh Brett
Mr. Paddy Cribb
Mr. Laurie Farrington
Mrs. Angela Howorth
Sir Michael Lickiss
Mr. Arthur Rayner
Mr. Peter Sebastian CBE

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the Innovation Advisory Board.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Innovation Advisory Board, as then constituted was wound up in September 1993. At that time the external members of the IAB were:

Chairman
Lord Chilver
Chairman
EEC Group plc

Dr. Stuart Burgess
Consultant
Immuno International AG

Mr. Richard Duggan
Chairman
Crosfield Chemicals

Dr. Ken W. Grey
Executive Chairman
Thorn Software

Mr. Len Weaver
Chairman
Jones and Shipman

Sir David Cooksey
Chairman
Advent Ltd.

Mr. Richard Freeman
Corporate Chief Economist
ICI Group

Mr. Michael Henderson
Chief Executive
Ronar Services Ltd.

Dr. Peter Williams
Chief Executive
Oxford Instruments

Since its inception in 1988 the IAB had a widely acknowledged reputation as a strong and effective champion of innovation and a very valuable source of advice to DTI. However, taking account of the publication of the science, engineering and technology White Paper, "Realising our Potential" in May 1993, the advisory structures being established by the Office of Science and Technology and the steps DTI is taking to develop closer links with business my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade agreed with the Lord Chilver and members of the IAB that the role of the board should be reviewed.

No decision has been taken on the structure of any successor arrangements.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the members currently appointed to the English Industrial Estates Corporation.

Mr. Sainsbury: The current members of the English Industrial Estates Corporation are as follows:

Sir Idris Pearce CBE TD—Chairman
Sir Kenneth Stowe GCB CVO—Deputy Chairman
Mr. Reay Atkinson CB
Mr. Euan Macfarlane CBE
Mr. Ron Norman OBE
Mr. Tony Pender CBE—Chief Executive
Sir Norman Wakefield

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the organisations to which his Department awarded consultancy work in 1992 and 1993 together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. Eggar: The consultancy contracts awarded centrally by the Department of Trade and Industry to all organisations in 1992 and 1993 plus the total value of those contracts are as detailed in the tables. The values of individual contracts are commercially confidential.

Organisations to which consultancy contracts were issued in 1992

Name of company

ABB Global Engineering
AD Technologies
AEA Industrial Technology
Aegis Systems Ltd.
Agniconsult
Amp Computer Recruitment Ltd.
Amp Systems Ltd.
Amps Limited
Andrew Irving Associates
Annabel Jackson Associates
Anshar Limited
Apertus
APM Ltd.
Appleton Associates Int.
Applied Electromagnetics Limited
Aspen Business Communications plc
Association of British Chambers of Commerce
Association of Print and Packaging
Barton Marketing Services
Beechcroft Commercial Systems
Benchmark Research Limited
Beta Technology Ltd.
BHR Group Limited
BIS Applied Systems
BIS Information Services Ltd.
BJM Research
John T. Boyd Company
Bradford University
Brameur Ltd.
Brantwood Consulting
Bristol University
British Aerospace Space Ltd.
British Materials Handling BOA
British Technology Group
British Textile Technology Group
Brook Street
Building Services Research
Burrups Limited
Business Market and Research plc
Business IT Solutions
Business Management Promotions Ltd.
Buxton Douglass Ltd.
CAD-CAM Data Exchange Technical Centre (CADDETC)
Cambashi Ltd.
Cambridge Consultants Ltd.
Cambridge Material Corrosion
CAMINUS
Capita Group plc
Centre for Adhesive Technology
Charles Barker Ltd.
Cheshire Precision Shape Ltd.
Chesterton Consulting Group
Chris Makemson Consultants Ltd.
Clearaway International Holdings Ltd.
CMG Information Service Public Sector
Commonwealth Development Corporation
Compupro Limited
Computer Consultants
Computer Training and Education Centre (CTEC)
Concorde Services Ltd.
Concurrant Computer Corporation Ltd.
Coopers and Lybrand
Corinne Flemming Associates
Cornwall County Council
Corporate Strategy Consultants
Cranfield School of Management
Croft Communication Consultants
CSC Computer Science Ltd.
CSS Software Solutions Ltd.
Dataflex Service Ltd.
Dataquest Ltd.
David Perchard Associates
Defence Research Agency
Digital Equipment Company Ltd.
DISC
DRM Group Ltd.
DP Support Services Ltd.
DPP International Ltd.
Energy Technology Support Unit
Environmental Resourse Ltd.
ERA Technology Ltd.
Ernst and Young
Essex University
ETSU
Evisa Systems
Export Industries
FI Group plc
Findlay Publications
FI Tech Inc.
Forbes Partnership Ltd.
Forman Computer Staff Ltd.
Frazer-Nash Consultancy Ltd.
Geoff Fordham Associates
Glamorgan University
Gordon Kirk Ltd.
Halper and Woolfe
Henley Computer Services Ltd.
Hertis Information Research
Hoskyns Group plc
Ibis Information Services Ltd.
ICL
ICM Marketing Ltd.
IFS Ltd.
IFT Market Research
Infologistix Ltd.
Ingres Ltd.
Innovation Research
Interdisciplinary Research Centre University of Cambridge
Intermatrix
ISVR Consultancy Services
IT World
John Matchett Ltd.
Keele University
Kennedy and Donkin Power Ltd.
Kent Technology Transfer Centre
Kermon Ltd.
Key Punch Girls Agency Ltd.
Kings College London
Kleinworth Benson
KPG Computer Support Services Ltd.
KPMG Management Consultants
L. J. Associates
Les Probert Associates
Lesley and Page Services Ltd.
Level 7
Linguacubun Ltd.
Lloyds Register Quality Assurance Ltd.
Logica CES Ltd.
London Business School
London Regional Technology Centre
London School of Economics and Political Science
London School of Economics (OMIT)
Lorien Computer Services
Malcolm Associates Ltd.
Manchester Design Technology
Manchester University
Manpower plc
MAPP Computer Facilities Ltd.
March Consulting Group
March Systems
Marchland Consulting Ltd.
Marine Technology Directorate
Marine Technology Support Unit
Market Research Network

Market Improvements Group plc
MBM Consulting Ltd.
MDS Transmodal
Meeting Deadlines Ltd.
Metal Research Semi Conductors
Metocean plc
Metra Martech
Michael Barrat Ltd.
Michael Neale and Associates Ltd.
Michael Shortlands Associates
Microtron Systems Ltd.
Microwave and Antenna Systems
Microwave Consultants Ltd.
Mike Griffith Asociates
Millennium
MITT Consulting Ltd.
MMT Computing plc
Morgan Clements Ltd.
Multiple Access Communications Ltd.
National Institute of Economic and Social Research
National Physical Laboratory (OMIT)
National Transcommunication
Nesco
Neville Way (Omit)
Neville Russell
Northern Development Company
Norton Motors
Nottingham University
ODI Ltd.
Optimat Ltd.
Orsand Ltd.
Oxford Innovation Ltd.
P-Four Consulting Ltd.
PA Cambridge Economic Consultants
PA Consulting Group
Palmlace Ltd.
Parter International Inc.
Paul A. Hill and Co
Pera International
Petroleum Science and Technology Institute
Pieda Plc
Pims Associates
Pira International
Polytechnic of Wales
PPS Management Consultancy
Praxis Systems plc
Prest Manchester University
Price Project Service Ltd.
Price Waterhouse
Private Service Corporation
Pro Laser
Profitstart
Proned
Purchasepoint
P-E Batelas
P-E International
QLM Associations Imc
Quality Projects
Quantex Consultancy
Queen Mary and Westfield College
Quotec
Ralph H. Pickering and Associates
Reed Posen Consultants Ltd.
Repim Ltd.
Ricardo Consulting Engineers
Ricardo Hitec Ltd.
Rolls Royce
RPS Group plc
RTR Management Consulting Ltd.
Russell House Associates
Rutherford Appleton Lab
Salford University
Saxton Bampfylde International plc
SBS Ltd.
Scientific Generics
Sciotech
Segal Quince Wicksteed Ltd.
Select Training and Consultancy
Sia-Langton
Simplicity Computer and Network Ltd.
Sir Michael Kerry (Omit)
Sira Limited
Smiths Associates Ltd.
Social Survey Gallup Poll
Solent Regional Technology Centre
South Eastern Regional Research Lab.
Southampton University
SRI International Europe
SRU Ltd.
Steer Davies and Gleave Ltd.
Strategem Ltd.
Strategic Sponsorship Ltd.
Strategic Vision
Stategy Group
Strathclyde University
Structural and Relational Systems Ltd.
Sue Beardon Consultancy
Survey Research Associates Ltd.
Systec Consultants Ltd.
Tamesis Partnership
Taskforce Group plc
Taylor Woodrow
Taylor-Stewart Associates
Technology Partnerships Ltd.
Technopolis Ltd.
Teknowledge
Templetrend Ltd.
Text Matters
Thames Valley Technology Centre
The Beacon Group
The Management Consulting Group
The UK Science Park Association
The Welding Institute
Tillinghast
Tilly International Ltd.
Total EC Computing
Touche Ross and Co.
Transcend Technology Ltd.
Transslimina Ltd.
Trellick Ltd.
Trends Business Research
Tyzack and Partners Ltd.
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
Unived Technologies Ltd.
University of Bradford
University of Hull
University of Kent
University of London
University of Oxford
University of Surrey
University of Wales
University of York
Urbed Development
Vector Fields Ltd.
Warwick Business School
Worthy Associates
WRC plc
York Consulting Ltd.
Zoom Production Company
Total value of these contracts is £36,423,000.

Organisations to which consultancy contracts were issued in 1993
Name of Company
Abacus Communications
Acer Consultants Limited
AEA Industrial Technology
Aegis Systems Ltd.
Agapiou
Alpha Numeric
Amp Systems Limited
Andrea Foote and Associates
Anshar Limited
Apertus Limited
Arkay Associates
Aspen Business Communications plc
Axsis Consultants Limited
Barclays De Zoete Wedd Limited
Barlow Lyde & Gilbert
Beddows and Company
Benchmark Research Limited

Berring Hine Management Consultants
Bolton Institute of Higher Education
Booz Allen and Hamilton International (UK) Limited
Bournemouth University
Bradtec Limited
Brameur Limited
Brantwood Consulting
Bristol University
British Market Research Bureau
Brook Street Bureau
BSRIA
Burrups Limited
Business and Trade Statistics
Business Call Direct (Europe) Limited
Business Design Group Limited
Caci Limited
Cambridge University
Campaign Warfare
Capita Group plc
Careers Research and Advisory Centre Limited
CCD Limited
Centre for Adhesive Technology (CAT)
Children's Research Unit
Chris Makeson Consultants
Clemdale Associates
Commercial Union Risk Management Limited
Commodities Research Unit Limited
Company Reporting Limited
Computer 2000
Consensus Research International
Coopers and Lybrand
Coptic Films Limited
Cornwall County Council
Corporate Strategy Consultants
Countrywide Communications Management
County Natwest Limited
CPL Scientific Limited
Cranfield Institute of Technology
Crown Business Communications
David Forsythe Associates Limited
David Perchard Associates
David Reay and Associates
Design Council Midlands Office
Disc
DMR Group Limited
DP Support Services Limited
Durham University Business School
Ecotec Research and Consulting Limited
Entech Energy Consultants Limited
Era Technology Limited
Ernst and Young
Ethos Management Limited
European Industrial Forecasting Limited
Eurostrategy Consultants Limited
Findlay Publications
Focus North West Limited
Forbes Partnership Limited
Go-Sat International
Grosvenor Consultancy Services
Halpern and Woolf
Henley Computer Services
Heriot Watt University
Hertis Information and Research
HMS Personnel Services
Hull University
Ice Ergonomics
ICL
IFS Limited
Imperial College London
Information Research Network
Institute of Occupational Ergonomics
Institute of Exports
Intac Associates
Intermatrix Limited
International Training Service Limited
IT Services (Group C)
IT World
J. H. Fenner and Co. Limited
John T. Boyd Company
Kermon Limited
Korea Business Services
KPMG Management Consultants
L. and J. Associates Limited
Lamb Associates
Les Probert Associates
Level-7 Limited
Logica-Ces Limited
Mai Engineering Limited
Management Consulting Group
Manpower UK Limited
March Consulting Group
Maygrove Consulting Group Limited
McAlpine Thorpe & Warrier Limited
MDS Transmodal
Mediascene Limited
Medical Research Council
Meeting Deadlines Limited
Merz and McLellan
Metal Bulletin plc
Metra Martech Limited
Michael Shortland Associates
MMM Consultancy Group Limited
Morgan Clements Limited
Morgan Harris Burroughs
MORI
National Society for Epilepsy
Neville Russell
Nottingham Polytechnic
OHS Limited
Optimat Limited
PA Cambridge Economic Consultants Limited
PA Consulting Group
Pannell Kerr Forster Associates
Pera International
Perfect Recall Limited
Peritas Learning Systems
Personnel Training Services (PTS)
Peter Saunders Associates
PFA Limited
Phillips Export Training Services
Porter Burrows Design Limited
PREST
Price Waterhouse
Prof-It-Strat Limited
Protus Limited
Purchasing and Supply Consultants
Putnam Hayes and Bartlett Limited
P-E International Management Consultants
P-E International plc—Computer Services
P-Four Consultancy Limited
Quarto Consulting International
Quotient Communications
Quo-Tec Limited
Radix Consultancy Limited
Reynolds and Associates Limited
Robert Fleming & Company Limited
RPS Group plc
Rutherford Appleton Laboratory
Salford University Business Services Limited
Sambrook Research International
Saxton Bampfylde International plc
Schofield Maguire
Scientific Generics
Scott Barrett
SD Scicon
Secure Information Systems Limited
Segal Quince Wicksteed Limited
Sensitive Systems Limited
Sepsu The Royal Society
Sequelogic Limited
Service Limited
Shreeveport Limited
SIA Limited
Simon Petroleum Technology
Small World Connections Limited
Smith Rea Energy Associates Limited
Smith System Engineering Limited
Solid Solutions Associates
Sound Sense Training
South West Productivity

SRU Limited
Stareblaze Limited
Steve Roberts Limited
Stoker Associates Limited
Stoy Hayward Consulting
Sudbury Consultants Limited
Sussex University
Teknowledge Limited
Text Matters
Thames Valley Technology
The Chartered Institute of Arbitrators
The Consultancy Corporation Limited
The Corporate Intelligence Group Limited
The Mail Marketing Company
The Outhouse Marketing Company
Thomas Howell Group
Touche Ross & Co.
TQM International Limited
Transport Study Group—University College
UK Cals Industry Council
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
United Technologies Limited
University of Bradford
University of Kent
University of Edinburgh
University of Keele
University of Westminster
Uni-Tech Limited
Urbecon
Verity Inc.
Wardell Armstrong
Warwick Business School
West Wales Software
World Wide Pictures Limited
WS Atkins Consultants Limited
X/Open

Total Value of these contracts is £29,323,000.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *646*, how many Christmas cards were sent at public expense in 1993 by his Department's Ministers; and how much this cost.

Mr. Eggar: The Minister for Trade sent out some 500 cards. They cost £385·14.

Cyprus (Oil Sales)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the monthly sale of oil from United Kingdom registered companies to Cyprus in each month since July 1992.

Mr. Eggar: Monthly exports of oil by the United Kingdom to Cyprus since July 1992 are as follows:

Value of United Kingdom oil[1] export to Cyprus

	£ thousand
1992	
July	202
August	116
September	131
October	187
November	107
December	89
Total	832
1993	
January	96
February	199
March	118
April	182
May	171
June	74
July	187
August	184
September	142
October	167
November	139
Total	1,660
Overall Total	2,492

[1] Petroleum, petroleum products, and related materials; ie. Division 33 of the Standard International Trade Classification.

Source: HM Customs and Excise.

The figures relate to all United Kingdom exports of oil to Cyprus. Statistics relating specifically to United Kingdom registered companies are not available.

Severance Schemes

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish details of the severance schemes available to employees which were in operation immediately prior to the privatisation of the Thames Water Authority, including details of facilities to make early payment of pensions to staff under such schemes.

Mr. Eggar: This subject is a matter for the boards of the respective utilities companies. I have passed on this request to the chairmen of British Gas and British Telecommunications and to the president of the Electricity Association.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Eggar: There are two special advisers and one chief economic adviser with the status of special adviser in the Department. None is seconded from other organisations.

Fire Safety

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names and positions held of the members of the contact group which will be assisting the steering group on fire safety matters.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Membership of the contact group assisting the steering group for the review of fire safety at present comprises:

Mr. Stewart Kidd	Director, Fire Prevention Association.
Mr. David Smith	President, Institute of Building Control.
Mr. William Yates	Manager (Fire and Security) Shell UK Ltd.
Mr. Alfred Thompson	Chief Officer, Durham Fire Brigade
Mr. Richard Saxon	Partner, Building Design Partnership

I intend to add a representative of the hotel industry to the contact group shortly.

Mining Subsidence

Mr. Stephen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to receive British Coal's fifth report on the administration of the coal mining subsidence damage repair and compensation scheme.

Mr. Eggar: I have now received this report from British Coal and have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses today.

Manufactured Food Products (Export)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value, for the most recent 12-month period available, of exports of manufactured food products to *(a)* Russia, *(b)* Hungary and *(c)* Czechoslovakia; and what are the corresponding figures over each of the previous three years.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 17 January 1994]:* Trade statistics have been available for Russia only since the beginning of 1993. Since the beginning of last year, separate figures have been published on the Czech and Slovak Republics to reflect the break-up of Czechoslovakia.

The value of exports of manufactured food products —classifications 01–09 of the standard international trade classification, revision 3, which include cereals and cereal preparations—in the period from 1 January to 31 October 1993, were as follows:

	£ thousands
Russia	142,779
Hungary	2,657
Czech Republic	3,246
Slovak Republic	162

The value of manufactured food exports to the former Soviet Union, Hungary and former Czechoslovakia for the three previous years are set out in the table:

	1989 £'000s	*1990 £'000s*	*1991 £'000s*	*1992 £'000s*
Soviet Union	148,503	155,089	20,139	97,748
Hungary	540	920	1,269	2,079
Czechoslovakia	794	1,191	2,035	2,822

Regional Assistance

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to be able to announce those areas designated under objective 2 and objective 5(b); and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 16 December 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 18 January, *Official Report,* column *517.*

Steel

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the meetings which he has held with British steel producers to discuss the December 1993 EC agreement on surplus capacity in the steel industry.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* I and my officials maintained close contact with the industry both before and during the 17 December Industry Council. Officials briefed the British Iron and Steel Producers Association on the outcome before Christmas, and I have since written to the chairman of British Steel.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will make a statement on the procedures established by his Department in order to monitor the implementation of the December 1993 EC agreement on steel capacity;

(2) if he will make a statement on current progress towards the implementation of the December 1993 EC agreement on surplus capacity in the steel industry.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answers 24 January 1994]:* On 17 December, the Industry Council gave its assent to proposals under article 95 ECSC to allow state aid towards the costs of restructuring six steel companies in four member states.

The monitoring of state aids approved under article 95 ECSC is primarily for the Commission, which will report to the Council; but DTI officials will maintain a watching brief on all six cases, including direct liaison with United Kingdom representatives in the relevant member states for news of their progress.

Tours Direct

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps were taken by his Department to protect the public after Companies House struck Tours Direct off its register.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* This matter is for Companies House. I have, therefore, asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Nigel Griffiths, dated 24 January 1994:

You tabled the following Parliamentary Question:

"To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what steps were taken by this Department to protect the public after Companies House struck Tours Direct off their register".

As this matter is my responsibility as Chief Executive and Registrar of Companies House, I am writing to you direct.

Section 652 of the Companies Act 1985, provides me with authority to dissolve companies which I have reasonable cause to believe are no longer carrying on in business or in operation.

In the case of Tours Direct Limited, correspondence received from accountants acting on behalf of the company, indicated that the company was no longer carrying on in business or in operation. Accordingly, formal inquiry letters were issued to the company at its registered office in accordance with the requirements of section 652(1) and 652(2) of the Companies Act 1985.

A director of the company subsequently confirmed that the company was no longer in operation and a notice was published in the London Gazette on 29 June 1993, of my intention to strike the company off the register at the expiration of 3 months, unless cause was shown to the contrary. A copy of this notice was placed on the public file and sent to the company on the same date.

In the absence of any objections to this action being received, the company was struck off the register on 10 October 1993 and dissolved by notice in the London Gazette of 19 October 1993. To date, I have not received any complaints concerning the removal of the company name from the register.

As to the matter of protection afforded to the public, section 653 of the Companies Act 1985 enables any creditor of a dissolved company to petition the Court to restore the name of the company to the register. Once restored, a company is deemed to have continued in existence as if its name had not been struck off. In addition, the Court may also give such directions and make such provisions as seem just for placing the company and all other persons in the same position, as nearly as may be, as if the company's name had not been struck off.

I trust that I have interpreted the question which you have tabled correctly and that I have covered the points raised. Should you, however, require any additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Perjury Act 1911 (Prosecutions)

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many prosecutions there have been under section 5 of the Perjury Act 1911 concerning fake declarations to the Registrar of Companies with regard to transactions covered by a company's articles of association; and who is responsible for initiating prosecutions.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* Our records are not kept in such a form that this information is readily available. No prosecutions have been brought by this Department in the last two years in the circumstances referred to in the question. Such prosecutions would normally be handled by this Department, but in some circumstances might be brought by other prosecuting authorities.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the objective of removing equal opportunities requirements from private contractors for government contracts.

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 20 January 1994, *Official Report*, column 776.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled Employees

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the disability organisations with which he has met to discuss the requirement upon employers to pay a contribution towards the purchase of special equipment and services for disabled employees enshrined in the access to work proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met representatives of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, MENCAP, the Spinal Injuries Association, RADAR and Deaf Accord to discuss several aspects of the new scheme access to work which he announced on 22 June 1993, *Official Report*, column 102.

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement outlining how he intends to monitor the effectiveness of his Department's access to work proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A full evaluation of access to work will be carried out after its first full year of operation. The evaluation will consider the effectiveness of access to work in meeting its stated aims and will consider statistical information provided by placing assessment and counselling teams, as well as information provided through research.

Sheltered Employment

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many responses were received to the consultative document on the sheltered employment funding system; how many were *(a)* totally in favour and *(b)* totally against; and how many gave specific reservations;

(2) how many fully funded places in sheltered workshops have been available in each of the past five years; and what are the expected figures for the next two years;

(3) what has been the level of training grants allocated to sheltered workshops in each of the past five years; and what is the expected level for each of the next two years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mrs. Margaret Ewing, dated 25 January 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the responses received to the consultative document on the Sheltered Employment funding system, and the number of places available in and the level of training grants allocated to sheltered workshops.

A number of changes to the current way in which we fund Sheltered Employment were proposed in a recent consultative document. The consultation on these proposals ended on 13 September 1993 and responses are still being considered. The 115 responses received were generally supportive, but none were totally in favour or totally against our proposals—we would not have expected this to be otherwise as the consultation process was intended to elicit comments. Implementation of changes will not take place, however, until we are satisfied that the interests of severely disabled people will be best served.

The number of places we supported in local authority and voluntary body sheltered workshops over the last five years is:

	Number
1989	5,520
1990	5,476
1991	5,209
1992	5,060
1993	4,838

Figures are for those supported on 31 March in each year and cover approved workers and trainees. Future plans are based on our supporting 4,900 workshop places in 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Sheltered workshops are only one part of the Sheltered Employment Programme; this also includes help to people with disabilities through the Sheltered Placement Scheme (SPS) and Remploy. Whilst the number of people supported in sheltered workshops has declined over the period, the overall number of people helped through the Programme has been maintained. The figures below illustrate this:

	Number
1989	19,276
1990	20,650
1991	20,777
1992	20,722
1993	20,386

Future plans are to help at least 20,800 people through the Programme in 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Training grants paid to sheltered workshops comprise payment of an employee's basic workshop wage for an agreed period plus a contribution towards the cost of fees for externally purchased training. Employees' wages vary from workshop to workshop and year to year. There is, therefore, no standard grant payable for this item. Payment of training fees is based on reimbursement of actual costs subject to a maximum of £1,400 per person per annum (£27·88 per person per week). This has remained unchanged over the last five years. The abolition of payments for training wages and fees from 1 April 1994 is one of the items being considered in the review of Sheltered Employment funding. A very small number of workshops claimed assistance for wages and fees and it has been proposed that the money set aside for this should be added to the overall money available to local authorities and voluntary bodies for helping all individuals assisted through the Programme.

I hope this is helpful.

Slaughter Industry

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in the slaughter industry in each year since 1985.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on employment in the slaughter industry is available only from the periodic censuses of employment and is as follows:

Number of employees in employment in the slaughter industry[1] in Great Britain, September of each year

Year	Number
1984	90,200
1987	92,500
1989	91,800
1991	95,100

[1] Group 412 of the standard industrial classification 1980.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the most recent residence-based unemployment rates for London by *(a)* borough and *(b)* constituency giving the figures overall and broken down for male and female; and what is the change in number of unemployed claimants in London by (i) borough and (ii) constituency for the same month in each of the last six years and the change since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: At present, official unemployment rates are not available for areas smaller than the self-contained labour markets known as travel-to-work areas.

Unadjusted data on the numbers of unemployment claimants for each local authority district and parliamentary constituency are available on a monthly basis from June 1983 onwards. The data can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

European Social Fund

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what level of support will be available to Great Britain from the European social fund under objectives 3 and 4 from 1994 to 1999.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government welcome last Wednesday's announcement by the European Commission that Great Britain will receive approximately £2,500 million between 1994 and 1999 from the European social fund for expenditure under objectives 3 and 4 of the European Community's structural funds, outside objective 1 regions.

Objective 3 is targeted at helping young people who are joining the labour market, long-term unemployed people and other people facing particular disadvantages in finding and keeping work. The Government value the important contribution made over the years by the ESF to helping young and unemployed people in Britain prepare or compete effectively for jobs.

In the course of the negotiations on the reform of the structural funds last year, it was agreed that member states should be free to decide the balance of objective 3 and 4 in their respective countries. Objective 4 is targeted at workers still in employment. The Government's consistent view has been that the ESF should continue to concentrate first and foremost on helping unemployed people.

The Government plan therefore to devote the available ESF resources for objectives 3 and 4 to helping unemployed people under objective 3 for the foreseeable future.

WALES

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish details for the latest convenient date of all ambulance response times reported to his office.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The ambulance service classifications in Wales and their standards for emergency call response times are:

	50 per cent. within Minutes	*95 per cent. within Minutes*
South Glamorgan		
Population, density: more than 3 persons per acre	7	14
Clwyd, Gwent, Mid and West Glamorgan		
Populaton density: between 0·5 and 3 persons per acre	8	18
East Dyfed, Gwynedd, Pembrokeshire and Powys		
Population density: less than 0·5 persons per acre	8	21

The latest available information, for the three months ending 30 September 1993, is shown in the table:

	Percentage arriving within 50 per cent. Standard Response Time	*Percentage arriving within 95 per cent. Standard Response Time*
Clwyd	63	98
East Dyfed	60	93
Gwent	52	97
Gwynedd	55	96
Mid Glamorgan	59	100
Pembrokeshire	44	90
Powys	45	89
South Glamorgan	57	94
West Glamorgan	58	94

Ambulance Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what approval in principle he has given to schemes of rationalisation of the ambulance service in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer of 21 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *875*.

NHS Staff

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the total cost of employing managers, advisers, administrators and clerical staff in national health service hospitals in each of the last three years for which figures are available;

(2) how many cars have been allocated to national health service managers, advisers, administrators and clerical staff in each of the last five years for which figures are available;

(3) how many cars have been allocated to the managers, advisers and administrators employed by the national health service trust hospitals in each of the last two financial years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Hospital Admissions

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many admissions to national health service hospitals for each of the last three years for which figures are available were elective admission and how many were emergency admissions.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is given in the table:

Discharge and deaths, by type of admission

	1989-90[1]	*1990-91*[1]	*1991-92*[2]	*1992-93*
Non-psychiatric				
Elective	257,698	252,672	286,000	n/a
Emergency	231,153	240,546	250,000	n/a
Other[3]	28,979	27,264	85,000	n/a
Total	517,830	520,482	621,000	650,000
Psychiatric				
Elective	n/a	n/a	4,000	n/a
Emergency	n/a	n/a	11,000	n/a
Other	n/a	n/a	2,000	n/a
Total	16,000	17,000	18,000	18,000

[1] Based on the hospital activity analysis system which was replaced in April 1991 by the patient episode database for Wales.

[2] Estimates based on incomplete database data, reconciled with aggregate hospital returns known to be more complete in coverage particularly in respect of day cases. The data are therefore not fully comparable with earlier years.

[3] Includes patients transferred from other hospitals and babies born in hospital. From April 1991 also includes maternity patients.

n/a Not available.

River Dee

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the flood defence embankments of the River Dee from Connah's quay to Saltney in respect of high tides; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am aware that these flood embankments were assessed as part of the recent sea defence survey undertaken by the National Rivers Authority and were considered to be in good order. This is due, for the most part, to the significant improvement works that have been carried out by the authority and its predecessors, in recent years. Much of this work has been undertaken with grant aid from the Department.

Dobshill Hospital

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit the Dobshill hospital, Clwyd.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have no present plans to do so.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Nurses (Allocation of Cars)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cars have been allocated to NHS nurses in *(a)* the hospital service and *(b)* the community service in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Meadowsleigh Hospital

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit Meadowsleigh hospital, Penyffordd, Clwyd.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have no present plans to do so.

Housing Association Properties

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many housing association properties there are in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to table 1.4 of "Welsh Housing Statistics No. 13, 1993", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Minerals Planning Guidance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on minerals planning guidance in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To date, a total of 11 minerals planning guidance notes have been produced by the Welsh Office jointly with the Department of the Environment. A further guidance, "Treatment of Disused Mine Openings and the Availability of Information on Mined Ground", is to be published shortly. "Opencast Coal Mining" and "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales" are the subject of review.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of local authority houses currently under construction in each of the local authority areas; how many houses have been constructed in each of the years from 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the construction of local authority dwellings and housing association houses is published in "Welsh Housing Statistics No. 13, 1993", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Broughton Special Hospital

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future use of Broughton special hospital, Clwyd.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is currently a matter for the Clwyd health authority.

Financial Assistance

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial assistance his Department has provided to *(a)* National Children's Home (Wales) and *(b)* the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Wales) in each of the last three years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Under the support for child and family services scheme, the Welsh Office awarded grants totalling £105,459, £135,300 and £121,470 to NCH in Wales in 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 respectively. No awards were made to the NSPCC.

Warden-controlled Properties

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many warden-controlled properties for elderly persons there are in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Local authorities' housing strategies and operational plans for 1994-95 show that at 1 April 1993 there were 15,350 sheltered dwellings for the elderly which had the services of a warden.

Planning Guidelines

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what differences of substance he has made in the provisions of the Welsh Office planning policy guidance note 6, when adapting for Wales the comparable guidelines drawn up by the Department of the Environment with particular reference to out-of-town supermarkets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Planning policy guidance note 6 "Town Centres and Retail Developments" was published jointly by the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office.

NHS Beds (Private Patients)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give private bed income by health authority, and by hospital, or the smallest available unit, for each financial year since 1988-89.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The amount of private bed income by health authority for each financial year since 1988-89 was as follows:

£000

Health authority	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Clwyd	352	354	434	512	501
East Dyfed	220	284	222	208	165
Gwent	17	13	20	107	128
Gwynedd	178	214	216	222	133
Mid Glamorgan	45	74	114	174	212
Pembrokeshire	77	105	105	99	155
Powys	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	40	23	52	67	66
West Glamorgan	83	97	129	159	186

Source: Health authorities annual accounts.
Pembrokeshire NHS trust annual accounts.

Notes:

1. The above data are only available by health authority.
2. Consists of private in-patients—section 65—and accommodation and services provided under section 58 of the NHS Act 1977.
3. Data for Pembrokeshire in 1992-93 relate to income received by the Pembrokeshire NHS trust and are an aggregate figure of private in-patients—section 65—private non-resident patients—section 66—anu accommodation and services provided under section 58 of the NHS Act 1977.

Hospital Estate

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has issued for calculation of the percentage maintenance expenditure for the annual upkeep of the hospital estate in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Guidelines on the percentage maintenance expenditure for the upkeep of the national health service estate in Wales were issued in Welsh health circular (85)30. This required health authorities to commit at least 7·5 per cent. of their total allocations—revenue and capital—to the maintenance of assets, that is buildings, land, vehicles, engineering services, plant and equipment.

Community Care Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is planned community care expenditure under his vote for each of 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97 in both cash and real terms.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Government expenditure is planned in cash terms. Resources of £86 million in 1994-95, £124·4 million in 1995-96 and £149·6 million in 1996-97 are being provided through the local government revenue settlement towards local authorities' new responsibilities for community care. These amounts are in addition to local government spending on personal social services generally, and to certain specific grants including resources which may be made available through the mental handicap and mental illness strategies. It is for individual local authorities to determine how much in total they will spend on community care.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he issued the Welsh Office 1993-94 cash allocation letter to the health authorities; what further adjustments have been notified to Welsh health authorities; whether any further adjustments are planned before the end of the financial year; what proposals he has for alterations in the timing of such letters and adjustment notifications to health authorities in 1994-95; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 9 December 1993 to his previous question relating to the notification and subsequent adjustments of 1993-94 allocations to health authorities, *Official Report*, column *305*. My right hon. Friend will announce the initial revenue and capital allocations for 1994-95 to health authorities shortly. The timing of subsequent adjustments to authorities' allocations will largely depend on when provision held in reserve for centrally funded developments is claimed by authorities.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the NHS planned expenditure in cash and real terms in 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Planned net provision for the NHS in Wales in 1994-95 is £2,076 million; this is a cash increase of 5·1 per cent. over the comparable figure for this year.

Provision for 1995-96 and 1996-97 will be detailed in the Welsh Office departmental report, which is due to be published in March.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the proposed closure of the regional offices in Bangor, Carmarthen, Wrexham, Newport and Treforest.

Mr. Redwood: The location of its regional offices is a matter for the agency.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency in relation to contracting-out and privatisation proposals for functions of the agency; if he will list the agency functions proposed for out-sourcing in the next financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: In common with other public bodies, the Welsh Development Agency is required to keep under review the efficiency and effectiveness of its organisation and to arrange for its activities to be contracted out where this represents value for money.

HEALTH

Child Protection Committees

9. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the operation of the area child protection committees.

Mr. Bowis: Area child protection committees operate in every social services area in England to ensure close working relationships between social services departments, the police service, doctors, community health workers, the education service and others who share a common aim to protect children at risk.

Osteopathy

10. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to make osteopathy more widely available on the NHS.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to make osteopathy more widely available on the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: We believe that the professional recognition and regulation of the profession will encourage those purchasers who want to refer their patients for osteopathy to do so.

Pharmacies

11. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of pharmacies will suffer a fall in income following the imposition of her Department's pay settlement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Pharmacies are privately owned businesses, only part of whose income comes from the national health service. However, no pharmacy which dispensed more than 1,000 prescriptions a month of average value in 1992-93 should have its NHS income reduced in 1993-94. The NHS income of pharmacies dispensing less than 1,000 prescriptions a month will depend on a number of factors, not least whether they qualify for the essential small pharmacy scheme, which we have extended.

"The Health of the Nation"

13. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to update the targets in "The Health of the Nation".

Mr. Sackville: We are making good progress towards "The Health of the Nation" targets, most of which are for 2000 and beyond. They have been set to be challenging but achievable, and remain the right ones.

Drug Education

14. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to extend drug education programmes; and what discussions she has had with local authorities on this matter.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are spending £5 million per annum on campaigns to raise awareness and prevent drug and solvent misuse especially by the young. We have just launched a major new campaign to encourage and help parents to talk to their children about drug and solvent misuse. Getting the message across involves co-operation with many agencies and my officials keep in close touch with local authorities on their contribution to fighting drug misuse.

Internal Market

15. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to review the operation of the internal market in health.

Dr. Mawhinney: The benefits of the internal market are clear; more patients are now being treated than ever before; people are waiting shorter times for treatment. National health service spending is also at an all-time high. Consequently, there are no plans to review the operation of the internal market.

Child Care

16. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the way in which local authority social services are using their discretion in the treatment of children placed in their care, particularly with regard to the provision for trips abroad.

Mr. Bowis: The framework for treatment of children in care by local authorities is contained in the Children Act 1989, regulations and associated guidance. It is the responsibility of the elected members of each local authority to ensure that these are complied with and that the resources involved are properly spent. I have made it clear, however, that trips abroad for young offenders are inappropriate.

GP Fundholders

19. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost of establishing each general practitioner fundholder; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Each fundholding practice is entitled to the reimbursement of appropriate expenses incurred in the preparatory year to fundholding. The maximum level of reimbursement is £17,500 for a single practice fund and £20,000 for a grouped practice fund.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to monitor the impact of general practitioner fundholding on community care; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Regional health authorities are responsible for monitoring the general practitioner fundholding scheme locally. They tell us that, as in other areas, GP fundholders are working with community health staff to improve the quality of care for patients.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many of the practices which expressed an interest in 1992-93 in becoming fundholders the following April but did not do so will become fundholders in April 1994;

(2) how many of the general practitioners practices which expressed an interest in 1991-92 in becoming fundholders the following April but did not do so subsequently became fundholding practices in 1993 or will become fundholders in April 1994;

(3) how many general practitioner practices have received the start-up allowance for potential fundholders more than once.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally. Regional health authorities manage the general practitioner fundholding scheme and are responsible for admitting practices to the scheme.

Patients Charter

20. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been taken to improve the amount of information available to national health service patients under the patients charter.

Dr. Mawhinney: The patients charter gives patients a right to information on local health services. Health authorities are making this information available to patients in many ways, including local charters, through the local media, leaflets, posters and public meetings. All district health authorities also publish annual reports on performance against patients charter standards. Providers are also required to display details of performance. In addition in January 1993 a national freephone service—0800 665544—was introduced which provides callers with information about local national health service services, patients charter standards, common diseases, waiting times, how to complain about national health service services as well as health advice. In June 1994 the National Health Service Management Executive will be publishing national health service performance tables for the first time.

Secretary of State (Travel)

22. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list her travel arrangements, with costs, over the last 12 months.

Mr. Sackville: Information to this level of detail could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Junior Doctors (Working Hours)

23. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the implementation of the new deal for reducing the hours worked by junior doctors.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am pleased to say that progress on implementing the new deal on junior doctors' hours has been very encouraging.

Between September 1990 and September 1993 junior doctors' posts contracted for more than 83 hours a week fell from over 13,000 to only 91, a reduction of 99 per cent. That represents a remarkable achievement.

I announced in December that we were giving priority this year to tackling hard-pressed on-call posts contracted for more than 72 hours a week. We are determined that junior doctors see real benefits from the new deal.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the extent to which measures to cut the working week of junior doctors have achieved their targets.

Dr. Mawhinney: We receive regular reports from regional task forces. Between September 1990 and September 1993 the number of junior doctors and dentists contracted for more than an average 83 hours a week fell from over 13,300 to 91, a reduction of 99 per cent. This is a remarkable achievement.

From August 1992 to September 1993 the number of those working in hard-pressed on-call posts contracted on average for between 73 and 83 hours a week fell from over 10,200 to 7,800, a 24 per cent. reduction. In December 1993 we announced that eliminating the remaining posts in this category will be a priority in 1994.

Asthma

17. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the treatment of asthmatic people.

Mr. Sackville: We attach high importance to the prompt and appropriate treatment of people with asthma. Last July the Department launched the chronic disease management programme, which is an organised programme of care run by general practitioners for people with asthma. And only last month the National Health Service Management Executive asked purchasers to reflect in contracts the professionally developed clinical guidelines produced by the British Thoracic Society on the management of asthma.

21. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has recently received about the incidence of asthma in young people.

Mr. Sackville: In the last three months one representation has been received specifically about a young person with asthma.

24. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work her Department is doing to secure a reduction in the incidence of asthma.

Mr. Sackville: Officials of the Department have initiated discussions with experts in the field with a view to identifying priorities for research aimed at a reduction in the incidence of asthma.

25. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals in Britain have not applied for trust status.

Dr. Mawhinney: A list of the directly managed units in England not awaiting a decision on national health service trust status is set out as follows. Information relating to Scotland and Wales are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Directly Managed Units not awaiting a decision on NHS Trust status

West Midlands
Wolverhampton Primary Healthcare[1]
Sandwell Mental Health

Trent
Glenfrith Unit[1] (Merger with Fosse Health NHS Trust in the 5th Wave)
Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital
Harlow Wood Orthopaedic Hospital
Charles Clifford Dental Hospital

North East Thames
Homerton Hospital
Essex Herts Acute[1]
Essex Herts Community[1]
City and East London Family and Community Health Services

South West Thames
North West Surrey Learning Difficulties
Pathfinder (Wandsworth Mental Health)[1]
Croydon Mental Health Unit (Warlingham Park)[1]

Yorkshire
Seacroft, Killingbeck and Wharfedale Hospital

[1] My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has given permission for these units to submit applications in the fifth wave of NHS trusts.

Hospital Trust Boards (Meetings)

26. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital trust board meetings have been open to the press and the public since 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: Trusts are not required to hold their board meetings in public. Each trust is required to hold an annual public meeting at which it presents its annual report, audited accounts and any report made on those accounts by the auditor.

Many trusts go beyond the minimum requirements on public access. Detailed information is not held centrally.

Social Workers (Training)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in implementing her review of the training of social workers.

Mr. Bowis: The Government are in the process of implementing the range of recommendations from the policy and financial management review of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work—CCETSW. This includes proposals for improvements to the management structure of CCETSW and a review of the "Rules and Requirements for the Diploma in Social Work".

Mental Health Review Tribunal

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who are the members currently appointed to the mental health review tribunal.

Mr. Bowis: A list of members of the English tribunals will be placed in the Library.

Drugs and Alcohol

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations she has received as regards funding for drug and alcohol addiction treatment centres;

(2) what assessment her Department has made on the cost implications arising from shortfalls in service provision for treatment centres for drug and alcohol addiction cases;

(3) what consultations she has had regarding provision of drug and alcohol addiction treatment centres; and if she will make a statement;

(4) what monitoring her Department has done on the impact of the implementation of community care on independent providers of residential services for alcohol and drug misuse; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The Department has received a number of representations about the funding of residential services for alcohol and drug misusers under the new community care arrangements. The Department consulted both providers and purchasers of services for this vulnerable group on the preparation of guidance to local authorities to ensure that alcohol and drug misusers receive proper attention within community care. This guidance, LAC(93)2, was issued in January 1993 and copies are available in the Library.

We also commissioned Goldsmiths' college to monitor the impact of community care on residential services for alcohol and drug misusers in the first three months of community care and the report "Who Cares Now" was published in July 1993. A copy of this report is in the Library. A three-month follow-up report was commissioned by Alcohol Concern and the Standing Conference on Drug Abuse—SCODA—entitled "Vulnerable Services for Vulnerable People" and published in December 1993, copies of which will be placed in the Library. The Goldsmiths' reports make it clear that the numbers of people receiving care funded by local authorities have increased steadily over the first six months of the community care reforms, and that local authorities had specified budgets in 1993-94 totalling £20·59 million for the purchase of services for alcohol and drug misusers within community care.

We shall continue to monitor the provision of services for drug and alcohol misusers within our general monitoring of community care.

Acute Day Care

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of districts provide acute day care as an alternative to hospital admission.

Mr. Sackville: Patients are admitted as day cases within every district health authority in England.

Mental Health

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many districts have a register of the 300 or 400 most severely ill vulnerable people in their area; and how many have a care programme approach register;

(2) how many districts have a suicide register to identify potentially vulnerable people.

Mr. Bowis: Guidance to be issued to district health authorities in the next few weeks will require them to ensure that providers of mental health services have in place from 1 April 1994 registers which identify those people with severe mental illness who may be at risk to themselves or to others. The number of mentally ill people to be included on these registers will be determined locally. The terms "suicide register" and "care programme register" are not in general use in the national health service, but all providers of NHS mental health services should already be able to identify all patients subject to the care programme approach.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many districts have a mental health service plan which targets and prioritises the severely mentally ill.

Mr. Bowis: All district health authorities are developing plans to achieve "The Health of the Nation" target to reduce the suicide rate of severely mentally ill people by at least 33 per cent. by 2000.

Complementary Therapies

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the policy of the NHS on the use of complementary therapies where they are found to be cost-effective; and what criteria are in use to enable the medical professionals and the management to choose and judge;

(2) how the NHS assesses the therapies it considers complementary.

Mr. Sackville: Our policy is that the national health service should assess interventions on the basis of their effectiveness in improving or maintaining health. There are a variety of sources of information on effectiveness, and we are seeking to make such information more readily accessible to managers and clinicians who need it.

Independent Sector Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost to independent sector homes of inspection by local authority arm's-length inspection units *(a)* per resident and *(b)* per year in total.

Mr. Bowis: The annual fee payable to local authorities by those running registered independent residential care homes for four or more residents is £41 per resident. Inspection by independent inspection units is among the costs reflected in that fee.

Information about the total cost of such fees per year is not available centrally.

Prescriptions

Mr. Milligan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the prevalence of fraud in prescriptions issued free of charge.

Dr. Mawhinney: Checks on eligibility for prescription charge exemption and charge remission under the national health service low income scheme indicate that the incidence of fraud is relatively low. The adequacy and operation of these checks are kept under review.

Senile Dementia

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each district health authority and trust the total number of their continual care beds designated for perons diagnosed with senile dementia.

Mr. Bowis: National health services continuing care beds are not usually designated specifically for senile dementia.

Hospitals, London

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital beds there are in the Greater London area per member of the population; what are the comparable figures under the suggestions made in the Tomlinson report; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The average daily number of hospital beds in all specialties in Greater London per thousand of the population in the financial year 1992-93 is 4·9. The Tomlinson report looked only at acute hospital beds and focused on inner London. Professor Tomlinson gave three main reasons why the need for hospital beds in inner London would fall: (i) patients from outside London would be less likely to come into London for hospital treatment; (ii) changes in medical care will lead to more day surgery; and (iii) shorter hospital stays will contribute to increased efficiency in bed usage.

Day Care Places

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of full-time day care places in day nurseries for under-fives provided in each local authority in Greater London.

Mr. Bowis: The latest available information on full-time day nursery places in London is contained in the publication "Children's day care facilities at 31 March 1992, England". Copies are available in the Library.

Community Care

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *794*, if she will give the planned expenditure for the present year under the community care expenditure under the provisions of the special transitional grant; and if she will give the actual outturn expenditure for the first half-year and for each of the first three quarters.

Mr. Bowis: We have made available for 1993-94 a special transitional grant of £565·4 million, which must be spent entirely on community care. Authorities will be required to account for their expenditure at the end of the financial year.

Patient S

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what drugs and treatment were given to Patient S, who recently died following the withdrawal of food and drink, between the time when the feeding tube was removed and his death on 16 January.

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not hold confidential personal information of this nature.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether a post mortem report has been commissioned in the case of the death of Patient S on Sunday 16 January; whether an inquest will be held into that death; and if she will make it her policy to publish any medical, pathological and other reports compiled in respect of this case.

Mr. Sackville: We understand from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department that a post mortem report has been compiled and that an inquest will be held. The decision whether or not to release information put in evidence at an inquest rests with the relevant coroner.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the NHS planned expenditure in England in 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97 in cash and real terms.

Mr. Sackville: The Government are honouring in full their pledge to increase year by year the level of resources committed to the national health service in real terms. Government expenditure on the national health service in England is planed to rise to £30,669 million in 1994-95, a cash increase of 5·6 per cent. over plan, or 1·6 per cent. in real terms. Details of the Government expenditure plans for 1994-95 to 1996-97 for all the Department's programmes will be published in March in the departmental report.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many hospitals and other units will start operation as NHS trusts in April.

Dr. Mawhinney: To date we have given approval to 99 hospitals and other units to become operational as national health service trusts from 1 April 1994. We will be considering further applications shortly and will make a further announcement then. An updated list of the status of all fourth wave applications has been placed in the Library.

Nursing Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of qualified nursing staff by specialty for each region in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 6 December 1993]:* This information will be placed in the Library. The total number of qualified nurses and midwives working in the national health service has risen by 6,490 in the period September 1989 to September 1992.

Meningitis

12. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children are now immunised against HIB meningitis.

Dr. Mawhinney: Immunisation against Haemophilus influenae type b was added to the routine childhood immunisation programme on 1 October 1992. Preliminary figures for England and Wales show that 90 per cent. acceptance for the full course of three doses of vaccine is already being achieved.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to resource the creation of rapid response units, nationally, to combat child meningitis fatalities.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* Children with meningitis are most appropriately treated in paediatric intensive care units. A report, "The Care of Critically Ill Children", by a working party convened by the British Paediatric Association has recently been published and copies are available in the Library. This includes recommendations on how a more accessible distribution of paediatric intensive care facilities can be achieved.

We are about to issue the report to purchasers of health services for children, with the request that they ensure any planned increases in paediatric intensive care facilities proceed and that they review immediately the current level of provison in order to develop a strategic plan for the purchasing of paediatric intensive care within the overall development of children's services. Regional health authorities will oversee this process and submit an interim report on action under way to the National Health Service Management Executive by April.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 26 January 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Stockton-on-Tees County Court

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what future use his Department intends for Stockton-on-Tees county court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor consented on 5 March 1993 to public consultation on the proposal by the circuit administrator for the north-eastern circuit to close Stockton-on-Tees county court. The responses to that consultation are being considered and a decision by the Lord Chancellor will be made shortly. If the court were closed, the present court building would be sold.

Barristers

Ms Lynne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what efforts are being made to ensure that newly qualified barristers are fully utilised.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The legal profession is independent and self regulating and the Government do not control the utilisation of newly qualified, or any other, members of the profession. These are matters which are properly the province of the professional bodies to consider.

Ethnic Minority Seminars

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the purpose of the seminars on ethnic minorities to be undertaken by all judges; how many seminars are taking place; where they are held; on what dates; at what cost in each case; what are the exact topics to be discussed; and if he will name those directing the discussions.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This programme of seminars is arranged by the Judicial Studies Board. Its purpose is to enhance the awareness of judges, recorders and assistant recorders of ethnic minority issues which may assist them. The seminars will be held at locations throughout England and Wales over the next two years; a detailed programme is being prepared. The Lord Chancellor supports this programme and has allocated a sum of over £900,000.

ENVIRONMENT

Minewater Pollution

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each year since 1988 all organisations or projects investigating minewater pollution which have received, or are receiving, financial or grant aid support from his Department.

Mr. Atkins: Comprehensive information in the form required is not readily available. However, the National Rivers Authority is currently funding a pilot project at the Wheal Jane tin mine in Cornwall devoted to identifying low cost treatment options. The NRA is jointly funding, with the British Oxygen Company Foundation for Environmental and Community Research, projects to examine low cost treatment technologies for discharges from disused mines involving the River Pelena in south Wales and the Little Don in Yorkshire. The NRA is also collaborating in a study with the Welsh Development Agency into the efficiency of engineered wetlands for the removal of metals and acidity from discharges from abandoned mines.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he or his Department last held meetings with *(a)* the National Rivers Authority and *(b)* British Coal to discuss minewater pollution in the Durham coalfield.

Mr. Atkins: My Department maintains regular contact with the National Rivers Authority about this and other issues. Liaison with British Coal is a matter for the NRA, and there are well-established arrangements.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the Wardell-Armstrong report on minewater pollution.

Mr. Atkins: Additional copies of Wardell Armstrong's final report on the potential impact of ceasing mine dewatering in the south-western part of the Durham coalfield are being produced. They will be placed in the House Library as soon as they are available.

Environmental Information Regulations 1992

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the operation of the Environmental Information Regulations 1992 since they came into force.

Mr. Atkins: The Government introduced the Environmental Information Regulations just over a year ago, and they seem to be meeting their purpose.

Radiation Monitoring Scheme

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to implement the Government's proposals for a radiation monitoring system and public warning network; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The RIMNET national radiation monitoring and nuclear emergency response system, set up as part of the national response plan for dealing with overseas nuclear accidents, has been operating since 1988. Details of the system are given in the HMSO booklet, "The National Response Plan and Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET). Phase 1", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. A contract to extend, automate and provide additional operational facilities for the system is currently approaching completion.

Biodiversity Convention

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column 566, if he will list the 38 countries that had ratified the biodiversity convention by 29 December 1993; and if he will list the countries that have ratified the convention since then.

Mr. Atkins: Revised information from the United Nations legal office in New York shows that 41 countries had ratified the biodiversity convention by 29 December 1993, rather than the 38 we believed had done so when I answered the hon. Member's earlier question on 18 January. A further two countries have since ratified, and the following is a full list in order of ratification.

List of countries to ratify the Biodiversity Convention

Country	*Date of ratification*
1. Mauritius	4 September 1992
2. Seychelles	22 September 1992
3. Marshall Islands	8 October 1992
4. Maldives	9 November 1992
5. Monaco	20 November 1992
6. Canada	4 December 1992
7. China	5 January 1993
8. Saint Kitts and Nevis	7 January 1993
9. Ecuador	23 February 1993
10. Fiji	25 February 1993
11. Antigua and Barbuda	9 March 1993
12. Mexico	11 March 1993
13. Papua New Guinea	16 March 1993
14. Vanuatu	25 March 1993
15. Cook Islands	20 April 1993
16. Guinea	7 May 1993
17. Armenia	14 May 1993
18. Japan	28 May 1993
19. Zambia	28 May 1993
20. Peru	7 June 1993
21. Australia	18 June 1993
22. Norway	9 July 1993
23. Tunisia	15 July 1993
24. Saint Lucia	28 July 1993
25. Burkina Faso	2 September 1993
26. Bahamas	2 September 1993
27. Belarus	8 September 1993
28. Uganda	8 September 1993
29. New Zealand	16 September 1993
30. Mongolia	30 September 1993
31. Philippines	8 October 1993
32. Uruguay	5 November 1993
33. Nauru	11 November 1993
34. Jordan	12 November 1993
35. Nepal	23 November 1993
36. Barbados	10 December 1993
37. Sweden	16 December 1993
38. Denmark	21 December 1993
39. Germany	21 December 1993
40. Portugal	21 December 1993
41. Spain	21 December 1993
42. Belize	30 December 1993
43. Albania	5 January 1994
European Community	21 December 1993

Olympic Games

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has examined the accounts for the Manchester Olympic Bid Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Manchester Olympic Bid Committee was established under the Companies Acts as a company limited by guarantee. It has no legal link with my Department.

However, since the company received £2·2 million in grant on a pound for pound basis to cover the cost of preparing the bid, my Department carried out an internal audit to assess the adequacy of the arrangements established by the company to safeguard public funds. The report found that the accounting arrangements were generally satisfactory and the terms of the grant letter were being met.

My right hon. Friend expects to receive a copy of the final audited accounts in due course.

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of the commitment given by the Sports Council, the Department of National Heritage and the Prime Minister, including all travel costs, of the Manchester olympic bid campaign.

Mr. Baldry: The Government committed some £75 million to support the Manchester olympic bid. This comprised £35·5 million for the arena; up to £30 million for the acquisition and clearance of the Eastlands site, which is ongoing; £6·4 million for the velodrome, plus £2 million from the Sports Council; £2·2 million to support the activities of the Manchester Olympic Bid Committee.

The Prime Minister and Ministers from a number of Government Departments met International Olympic Committee members on a number of occasions at home and overseas to discuss the olympic bid. Most of the meetings took place in the course of normal departmental business and, therefore, the costs fell within existing departmental running cost budgets. Information about these costs is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the accident rate for children living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation for the last year that figures are available;

(2) how many families with children are currently living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales.

Sir George Young: The information for England is not available centrally and my Department has no estimates.

For information about Wales, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

South-East Planning Guidance

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish regional planning guidance for the south-east.

Mr. Baldry: The regional planning guidance for the south-east will be published as soon as possible.

Council House Sales

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority in London the total discounted value of houses and flats sold by them in each year since 1980-81.

Sir George Young: The total reported discounted values of dwellings sold by local authorities in London in the years 1980-81 to 1992-93 are given in the table. Actual cash receipts in any year will depend on the extent to which sales were financed by loans from the authorities.

Discounted Value of Sales in London *£ thousand*

Local authority	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Barking and Dagenham	0	7,802	29,152	11,262	10,705	14,222	n/a	20,000	45,116	26,984	13,724	10,680	n/a
Barnet	3,664	5,371	8,041	13,595	13,499	12,367	13,065	19,787	21,203	0	9,431	6,714	3,818
Bexley	4,761	6,297	4,041	5,033	3,925	4,179	4,844	7,156	11,580	n/a	n/a	3,315	4,022
Brent	22	3,194	6,794	5,669	n/a	n/a	7,032	n/a	n/a	n/a	21,590	7,932	n/a
Bromley	5,626	8,608	9,470	10,563	14,929	11,848	13,251	23,286	28,124	14,713	n/a	9,013	116,888
Camden	10	346	5,221	1,950	25	1,799	4,611	20	18,663	41,037	32,158	14,103	n/a
City of London	0	3,496	10,997	5,585	3,408	9,230	16,088	15,497	16,795	8,117	3,399	3,755	3,993
Croydon	3,927	10,088	10,717	10,599	9,485	13,522	n/a	20,353	26,744	18,850	8,749	10,912	5,671
Ealing	9,327	11,643	10,620	n/a	7,307	10,475	12,190	11,794	0	n/a	17,663	n/a	n/a
Enfield	3,891	5,513	8,245	13,704	13,610	9,733	11,915	15,608	31,955	27,236	13,518	8,819	4,978
Greater London Council	95,279	43,700	19,768	11,209	6,276	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Greenwich	0	3,029	15,062	6,301	5,980	7,932	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9,891	8,462
Hackney	n/a	390	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	14,570	n/a
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,329	5,853	6,421	5,291	7,047	7,979	7,083	6,600	15,525	11,429	13,587	7,706	4,211
Haringey	0	5,883	8,268	4,713	6,413	7,076	n/a	n/a	19,847	27,359	17,492	10,701	n/a
Harrow	1,739	3,514	6,093	4,315	3,647	5,118	5,724	8,343	12,338	7,776	4,552	4,377	3,596
Havering	427	4,777	6,175	7,632	6,889	6,632	n/a	11,960	19,150	16,672	7,495	4,274	4,388
Hillingdon	n/a	13,069	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hounslow	49	4,082	12,867	8,830	4,888	6,443	6,655	12,329	n/a	20,741	20,357	11,507	7,885
Islington	30	1,791	6,082	4,767	n/a	n/a	n/a	9,785	23,298	33,745	29,304	13,525	11,266
Kensington and Chelsea	1,088	4,394	4,521	2,232	1,700	2,379	5,291	3,971	6,701	n/a	7,499	n/a	n/a
Kingston upon Thames	2,381	2,553	5,727	4,190	2,488	3,073	3,009	2,535	6,504	7,518	3,701	3,344	2,397
Lambeth	0	507	4,453	n/a	128	318	n/a	n/a	13,632	15,444	30,221	21,409	11,611
Lewisham	0	2,665	12,387	n/a	4,981	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14,191	11,397
Merton	6,536	12,173	4,799	6,168	10,424	4,607	9,755	n/a	0	n/a	8,772	5,492	4,146
Newham	1,400	2,925	15,744	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Redbridge	3,080	4,657	5,802	6,063	5,390	n/a	4,369	5,570	9,583	n/a	9,680	5,487	4,190
Richmond upon Thames	1,500	1,336	4,497	4,458	5,296	5,902	3,520	8,196	14,151	10,099	6,108	5,884	4,196
Southwark	60	2,512	7,354	4,257	3,757	5,449	3,883	n/a	n/a	38,448	34,232	n/a	n/a
Sutton	2,201	3,318	4,542	6,386	7,561	5,940	6,178	7,726	12,901	9,518	6,025	3,927	2,801
Tower Hamlets	0	227	2,986	1,957	1,552	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	53,754	n/a
Waltham Forest	0	7,339	9,324	6,695	6,582	n/a	n/a	n/a	14,307	18,139	7,706	4,848	n/a
Wandsworth	10,903	24,023	19,073	21,647	30,703	37,411	32,494	49,354	67,616	72,806	37,031	25,842	19,959
Westminster	3,506	1,602	5,399	n/a	n/a	8,661	10,092	12,515	43,007	61,357	27,935	14,767	10,454

n/a=Not available.

Rent-a-room Scheme

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the number of lettings of spare rooms which have been made available in consequence of the rent-a-room scheme under which owners receive tax relief on certain income from lodgers.

Sir George Young: Information about the number of rooms let under the rent-a-room scheme can be obtained only from housing surveys. No data are available as yet.

Housing, Wandsworth

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the London borough of Wandsworth as to the service charges that are imposed by the authority on people living in properties that they have purchased from the borough; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Service charges imposed by a local authority as a freeholder on individual leaseholders are a matter for that authority. The London borough of Wandsworth is participating in a survey of charging practice, commissioned by the Department. The findings should inform good practice guidance we propose to issue in the summer.

Home Insulation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to institute a national programme to insulate homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My Department already operates a national programme to insulate homes. The home energy efficiency scheme—HEES—was introduced on 1 January 1991 and provides grants in England, Scotland and Wales to householders on low incomes for the installation of loft, tank and pipe insulation, draughtproofing and energy advice. There is a similar scheme in Northern Ireland. In April 1994 the provision for HEES is to be almost doubled and the scheme extended to pensioners and the disabled.

Letting Agents

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider bringing letting agents within the scope of the Estate Agents Act 1979 so as to protect the public against loss of deposits and other malpractices and to ensure that letting agents are properly regulated.

Sir George Young: The Accommodation Agencies Act 1953 already regulates the activities of letting agencies. This makes it an offence to take money for registering the name or requirements of someone seeking a tenancy of a dwelling, to charge for supplying addresses of dwellings to be let and to advertise a dwelling, without the owner's authority, as being available to let. We consulted on the value of the Act towards the end of last year and decided, in the light of responses received, to maintain it in its present form.

In addition, a number of trade associations, such as the Association of Residential Letting Agents already promote good practice throughout the industry by means of codes of practice and bonding schemes. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors is preparing a code of practice on the management of residential property.

Local Authority Asset Sales

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the value of sales by each local authority of (i) parks and open space and (ii) other outside sports and playing fields in (1) 1991-92 and (2) 1992-93 approximated to the nearest £1,000 and *(b)* the total value of assets sold in each of those service categories by all local authorities in each of those years.

Mr. Baldry: The total value of fixed assets sold in the service categories specified is summarised in the table.

£'000

	1991-92	*1992-93*[1]
Parks and open spaces	16,901	23,924
Golf courses	205	768
Other outside sports/playing fields	1,824	644

[1] Provisional figures.

Source: Local Authority Capital Outturn Returns.

I am arranging for information on the sale of fixed assets in these service categories, for each local authority, to be placed in the Library of the House.

Wildlife Injuries, Lancashire

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sea birds and other wild life have been found dead or injured off the Lancashire coast in the last month; what information he has to the causes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

The pollution incident off the coast of Lancashire was reported to the Department of Transport's marine pollution control unit on 1 January. More than 700 sea birds have been affected, but there are no reports of other wildlife being harmed. Samples of the substance recovered from the coastline and samples from a cargo of lubricating oil additives discharged at Eastham near Liverpool on 30 December by the tanker Stolt Kestrel have been analysed by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist. They have concluded that the two samples originated from the same source.

These particular additives are category D substances —the least harmful category—under the relevant provisions of the International Maritime Organisation— "MARPOL 73/78". The owner of the Stolt Kestrel, the Stolt Nielsen Group, has said that after unloading its cargo the Stolt Kestrel washed its tanks more than 12 nautical miles offshore in the Irish sea in accordance with the International Maritime Organisation regulations for category D substances, which permit discharges of mixtures of not more than one part of substance to 10 parts of water. The permitted discharge of washings from tankers carrying noxious liquid substances in bulk is presently under discussion in the IMO with a view to making discharge provisions more stringent.

The marine pollution control unit is discussing the Laboratory of the Government Chemist report with the Stolt Nielsen Group which is considering its position. The group has already announced that it will no longer wash at sea tanks which have carried these additives.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Attorney General, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *1049*, when he expects to inform the House of the results of the survey of cases discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service during November 1993.

The Attorney-General: I have today placed a copy of the findings in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Incitement to Racial Hatred

Mr. Peter Shore: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *1051*, how many cases of alleged incitement to racial hatred under the Public Order Act 1986 were referred to the Crown Prosecution Service in each year since 1987.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service does not maintain records of files submitted to it by the police, or correspondence from members of the public, categorised by the type of offence alleged to have been committed. The information sought is therefore not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Brian Charrington

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the persons present in addition to the Solicitor-General at the meeting he chaired of defence and prosecution counsel dealing with the case of Mr. Brian Charrington.

The Attorney-General: Those present at the meeting were, in addition to the Solicitor-General and myself, leading counsel for the prosecution, leading counsel for Mr. Brian Charrington, two lawyers from HM Customs and Excise and two lawyers from my own Department.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Attorney-General what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during the current year.

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *849*.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Domestic Electricity

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will agree to the proposal by the Comité Européen des Normes to standardise on the continental two-pin unfused star ring system for domestic electricity.

Mr. Eggar: CENELEC, the body responsible for European electrical standards, is working on draft standards for a future European plug and socket system. While the standards under discussion would not incorporate a fuse in the plug, an equivalent level of protection would be achieved either by a suitable fuse or circuit breaker at the consumer unit or by the incorporation of a fuse in the socket. Moreover, the CENELEC work includes provision for sleeved pins on plugs, shuttered sockets and a three-pin plug for those appliances which need earth protection.

If these discussions result in a European standard, the United Kingdom will need to consider whether to adopt it or seek a derogation. In this assessment, safety will be paramount.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what costs will accrue from standardisation to the continental two-pin unfused star ring system for domestic users.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has commissioned an independent analysis of the likely costs and benefits for the United Kingdom of adopting a future European plug and socket standard. The final report from the consultants is expected within a few weeks and will be published in the spring to form the basis for wider consultation on this issue. In assessing whether the change to the United Kingdom's present standards might be desirable, full account will be taken of the cost implications for consumers and industry.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the implications of the Government's "Back to Basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January, *Official Report,* column *849.*

Mr. Rendel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 21 January, *Official Report,* column *849.*

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Eggar: My Department does not classify consultancy contracts in terms of their activity and the information requested cannot be provided other than at disproportionate cost.

Pit Closures

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take measures to ensure that collieries closed by British Coal are put on a care and maintenance basis until he has explored whether or not EC funds are available to help meet the cost of mothballing mines.

Mr. Eggar: British Coal applies for EC loans and grants as and when these are available on appropriate terms. For instance, loans to British Coal from the European Coal and Steel Community for financing capital expenditure at deep mines currently amount to £99 million in total. It is for British Coal to decide how to finance any particular project or activity which it might decide to undertake.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the companies granted licences to build combined cycle gas turbines and the generating capacity of the proposed plant since the EC revoked the restriction on the use of gas for electricity generation.

Mr. Eggar: Details of construction consents granted for new CCGT's are contained in tables 10.2 and 10.3 of the White Paper "The Prospects for Coal", Cmnd. 2235. Since the publication of that White Paper, my right hon. Friend has granted further consents under section 36 of the Electricity Act as follows:

Company	*Location*	*Capacity (MW)*
National Power	Deeside	Extension to 500
	Staythorpe C	1,500
	Didcot B	1,500
PowerGen	Connah's Quay	1,360
Grovehurst Energy	Kemsley	90
SCA Aylesford	Aylesford	100
Seabank Power	Seabank	1,200
Eastern Generation	King's Lynn	380
Central Power	Fort Dunlop	120
Keadby Developments	Keadby	700

Other stations with a capacity below that for which section 36 consent is necessary—above 50 MW—have received planning permission under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

Contracting Out

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will halt any further proposals to contract out information-gathering areas of his Department following the findings of the report into business attitudes to the contracting out of statistical inquiry work.

Mr. Eggar: There are no plans to contract out statistical inquiry work undertaken by my Department.

"Prospects for Coal"

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total cost including the expenses of all consultants he has commissioned to help produce the White Paper, "Prospects for Coal".

Mr. Eggar: The total cost was £1·4 million.

School Fees

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department spent on private education and boarding school allowances for the children of personnel employed by his Department in each of the last five years; and how many children had their fees paid in each of those years.

Mr. Eggar: This expenditure is not identified separately and to provide the information would entail disproportionate cost.

Power Stations

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures his Department is taking to improve the efficiency of British power stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The choice of fuel and type of plant for power stations are commercial matters for generators. The major plants constructed recently or for which consent has been given use combined cycle gas turbines which operate at a higher level of energy efficiency than the old plant which they replace.

The Government support the wider use of combined heat and power plant, which can operate at very high levels of efficiency, wherever this is economic, and have a role in addressing any unnecessary barriers to such developments. On 16 December, the Government announced changes to the regulations governing on-site generation of electricity. These changes should encourage the further development of combined heat and power schemes.

Tours Direct and New Vista Travel

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether customers of Tours Direct and New Vista Travel were covered by the legislation covering package travel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* In so far as Tours Direct and New Vista Travel were offering packages, customers will have been covered by the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what improvements in trade opportunities for British companies he expects to result from the GATT, with particular reference to trade with the United States.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* Improved trade opportunities for British exporters will come from higher world growth, reductions in industrial tariffs, the inclusion of services and intellectual property in the multilateral trading system for the first time, improved trade rules and a more stable international trading environment. The average cut in bound tariff rates on exports of industrial products from the European Community to the United States is 49 per cent. Tariffs will be eliminated completely on agricultural equipment, beer, construction equipment, furniture, medical equipment, paper, pharmaceuticals, certain spirits, steel and toys. The new agreement on Government procurement will open up purchases worth over £200 billion worldwide per year to United Kingdom suppliers of goods and services.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of the GATT on the competitiveness of British industry.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* British industry will benefit from higher world growth and from the reduction of tariffs on imports of components and raw materials into the United Kingdom. British exporters will benefit greatly from the lifting of overseas trade barriers, improved trade rules and a more stable international trading environment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what commitment has been given by the United States Government as part of the GATT negotiations to reduce *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect subsidies to industries; and what was the overall percentage reduction in subsidies undertaken.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* In common with the other GATT signatories, the United States Government will be bound by the terms of the new subsidies agreement which will impose clearer disciplines on subsidies than the present GATT subsidies code. It is too early to say how this will affect the value of any subsidies paid out by the United States Government.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what will be the total reduction in the sum spent by European Governments in the reduction of subsidies to European industries following the GATT agreement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* Except in the field of agriculture, where specific reductions in domestic support and subsidised exports have been agreed, it is too early to say how the GATT agreement will affect the value of any subsidies paid out by European Governments.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Value Added Tax, Southampton

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his estimate of the amount of uncollected VAT arrears in the area covered by the Southampton Customs and Excise office;

(2) what was the total number of Customs and Excise officers engaged in VAT inspections in the area covered by the Southampton Customs and Excise office in each year since 1983;

(3) what was the total number of VAT inspections carried out in the area covered by the Southampton Customs and Excise office in each year since 1983.

Sir John Cope: In December 1993, the outstanding VAT debt of registered businesses within the Southampton local VAT office area was just over £10 million.

Because of the restructuring of local VAT office boundaries and other operational changes, VAT visiting employment figures are not available for the whole period requested. For the years to March 1993 and March 1994, Southampton LVO assigned 43 and 45 officers respectively to such duties.

Using those staff, 3,962 visits were carried out in the period to March 1993 and it is planned to complete some 3,450 visits by March 1994. The number of visits is not, of itself, an indicator of the efficacy of the visiting programme as businesses are selected in accordance with their risk profile which may vary from year to year.

Contracting Out

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what areas of statistical work have been contracted out by the Treasury over the past three years.

Mr. Nelson: No statistical work has been contracted out by the Treasury over the past three years.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will halt any further proposals to contract out information-gathering areas of his Department following the report into "Business Attitudes to the Contracting Out of Statistical Inquiry Work".

Mr. Nelson: Any proposals for contracting out statistical work in my Departments will take the report fully into account in assessing value for money. Business concerns about confidentiality and our quality requirements for statistics would obviously be key considerations.

House Prices

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rise he expects in the price of a typical house in 1994, 1995 and 1996; and if he will provide figures for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions.

Mr. Nelson: Such forecasts are not available.

Rent-a-room Tax Relief

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people will benefit from his rent-a-room tax reliefs.

Mr. Dorrell: Information about the number of people benefiting from the rent-a-room scheme introduced in the Finance (No. 2) Act 1992 is not yet available.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the revenue forgone in consequence of the introduction of the rent-a-room scheme under which owners of property can receive tax relief on certain income for lodgers.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information requested is not yet available.

Value Added Tax (Charities)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much charities are currently paying in VAT; how much benefit they receive from direct tax concessions for giving; and what plans he has to remedy any imbalance.

Sir John Cope: Direct tax reliefs on charitable giving are worth about £260 million a year to charities. Other direct tax reliefs benefiting charities are worth a further £480 million, business rates relief £390 million and VAT reliefs £150 million—a total of £1·3 billion a year. Charities estimate that they pay £350 million a year in irrecoverable VAT.

Value Added Tax (Medical Services)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the implications for the application of VAT to the provision of medical legal services of EEC Council directive of 17 May 1977 on the harmonisation of the laws of the member states relating to turnover taxes-common system of VAT: uniform system of assessment—"the sixth directive"; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement about the application of VAT to the provision of medical services which involve no patient care, including the provision of expert evidence in medical legal cases.

Sir John Cope: The professional services of a registered medical practitioner are exempt from VAT in the United Kingdom. This ensures the simple and straightforward application of the exemption and is in accordance with the requirements of the EC sixth VAT directive.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of people who will pay insurance premium tax.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* Evidence from the 1991 family expenditure survey suggests that around 16·5 million households—85 per cent. —will pay insurance premium tax.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Traffic Lights, Meriden

Mr. Mills: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about the installation of traffic lights at the junction of Oak lane and the A45 near Meriden; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have received no representations about the installation of traffic lights at the junction of Oak lane and the A45 near Meriden.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Press Interviews)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) by whom and in what circumstances a journalist was given access to interview Darius Guppy in prison, for and on behalf of *Hello!* magazine; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when the Prison Service learned that Darius Guppy was to be interviewed in prison by a journalist;

(3) on what date Darius Guppy was interviewed in prison for or on behalf of *Hello!* magazine;

(4) when and what action was taken by him or the Prison Service on discovering that payments had been made by *Hello!* magazine for rights to an interview with Darius Guppy in prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 26 January 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the article appearing in Hello! magazine on Darius Guppy.

We do not know when or by what means Hello! conducted the interview with Mr. Guppy, although it could not have been from a prison cell as suggested in the article. He was not given permission to be interviewed in prison, and was not visited in prison by anyone identified as a journalist. The Prison Service was not aware Mr. Guppy had been interviewed until the article was published in Hello!

I understand that the Press Complaints Commission found Hello! to be in breach of its Code of Practice in making payment for the interview. I similarly deplore such practice. However, I understand payment for the interview was not made to Mr. Guppy but to third parties. Consequently, it would not be a matter over which the prison has any jurisdiction.

Travel Documents

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department *(a)* what is the average time currently being taken to process a travel document, *(b)* how this compares with the target figure in the citizens charter, *(c)* how many cases have exceeded this target in the last 12 months and *(d)* what percentage of applications this represents.

Mr. Charles Wardle: At present, applications for Home Office travel documents made by people accepted as refugees under the terms of the 1951 United Nations convention are taking up to eight weeks to be considered, and other applications about six months. These periods may be exceeded in cases which necessitate further inquiries or which raise other immigration issues. There is no target for this work in the citizens charter. Action is now in hand to process new applications more quickly and tackle the backlog.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants are currently awaiting the processing of travel documents; and what was the application date of the earliest dated application.

Mr. Charles Wardle: At the end of December 1993, there were 5,099 cases outstanding in the travel document section of the immigration and nationality department. The oldest unactioned travel document application from a person accepted as a refugee was made on 18 November 1993, and from a non-refugee on 14 July 1993.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Security Service Tribunal.

Mr. Michael Howard: The current members of the Security Service Tribunal are the right hon. Lord Justice Simon Brown, president, Sheriff John McInnes QC, vice-president, and Sir Richard Gaskell.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Interception of Communications Tribunal.

Mr. Michael Howard: The current members of the Interception of Communications Tribunal are the hon. Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, TD, president, Sir Cecil Clothier KCB QC, vice-president, Sir David Calcutt QC, Mr. Ivor Guild CBE and Mr. Peter Scott QC.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on external consultancy contracts let by the Home Office since 1979 is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Safer Cities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which areas of the Northumbria police force have been included in the safer cities project for 1994-95.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The safer cities project to be set up in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne will encompass the metropolitan district of Newcastle upon Tyne, which is served by four basic command units within the Northumbria police force, namely—Newcastle central, Newcastle east, Newcastle west and Newcastle north.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has received from the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers in relation to the Sunday Trading Bill; and what response he has given.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None; but we understand that USDAW wrote to all Members of Parliament in November last year, in support of partial deregulation.

Visas

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the European Commission's proposed list of countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa when crossing the external frontiers of member states will come into force.

Mr. Charles Wardle: When it has been agreed by the Council of Ministers.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement with regard to the effect on Commonwealth countries of the European Commission's proposals to determine the list of countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa when crossing the external frontiers of member states;

(2) if he will make it his policy, in discussions with the European Commission and in the Council of Ministers about the rights of those Commonwealth countries whose nationals are able to visit the United Kingdom without a visa, to ensure that they may continue to do so;

(3) if he will give undertakings to the Governments of those Commonwealth countries whose nationals are currently able to visit the United Kingdom without a visa that they may continue to do so.

Mr. Charles Wardle: An explanatory memorandum setting out the Government's response to the Commission's proposals will be submitted shortly.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the

European Commission on maintaining the rights of those Commonwealth countries whose nationals are able to visit the United Kingdom without a visa, when drawing up the list of countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa when crossing the external frontiers of member states.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None formally. Formal discussions of the Commission's proposal have only just started.

Juvenile Offenders

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to seek a change in the law to make it possible to identify publicly a juvenile who, having been charged with a criminal offence, is unlawfully at large.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to clause 37 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill which is now before Parliament.

Life Sentence Prisoners

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many life sentence prisoners there are in the northern region; how many have been convicted of murder; and how many have been convicted of serious rape cases.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest information is for 30 June 1992 when there were 156 persons, of whom 149 were convicted of murder and seven were convicted of rape, serving life sentences in Prison Service establishments in the northern region of England and Wales.

Accidents (Cyclists)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many motorists involved in an accident with a cyclist were prosecuted for dangerous driving in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1993.

Mr. Maclean: Information on whether persons prosecuted for dangerous driving had been involved in accidents with cyclists is not available centrally.

Domestic Workers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government will now monitor the screening procedures introduced in May 1991 to facilitate the working of the 1980 concession in respect of domestic workers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The arrangements for this scheme are kept under close review.

Charity Commission

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report,* columns *947-48,* what factors led the Charity Commission to believe that some of the payments made by Foundation for Business Responsibilities to Marketforce Communications Ltd. were not justified; what consideration was given to investigating how these payments had been used by Marketforce Communications Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As I explained in my answer of 17 December, it was the trustees of the foundation themselves who, during the course of the commissioners' investigation, formed the view that some of the payments made to Marketforce Communications Ltd. may not have been justified. Subsequently, these and all other payments to the company by the foundation were recovered in full. New procedures were adopted by the foundation to prevent similar concerns arising in the future.

It is for the charity commissioners to decide on the extent and nature of inquiries that are appropriate in a particular case. In this case, the commissioners were satisfied that sufficient action had been taken to protect charitable funds, and that it was not necessary to continue with their inquiries.

Prisons (Drugs and Alcohol)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the services on drug and alcohol abuse available in each prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Lady Olga Maitland, dated 26 January 1994:

> The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the services for drug and alcohol abuse available in each prison. Detailed information about the services provided in individual prisons relating to drug and alcohol abuse is not collected centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.
>
> There are, however, a number of services available. Detailed information about caring for drug users is set out in Circular Instruction 12/1991 and the resource manual "Caring for Drug Users", copies of which are in the House of Commons Library.
>
> Provision is made for detoxification of drug users on reception, any necessary medical treatment, and treatment programmes. The latter vary between establishments, but include individual and group counselling work, often run by or in conjunction with voluntary agencies. Arrangements are also made for care after release through probation services and voluntary agencies. Our HIV and AIDS education and training for prisoners include particular mention of the dangers of transmission of the HIV virus for injecting drug users.
>
> Drug and alcohol abuse is a very high priority for the Prison Service and we are continuing to develop our programmes for dealing with drug and alcohol abusers.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Anguilla

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the refurbishment of the Governor's mansion in Anguilla is proceeding on time and within cost limits; what is the expected completion date and total cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The first stage of refurbishment of the governor's residence in Anguilla began in April 1993 and was completed in October 1993. The second stage began in December 1993 and is programmed for completion in July 1994. The project suffered some delay at an early stage, but is now proceeding on schedule and within the total works cost estimate of £310,000.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what complaints procedures exist for complaints of political bias or inaccuracy by the media in Anguilla.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All complaints are referred by the Director of Information and Broadcasting to the Chief Minister of Anguilla.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what subsidy is paid to Radio Anguilla by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No subsidy is paid to Radio Anguilla by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who is responsible for the appointment and employment of staff at Radio Anguilla.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The establishments division of the Government of Anguilla, acting on the recommendation of the Public Service Commission, is responsible for the appointment and employment of staff at Radio Anguilla.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what outstanding applications exist for licences to broadcast from radio stations in Anguilla.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are no outstanding applications for licences to broadcast from radio stations in Anguilla.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the role and responsibility of the Governor of Anguilla regarding complaints against Radio Anguilla.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Complaints against Radio Anguilla fall within the portfolio of the Chief Minister, not the governor.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will issue guidelines to Radio Anguilla to ensure the political impartiality of that radio station in the forthcoming general elections and beyond.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Additional guidelines for Radio Anguilla staff are not required in the period leading up to the general election. The governor is confident that Radio Anguilla will continue to operate free from all political interference.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of the Radio Authority's guidelines regarding political coverage for radio stations in the Caribbean dependent territory of Anguilla.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I consider the guidelines to be appropriate, as they are based on the practice adopted by the BBC. These are kept under review by the Department of Information and Broadcasting and updated where necessary.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the independence of Radio Anguilla from the Government of Anguilla; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Radio Anguilla is part of the Department of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of Anguilla and, as such, is free from any form of censorship.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who is responsible for the issuing of licences for radio broadcasts on Anguilla.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Under Anguilla's Telecommunications Ordinance, the licensing authority is the telecommunications officer of the Government of Anguilla.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is prepared to set up a training programme for employees of Radio Anguilla at the BBC World Service.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A training programme with the BBC for employees of Radio Anguilla already exists.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects of a free and fair process in the forthcoming general elections in Anguilla; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am confident that, as in the past, the forthcoming elections in Anguilla will be conducted in a fair and democratic manner.

Women Conference

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who represented Her Majesty's Government at the inter-sessional working group for the fourth world conference on women held in New York, 10 to 14 January; if he will place in the Library a copy of the draft platform for action; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At the intersessional meeting in New York the United Kingdom was represented by the following officials: Ms J. Whitaker, sex equality branch, Department of Employment, Ms J. Graham, social development division, ODA, Ms A. Grant, counsellor, United Kingdom mission in New York, and Mr. P. Tissot, second secretary, United Kingdom mission in New York. The draft platform for action will not be completed until all national reports have been submitted and all preparatory conferences have been held. This will not be before 1995. A copy of the draft platform will then be placed in the Library of the House.

Kathmandu Air Crash

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Nepal concerning publication of the official report into the air disaster at Kathmandu in September 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have not made any representations to the Nepalese Government since the final report of the investigation into the crash of PIA flight PK 268 on 28 September 1992 was circulated in August 1993 by the Nepalese Government to the interested parties including the air accidents investigation branch, which led the investigation. The air accidents investigation branch subsequently distributed copies of this report to relatives of the British victims.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Goodlad: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest position regarding peace initiatives to bring about a ceasefire in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The latest round of talks between the parties in Geneva took place on 18 and 19 January. The talks are due to resume on 10 February. All sides violated an agreed ceasefire over the Christmas period. The United Kingdom and our European Union partners remain fully behind the efforts of Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg to bring the parties to a negotiated settlement.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what deadline has been set for a withdrawal of British troops from the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There is no deadline for the withdrawal of British troops. No decision has been taken on whether the current British contingent in UNPROFOR will be replaced, and none is imminent. Any such decision would be taken after consultation with our fellow troop contributors and other allies.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests Her Majesty's Government have received for additional British troops in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Britain is one of the leading contributors to UNPROFOR, with more than 2,300 troops in the former Yugoslavia. We have not been approached by the United Nations to increase this contribution.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the cost to date to the Exchequer of British peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia; and to what extent this cost will be reimbursed for the cost from the United Nations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom share of United Nations assessed contributions to UNPROFOR is likely to total around £36·5 million for this financial year. The United Kingdom pays 6·373 per cent. of peacekeeping costs on the United Nations scale of assessment. The costs fall to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Additional Ministry of Defence costs for United Kingdom participation in UNPROFOR also fall to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. For the financial year 1993-94, this will amount to about £66·79 million, made up of Operation Grapple—Bosnia—£61·87 million; Operation Cheshire—airlift—£4·54 million; Operation Hanwood—the field ambulance which withdrew in September—£381,975. All amounts are net of standard rate of VAT.

The United Nations has paid standard rate reimbursement for troop contributions to UNPROFOR for the period to the end of October 1993, and for nations to the end of September 1993. Refunds for the financial year 1993-94 to date amount to £15·7 million. Troop costs for the month of November 1993 are due to be paid at the end of January 1994. Other claims for reimbursable items of expenditure —for example, vehicles and equipment—have been submitted to the United Nations, and reimbursement will depend on the United Nation's ability to pay.

Private Education Allowances

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on private education and boarding school allowances for the children of personnel employed by his Department, in each of the last five years; and how many children had their fees paid in each of those years.

Mr. Goodlad: In each of the last five years expenditure on boarding school allowances, and the number of children who attended boarding schools in the United Kingdom, was as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*	*Number of children*
1992-93	7·88	744
1991-92	7·73	880
1990-91	7·58	910
1989-90	7·21	988
1988-89	7·17	998

Expenditure on fee-paying schools for children educated locally at post was as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1992-93	2·00
1991-92	1·80
1990-91	1·68
1989-90	1·58
1988-89	1·54

Details of the total number of children for whom such allowances were paid are not available.

Diplomatic Bags

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *723*, when the present policy of destroying records of material carried by diplomatic bag within one year was introduced.

Mr. Goodlad: The practice of destroying bag schedules after a period of not less than six months has been part of standing instructions for over 30 years. Records of the precise date on which the policy was introduced are no longer available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of

20 January, *Official Report*, column *723*, what are the reasons for the Government's present policy of destroying records of material carried by diplomatic bag within one year.

Mr. Goodlad: Foreign and Commonwealth Office bag schedules record the delivery of material between originator and addressee, and are considered to have served their purpose once the contents of bags have been recorded as safely received. The bag schedules are treated in the same manner as other documents considered ephemeral, which are destroyed after a minimum period of six months.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Hill Farmers

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will provide details of the basis of the sample that her Department use for determining the national average incomes of hill farmers who are in receipt of hill livestock compensatory payments; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Details of the sample, which is part of that used in the farm business survey, together with notes on the method and definitions used are set out each year in "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom", copies of which are in the Library of the House. The latest published data relate to the 1991-92 survey; details of the 1992-93 survey will be published in March.

The survey is carried out by experienced field officers who are employed by universities and agricultural colleges. They visit a sample of 2,300 farmers throughout England and record a wide range of detailed physical and financial information about the farm business. The sample of farms covers all the different types and sizes of farm businesses in the country which are considered to be full-time. Such businesses account for 98 per cent. of agricultural activity in the country as a whole and 97 per cent. on farms wholly or mainly in the less-favoured areas. Great care is taken in the analysis of the results to ensure that the averages produced fully reflect the distribution of full-time farms in the country. Similar surveys are carried out in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. I am confident that the surveys are carried out to the highest professional standards and that they provide a fair reflection of trends in the income position of full-time farm businesses.

Full time farm businesses at June 1991 census and in the complete 1990-91 to 1991-92 identical sample by country, farm type, size group and tenure

	England			*Wales*			*Scotland*			*Northern Ireland*		
	June 1991 Census	*1991-92 Sample*	*Sampling %*	*June 1991 Census*	*1991-92 Sample*	*Sampling %*	*June 1991 Census*	*1991-92 Sample*	*Sampling %*	*June 1991 Census*	*1991-92 Sample*	*Sampling %*
Dairy												
Small	5,504	49	0·9	1,854	28	1·5	142	6	4·2	3,558	106	3·0
Medium	11,274	225	2·0	2,364	88	3·7	1,187	40	3·4	2,015	92	4·6
Large	5,189	190	3·7	627	52	8·3	1,074	47	4·4	257	—	—
All sizes	21,967	464	2·1	4,845	168	3·5	2,403	93	3·9	5,830	198	3·4
of which:												
owned	9,796	168	1·7	2,833	102	3·6	1,753	64	3·7	5,830	198	3·4
tenanted	5,251	100	1·9	790	20	2·5	650	12	1·8	—	—	—
mixed tenure	6,920	196	2·8	1,222	46	3·8	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hill and upland LFA livestock												
Small	4,354	101	2·3	5,139	75	1·5	4,897	86	1·8	4,045	103	2·5
Medium	3,145	124	3·9	3,332	119	3·6	3,296	128	3·9	340	19	5·6
Large	1,033	25	2·4	683	37	5·4	953	49	5·1	34	—	—
All sizes	8,532	250	2·9	9,154	231	2·5	9,146	263	2·9	4,419	122	2·8
of which:												
owned	4,068	93	2·3	5,718	130	2·3	5,646	133	2·4	4,419	122	2·8
tenanted	1,994	73	3·7	1,220	24	2·0	3,500	95	2·7	—	—	—
mixed tenure	2,470	84	3·4	2,216	77	3·5	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lowland livestock												
Small	10,439	76	0·7	1,224	16	1·3	362	14	3·9	1,240	20	1·6
Medium	3,645	78	2·1	338	10	3·0	489	25	5·1	176	6	3·4
Large	1,121	36	3·2	76	2	2·6	237	12	5·1	24	—	—
All sizes	15,205	190	1·2	1,638	28	1·7	1,088	51	4·7	1,440	26	1·8
of which:												
owned	8,920	84	0·9	959	18	1·9	743	24	3·2	1,440	26	1·8
tenanted	2,616	44	1·7	300	5	1·7	345	19	5·5	—	—	—
mixed tenure	3,669	62	1·7	379	5	1·3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cropping												
Small	9,295	46	0·5	—	—	—	774	8	1·0	443	—	—
Medium	10,917	203	1·9	—	—	—	1,547	31	2·0	185	—	—
Large	13,949	530	3·8	—	—	—	1,438	43	3·0	54	—	—
All sizes	34,161	779	2·3	—	—	—	3,759	82	2·2	682	17	2·5
of which:												
owned	14,233	268	1·9	—	—	—	2,336	50	2·1	682	17	2·5
tenanted	7,981	163	2·0	—	—	—	1,423	22	1·5	—	—	—
mixed tenure	11,947	348	2·9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pigs and poultry												
Small	1,812	28	1·5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Medium	1,595	38	2·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Large	1,506	43	2·9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
All sizes	4,913	109	2·2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
of which:												
owned	3,515	65	1·8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
tenanted	506	11	2·2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
mixed tenure	892	33	3·7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

	England			*Wales*			*Scotland*			*Northern Ireland*		
	June 1991 Census	*1991-92 Sample*	*Sampling %*	*June 1991 Census*	*1991-92 Sample*	*Sampling %*	*June 1991 Census*	*1991-92 Sample*	*Sampling %*	*June 1991 Census*	*1991-92 Sample*	*Sampling %*
Horticulture												
Small	3,481	68	2·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Medium	1,212	56	4·6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Large	748	49	6·6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
All sizes	5,441	173	3·2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
of which:												
owned	3,667	123	3·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
tenanted	673	12	1·8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
mixed tenure	1,101	38	3·5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total holdings												
Small	34,963	368	1·1	8,217	119	1·4	6,175	114	1·8	9,458	246	2·6
Medium	31,829	724	2·3	6.034	217	3·6	6,519	224	3·4	2,765	126	4·6
Large	23,573	873	3·7	1,386	91	6·6	3,702	151	4·1	373	—	—
All sizes	90,365	1,965	2·2	15,637	427	2·7	16,396	489	3·0	[2]12,596	[3]372	3.0
of which:												
owned	44,328	801	1·8	9,510	250	2·6	10,478	271	2·6	[2]12,596	[3]372	3.0
tenanted	19,028	403	2·1	2,310	49	2·1	5,918	148	2·5	—	—	—
mixed tenure	27,009	761	2·8	3,817	128	3·4	—	—	—	—	—	—

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[1] The data in this table relate to farm types and sizes sampled for the Farm Business Survey. The totals quoted are therefore slightly lower than the grand totals of full-time farm businesses.

[2] Includes 225 mixed livestock farms not included in the breakdown.

[3] Includes 9 mixed livestock farms not included in the breakdown.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will place in the Library the information note prepared by his private secretary on 3 December 1990 on options for responding to allegations published in *The Sunday Times* on United Kingdom assistance to the Iraqi machine tool industry;

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the chronology of United Kingdom trade with Iraq, including the export guideline milestones, prepared for his office by the Cabinet Office in November 1992;

(3) if he will place in the Library the briefing note prepared for him in support of his answer to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) of 12 November 1992, *Official Report,* column 990.

The Prime Minister: No. All the relevant documents have been made available to the Scott inquiry.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report,* column *456,* how many official Christmas cards he sent out in 1993; and how much this cost.

The Prime Minister: Nine hundred; the direct total cost of purchase and dispatch to the Prime Minister's office was approximately £205. The cost of the other cards I send does not fall on official funds.

Trinidad Terms

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had in the last six months regarding the Trinidad terms; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Under the existing Trinidad terms, which resulted from my personal initiative, 18 countries have benefited. Over $4 billion of debt has been restructured and nearly $2 billion will be reduced over the lifetime of the individual agreements. We expect more countries to benefit over the coming months. These terms have the effect of halving the payments due to creditors and give a commitment to consider restructuring the whole stock of a country's eligible debt after a good track record of economic reform has been established. This would lead to significant additional relief for indebted countries in the medium term.

At the G7 Tokyo summit last July, I secured agreement that improved debt reduction terms should be considered for the poorest and most indebted countries, including, for the first time, earlier action case by case on reducing the whole stock of debt—a key Trinidad terms objective.

The United Kingdom is active in the Paris club and elsewhere in seeking co-ordinated action by creditors on the comprehensive debt reduction which these countries need, the Government miss no opportunity for urging other creditors to make progress.

Second World War Commemorations

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will ensure that recognition is given in the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the Normandy landings to the contribution made by the construction of Mulberry harbours at the town of Tilbury;

(2) if he will consult on ways to commemorate the sacrifices made, and the contribution to victory given, by dock workers and dockland communities throughout the United Kingdom during the second world war.

The Prime Minister: The Government's programme for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the D-Day landings was announced on 6 January: I have arranged for details to be placed in the House Library. Included in the programme is a dinner at the Portsmouth guild hall and representatives of those who designed and built specialised equipment such as the Mulberry harbour will be invited.

Plans are also being made for an official commemorative event in 1995 to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of world war II. This will be a national event involving not only the armed forces, but those civilian organisations which served this country during the war. It pays tribute to all those who sacrificed so much during the second world war.

Correspondence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer on 17 January, *Official Report,* column *367,* if he will place in the Library a copy of the unsigned letter on Mr. Adams's headed notepaper, dated 7 January, which he recently received.

The Prime Minister: I have done so.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will withdraw his appeal to the Court of Appeal against the decision of the Social Security Commissioner that the United Kingdom social security law discriminates against women being paid invalidity benefit.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to hear the result of his appeal to the Court of Appeal against the Social Security Commissioner's decision that the United Kingdom social security law discriminates against women being paid invalidity benefit.

Mr. Scott: A hearing before the Court of Appeal took place on 18 January, when the court decided to refer the case to the European Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling on questions of European law.

State Pensions

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his Department's estimate of the additional cost to the Exchequer in each year from 1980 of linking the state pension to average earnings; and if he will extend this estimate to each year up until 2000-01;

(2) what would the state old age pension for 1994-95 be, in cash terms, if the link with earnings had been maintained since 1980.

Mr. Hague: It is estimated that the weekly rate of category A retirement pension would be £75·10 from April 1994 if it had been increased in line with average earnings since 1980.

The estimated additional cash cost for the years 1980-81 to 1994-95 is shown in the table. An equivalent estimate for the years 1995-96 to 2000-01 is not available in the form requested, and depends on the assumed rate of increase of prices and earnings. However, a comparison between the cost of earnings uprating of benefits and that of prices uprating of benefits from 1990-91 to 2050-51 can be made by referring tables 13 and 14 of the "National Insurance Fund Long Term Financial Estimates—Report of the Government Actuary on the Second Quinquennial Review under Section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975" published in July 1990 as HoC 582.

Additional cost of uprating state Retirement Pension in line with average earnings[1]

Financial year	*Cash cost £ million*
1980-81	66
1981-82	294
1982-83	396
1983-84	465
1984-85	920
1985-86	1,084
1986-87	1,762
1987-88	2,711
1988-89	3,506
1989-90	4,510
1990-91	5,437
1991-92	5,712
1992-93	6,985
1993-94	7,751
1994-95	7,916

[1] *Source* Government Actuary's Department.

Administration Costs

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is *(a)* the administrative cost and *(b)* the administrative cost as a percentage of the payments made by his Department of (i) income support, social fund, (ii) grants, (iii) social fund loans and (iv) family credit.

Mr. Burt: The latest available information is for 1991-92. The administrative cost as a percentage of benefit expenditure is in the table, which is an extract from the 1993 departmental report.

Estimated administration costs 1991-92

	Administration cost (£ million)	*Administration cost as a percentage of benefit*
Income support	1,373	11·8
Social fund[1]	163	[2]45·2
Family credit	33	5·3

[1] Separate costs for social fund grants-loans are not available.

[2] Costs reflect the discretionary nature of most social fund decisions and recovery and recycling of money from loans.

The next departmental report is due to be published by March 1994.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average cost, as a proportion of each claim, of administration of *(a)* child benefit, *(b)* income support, *(c)* invalidity benefit, *(d)* family credit and *(e)* the social fund.

Mr. Burt: The latest available information for the year 1991-92 is in the table.

Estimated administration costs 1991-92

	Administration cost (£ million)	*Administration cost as percentage of benefit*
Child benefit and one parent benefit[1]	118	2·2
Income support	1,373	11·8
Sickness and invalidity benefit[1]	275	5·7
Family credit	[2]33	5·3
Social fund	163	[3]45·2

Source: 1993 departmental report.

[1] Costs not available in respect of separate benefits.

[2] Includes increased capital investment for information technology and publicity costs.

[3] Costs reflect the discretionary nature of most social fund decisions and recovery and recycling of money from loans.

The next departmental report is due to be published by March 1994.

VAT (Fuel)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what specific help with increased heating and fuel bills will be available to those using continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis as treatment for kidney disease, including help for those just above the income support threshold, after the imposition of value added tax on fuel;

(2) what specific help with increased heating and fuel bills will be available to people with already high bills as a result of necessary medical treatment, after the imposition of value added tax on fuel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: We have announced a package of measures worth around £2·5 billion over three years. Pensioners and 80 per cent. of disabled people will receive extra help, as will all those receiving income-related benefits. Those disabled people who do not qualify for extra help are likely to be younger, less severely disabled, in work or better off. In addition, from April, disabled people receiving disability living allowance will become entitled to help with insulation costs through the home energy efficiency scheme.

Income Support (Young People)

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young people aged *(a)* 16 to 17 years and *(b)* 18 to 24 years were receiving supplementary benefit of income support in each year since 1978-79 and the latest month for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: Such information as is available is in the table.

Thousands

Year	*Aged 16 to 17*	*Aged 18 to 24*
1978	80	252
1979	79	256
1980	141	345
1981	166	533
1982	183	719
1983	175	813
1984	185	847
1986	168	903
1987	141	823
1988	101	687
1989	18	683
1990	21	688
1991	22	809
1992	30	925
1993	36	1,073

Notes:

1. *Sources:* Supplementary Benefit Annual Enquiries, 1978–1987; Income Support Annual Enquiries, 1988–1992 (1 in 100 samples each May); February 1993 is the latest information and is based on a Quarterly Enquiry (1 in 20 sample).
2. The figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. The information is not available for 1985.
4. Eligibility for 16 and 17-year-olds changed from 12 September 1988.

Severe Weather Payments

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total level of severe weather payments so far triggered over the winter months 1993-94; what were the figures for each of the past two years for the same period; and if he will give this as a breakdown according to recognised weather stations.

Mr. Scott: All the available information is in the Library.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of administering unemployment benefit in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The information is not yet available. Costs for the financial year 1992-93 will be contained in the next departmental report due to be published in March. The latest available figure is £322 million for 1991-92.

Retirement Pensioners

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are in receipt of the state retirement pension; and what percentages of these *(a)* pay tax and *(b)* receive income support.

Mr. Hague: At 31 March 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, approximately 10 million people (total number of contributory and non-contributory pensions including those payable to people residing abroad) were in receipt of state retirement pension, of whom approximately 14 per cent. were also in receipt of income support.

On the basis of the 1990-91 family expenditure survey, it is estimated that approximately 68 per cent. of individuals in receipt of state retirement pension were taxpayers.

Child Maintenance

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases the maintenance assessment by the Child Support Agency has been lower than a previous maintenance agreement.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to my hon. and learned Friend.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 25 January 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking for the number of cases in which the maintenance assessment of the Child Support Agency has been lower than a previous maintenance agreement.

The Agency does not routinely have information on the amounts of maintenance awarded, and therefore cannot make the comparsion asked for. Average court payments however, prior to 5 April 1993, when the Agency took over from the courts most of its work on assessment and collection and child maintanence, were £25 to £30 a week. Under the Agency's formula, we estimate that payments will average £45 to £50 a week.

I hope that you find this reply useful.

War Pensions

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many jobs in each grade are to be transferred to Blackpool from the DSS archieves at Brunswick street, Nelson; and on what date this is scheduled to occur;

(2) what consultations have taken place with the relevant civil service unions concerning proposals to transfer staff from the Government Records Office at Brunswick street, Nelson, to Blackpool;

(3) how many and at what grade jobs are to be transferred to Blackpool from the Records Office at Brunswick street, Nelson; and when this is scheduled to occur.

Mr. Burt: The administration of war pensions is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 25 January 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the transfer of staff from DSS Archives in Nelson to Blackpool.

I understand that your question refers to staff employed within the War Pensions Unit and are working in the same premises as the DSS Archives in Nelson.

With a reducing number of claims and a new computer system in 1995 the War Pensions Unit is looking at its service delivery to see how work can be better processed.

One option is to centralise the work currently carried out at Nelson within the War Pensions main operations centre at Norcross, Blackpool. There are currently 126 staff engaged on War Pensions duties at Nelson, but as no final conclusion has been reached as to the relocation I am not in a position to comment on the precise numbers or grades of staff which may be involved in such a move, or when such a move may take place.

Full consultation has taken place with all the relevant Civil Service Unions concerning the proposals.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Azerbaijan Refugees

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been given by Her Majesty's Government to Iran to help refugees from Azerbaijan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have this month provided £100,000 to the appeal of the International Federation of Red Cross/Crescent Societies for relief assistance to Azerbaijan. This contribution is specifically tied to support of the Iranian Red Crescent Society's programme for the displaced people in the south of the country.

Oman

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid has been given to Oman in the last five years; and how it was spent.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Gross bilateral aid to Oman over the last five years was as follows:

	£
1988-89	773,000
1989-90	815,000
1990-91	825,000
1991-92	1,044,000
1992-93	750,000

The bulk of this finance was spent by ODA on technical co-operation projects and training mainly in education and agriculture. Short consultancies on investment promotion, engineering safety, industrial diversification, and public administration were also provided. The figures also include a total of £211,000 over the five-year period provided under schemes administered by the diplomatic wing of the FCO, mainly in the form of scholarships.

Aid and Trade

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total aid and trade provision for each of the last five years; and how it was spent.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Total expenditure under the ATP for each of the last five years was as follows:

	£ million
1988-89	58
1989-90	62
1990-91	94
1991-92	101
1992-93	93

This was used to provide grants to support successful tied aid development projects through mixed credits, soft loans and technical co-operation. A full list of projects supported under the ATP is in the Libraries of both Houses.

Malaysia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a correction to his answer of 3 November, *Official Report,* column *239,* in the light of the statement by the Overseas Development Administration permanent secretary before the Committee of Public Accounts on 17 January.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 25 January.

Kenya

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new British aid projects in the areas of *(a)* agriculture and wildlife, *(b)* education, *(c)* health and family planning, *(d)* police and *(e)* transport are now under consideration in discussions with the Kenyan Government.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Projects currently under discussion include support for the national agricultural research programme; Kenya wildlife service; the Kenyan trypanosomiasis research programme; management training for head teachers; the planning function in the Ministry of

Education; projects to increase the availability of family planning services; an AIDS prevention project; a project to strengthen health service management; training for the police; and possible further assistance for Kenya railways.

Projects (Ministerial Decisions)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on which occasions and what projects during his term of office he has overridden professional advice from the Overseas Development Administration that projects are not good value in aid terms and used Overseas Development Administration funds for that purpose.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has given a ministerial direction to ODA's accounting officer on one occasion, in respect of the Pergau hydro-electric project in Malaysia.

Family Planning

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and which non-governmental organisations received support for family planning and related projects through the joint funding scheme in 1993; what these projects were and in which countries they took place.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the financial year 1992-93, the latest year for which figures are available, a total of eight non-governmental organisations received support through the joint funding scheme for projects which were primarily for family planning and related activities. The details are set out in the table.

Agency	*Country*	*Project Name*	*1992-93*
Africa Now	Gambia	Tanji Community Family Planning	26,187
CARE	Sudan	Maternal Health	9,515
Christian Aid	Thailand	Burma Ethnic Minority Refugee Programme	28,003
Health Aid Moyo	Malawi	Expanded Nurse/Midwife Training	84,180
Marie Stopes International	Bangladesh	Employment Based FP Programme for Workers	66,191
Marie Stopes International	Ethiopia	Condom Soc Marketing FP/Aids Prog Urban Couples	64,589
Marie Stopes International	Ethiopia	Maternal and Reproductive Health Clinic	45,738
Marie Stopes International	India	Contraceptive Social Marketing	77,335
Marie Stopes International	India	Family Life Education (Brass Tacks) Extension for Delhi and Lucknow	119,032
Marie Stopes International	India	Workplace FP and Prev HC—Employees and Dependants	73,382
Marie Stopes International	Lesotho	Creating a Corps of Village-based FP Ed/Motivators	5,402
Marie Stopes International	Malawi	Community Mch and FP-Blantyre, Lilongwe and Zomba	146,461
Marie Stopes International	Malawi	Man to Man—Male Orientated Child Spacing/Education	92,303
Marie Stopes International	Mexico	Factory Based Health Care and FP Programme	71,777
Marie Stopes International	Nicaragua	Workplace Preventative Maternal Health and FP	71,278
Marie Stopes International	Pakistan	Lahore Based Reproductive Health Ext Services	2,036
Marie Stopes International	Sierra Leone	Work Based Maternal and Child Health and FP	7,636
Population Concern	Bangladesh	FP Services for the Rakhaine Tribes	19,428
Population Concern	Ethiopia	FP Training for Rural Women Development Agents	17,364
Population Concern	Ethiopia	Jimma-Contraceptive Distribution by Comm Health Agents and TBAs	28,348
Population Concern	Ethiopia	Training of Health Assistants	19,955
Population Concern	Ethiopia	Yirgalem—FP Education and Outreach Services	25,773
Population Concern	Gambia	Youth to Youth Iec on Adolescent Reproductive Health Management	24,034
Population Concern	India	Mobile Education and Service Unit	48,235
Population Concern	India	Women's Development (Kulasekaram and Dindigul)	39,567
Population Concern	Pakistan	Community Leadership Training	16,132
Population Concern	Pakistan	Family Planning Through Community Institutions	28,864
United Kingdom Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific	Vanuatu	Family Health Planning Project	33,771
Urban Aid	Ghana	Family Planning Project	36,277
		TOTAL	1,328,793

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to encourage other member states in the European Union to start funding family planning and related projects within their development and co-operation budgets.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are playing a leading role in pressing for concrete action to follow up the 1992 EC resolution on population. Officials participate in regular expert meetings in Brussels to strengthen co-operation among member states and the Commission. We are also helping the Commission to organise a seminar for EC member states and Commission officials on 28 February.

Natural Resources Institute

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the future status of the Natural Resources Institute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government have decided that a study of options for the future ownership of the Natural Resources Institute—NRI—should be carried out. Consultants will provide advice to Ministers on a range of possibilities for transferring the NRI to the private sector. These will be considered against the option of retaining the NRI within the public sector.

This work will be undertaken against the background of Government policy explained in the 1993 "Next Steps Review", Cm 2430. The results of the study will be taken into account in the wider scrutiny of public sector research establishments which is being undertaken by the Office of Public Service and Science.

WALES

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January, *Official Report,* column *849.*

Live Animals (Export)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning the export of live animals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Government accept that animals can be transported provided proper welfare standards are met. The EC directive on transport sets welfare conditions for the transport of all types of animals in the Community. Agreement on a package of additional measures was blocked by the United Kingdom in December last year because they did not offer real improvements in standards of protection. In any further discussions we shall press the Community to adopt measures reflecting our own high standards.

Sheep Premium Scheme

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of claims for payment under the sheep annual premium scheme had been *(a)* processed and *(b)* paid by his Department by 17 January.

Mr. Redwood: The proportions are *(a)* 85 per cent.; *(b)* 82 per cent.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will announce the arrangements for leasing quotas under the sheep annual premium payments scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The arrangements for the second transfer and lease notification period for sheep quota for the 1993-1994 scheme years will be announced once all the national reserve quota has been allocated. For the 1995 scheme year, it was announced, on 15 November 1993, that notifications of transfers and leases should be submitted between 15 November 1993 and 15 September 1994.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he has made for farmers to have access to Ordnance Survey maps of the appropriate scale for completion of the IACS forms for hill livestock producers.

Mr. Redwood: Those hill livestock producers to whom IACS applies for the first time in 1994 can obtain copies of maps of the scale 1:2,500 from OS agents or other recognised outlets. Maps of this scale generally contain the four-figure national grid reference number of each field and the area in hectares which is required for IACS purposes. Where this information is not printed on the map, or in other areas where maps of 1:2,500 scale are not available, farmers may wish to seek professional help. The detailed requirements relating to mapping and field data, are included in a guidance note which is being sent to producers this week.

Nurses

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many nurses were employed in NHS hospitals in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what are the figures for nurses employed in the community alongside family doctors.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Detailed breakdowns of nursing staff employed by health authorities and NHS trusts into hospital and community staff are not considered reliable. However information on the whole-time equivalent numbers of all hospital and community nursing and midwifery staff is shown in the table as well as numbers of nurses employed by general medical practitioners.

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Hospital and community nursing and midwifery staff[1]:					
Learners[2]	3,118	3,075	2,934	1,970	1,033
Other staff[3]	24,913	25,008	24,956	25,377	25,129
Nurses employed by general medical practitioners[4]	268	459	524	519	544

[1] Staff in post as at 30 September. Excludes staff employed by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority. Figures for 1989 and 1990 include staff working in the Blood Transfusion Service but figures for subsequent years do not as these staff then transferred to the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

[2] Since the autumn of 1991 student nurses have been classified as students and are no longer included in the NHS staff figures. Staff included here are students finishing courses begun before this date.

[3] The use of locally devised payscales from 1991 onwards may affect the comparability of figures as these staff cannot be allocated centrally to a specific staff group and are not, therefore, included above.

[4] Staff in post as at 1 October. Excludes some staff employed by GP Fundholders.

NHS Hospitals (Admissions)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many admissions to NHS hospitals there were in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many of these admissions were re-admissions within a month of hospital discharge.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information, based on aggregate hospital returns of discharge and deaths from NHS hospitals, is given in the table:

	Numbers
1990-91	584,285
1991-92	638,873
1992-93	667,367

Information on how many of these cases were patients re-admitted within a month of hospital discharge is not available centrally.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to monitor the levels of private practice in national health service trusts in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is the responsibility of each national health service trust in Wales to monitor any provision for private patients and ensure that this does not interfere with its obligations to national health service patients. Income generated from private practice will be monitored through audited accounts.

North Avon Training

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if his Department has awarded any training contracts to North Avon Training;

(2) What training companies have replaced North Avon Training for training contracts in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Department has not awarded any training contracts to North Avon Training.

Welsh Language

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to allow A-level students to sit examinations in Welsh if they so request.

Sir Wyn Roberts: It remains our general policy that pupils taught through the medium of Welsh should be assessed through the medium of Welsh. Pupils entry to individual subject examinations is a matter of decision by the school governing body. The range of examinations offered by an individual examining body is a matter for the board itself.

Tai Cymru Budget

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much of the 1993 Tai Cymru budget was allocated to each Welsh constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Housing for Wales does not allocate resources on a constituency basis.

Job Clubs

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those training companies which currently have job club contracts at Newport, Haverfordwest and Merthyr Tydfil.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Training contracts let by job clubs are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Cereals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the average cereal yields per hectare for each of the two cereals regionalisation proposed regions in Wales for each year since 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 16 December 1993]:* The information for 1989 to 1992 is shown in the table. Data for 1993 are not yet available. For the years 1987 and 1988, there is insufficient information available to produce reliable estimates.

Cereal yields in proposed cereals regionalisation regions in Wales[1]

Year	*Average cereal yield (tonnes per hectare)* *Region 1*	*Region 2*
1989	4·50	3·63
1990	5·08	4·39
1991	5·58	4·55
1992	5·85	4·68

Source Cereals Production Survey (MAFF and Welsh Office)[2].

[1] As announced in the letter of 5 November 1993 from the Welsh Office to all cereal producers in Wales which proposed two regions as follows:

Region 1—All parishes containing land classified as suitable for growing winter cereals and having an average of at least 50 hectares of wheat and winter barley during the period 1989 to 1991.

Region 2—All parishes not included in Region 1.

[2] A sample survey: the results shown are accurate to within plus or minus 10 per cent.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the funding of the English tourist board to each of the regional boards for 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Mr. Sproat: The allocation of this funding is for the English tourist board to decide, based on discussions with the regional tourist boards as to whether industry needs are better met by action at the centre or action at regional level. Funding levels for 1994-95 are due to be determined in the near future.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what projections have been made of the potential expansion of overseas visitors to the United Kingdom over the next three years; and what steps he is taking to guarantee adequate investment to ensure this is achieved.

Mr. Sproat: The British Tourist Authority, which receives grant aid from my Department, has forecast 5 per cent. average annual growth in visits by overseas tourists, and 6·5 per cent. growth in expenditure by overseas tourists, during the period 1992-97.

The Government will continue to support the work of the British Tourist Authority in promoting Britain overseas; indeed, an increase in planned support was announced in the recent budget. The authority's corporate plan, agreed by Ministers, also sets challenging targets for attracting non-Government funding for its promotional activities.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list those Departments that have acquired photographs or pictures for their rooms from sources for which he is responsible; and if he will list the paintings and photographs concerned.

Mr. Brooke: The principal source of pictures on loan to Departments is the Government art collection, established nearly 100 years ago under the aegis of the office of works, and now a division of my own Department. Every major Government Department borrows works from the collection. Records are maintained of all the paintings and photographs in the Government art collection and their whereabouts throughout the world, but a written record would run to several hundred pages and could not be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the photographs and paintings on the walls of his rooms, together with the cost of each.

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend has the following paintings and photographs in his office on loan from the Government art collection:

Albatross, by Anthony Gross, cost: £37
Two Coster Girls, by W. R. Sickert, cost: £4,500
Ladder Painting No. 1, by Stephenie Bergman, cost: £1,035
In The Cellar Mirror, by Norman Blamey, cost: £2,925
The Red Cow, by John Armstrong, cost: £16,000
Citadel, Triptych, Bermondsey Street, by Harriet Mena Hill, cost: £3,500

In addition, I have two sculptures and two prints on loan from the Government art collection:

Study for "Standard Unique", by Elisabeth Frink, cost: £81
Study for "Hamstead Figure" 1/5, by Frederick E. McWilliam, cost: £135
Brenda 1984 180/200, and Saturday Morning Shopping 1984 180/200, by Glen Baxter, cost: £117 each.

The costs given are those at the date of purchase.

Finally, there is a work from my own collection and a picture presented to my office.

Sports and Arts

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will give details of the consultations he has had with *(a)* regional sports councils and *(b)* regional arts boards, including dates and the nature of those consultations.

Mr. Brooke: I have so far had no meetings with the regional councils for sport and recreation. However, as part of the review of the Sports Council, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for National Heritage is currently meeting with the chairman of all 10 regional councils and is also visiting all 10 regions.

I have occasional meetings with the chairman of individual regional arts boards. I also met the chairman of the English Regional Arts Boards, Sir Ernest Hall, on 20 January, when a range of matters was discussed.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proportion of expenditure by his Department, and previous responsible Departments, has been for the Arts Council, the Sports Council, tourist boards and the British library in each year since 1981-82; and what is his forecast for 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is as follows:

Percentage

	Arts Council	*Sports Council*	*Tourist Boards*	*British Library*
1981-82	26·8	7·0	8·3	13·2
1982-83	30·3	9·3	9·5	15·7
1983-84	31·5	9·0	8·5	16·7
1984-85	33·3	9·5	8·8	17·7
1985-86	26·3	7·5	6·5	13·8
1986-87	33·9	9·3	7·9	15·2
1987-88	22·1	5·9	5·3	11·5
1988-89	22·2	5·6	5·3	11·0
1989-90	21·8	5·9	5·5	13·3
1990-91	22·4	5·7	5·4	13·9
1991-92	23·1	5·3	5·0	13·8
1992-93	21·9	4·8	4·7	12·6
1993-94	22·8	5·1	4·6	11·0
1994-95	19·1	5·1	4·6	13·6
1995-96	18·8	5·0	4·4	13·1
1996-97	19·3	5·1	4·6	11·3

Notes:

1. The percentage of funding shown for the bodies in question, is based on the central government expenditure for all those activities which now fall within the DNH responsibility. It is not possible to show these figures as proportions of the expenditure of those departments who had responsibility for these functions previously.

2 From 1 April 1994 responsibility for the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils will be transferred from the Secretary of State for National Heritage to the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales respectively. Whilst the above figures take account of all three Arts Councils for the years prior to 1994-95, from that year they represent the Arts Council of England only.

3. The figures are also distorted due to changes in the spending coverage of the Department now and in prior years, for example the inclusion of provision for funding the Welsh 4th Channel with effect from 1992-93.

4. The British Library figures include payments in relation to the building of the new British Library, St. Pancras.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, how many official christmas cards were sent out in 1993 by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* civil servants and *(c)* staff of Government agencies working in or to his Department; and how much these cards cost (i) to buy, (ii) to post and (iii) in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes.

Mr. Sproat *[pursuant to his reply, 19 January 1994, c. 656]:* The chief executives of the Historic Royal Palaces and the Royal Parks agencies have now written to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Welch to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 21 January 1994:

As you know, I have been asked by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Mr. Iain Sproat, to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of Christmas cards sent by the Royal Parks Agency, and the cost of sending them.

The only christmas cards distributed by the Agency were from Richmond Park. The printing costs were sponsored locally.

Envelopes cost £10 and they were sent at normal second class postal rate. It is not possible to quantify the cost of staff time involved in distributing them.

Letter from David Beeton to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 20 January 1994:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for National Heritage, Mr. Sproat, to reply to your Parliamentary Question regarding Historic Royal Palaces Agency christmas cards.

The Agency purchased 1,000 Christmas cards at a cost of £251·51. These, together with stocks (of about 650) remaining from the previous year, were supplied to me and my Palace and Specialist Directors and their staff, all of whom are civil servants.

All cards were despatched at normal second class postal rate, or were sent via the Government Inter Departmental Service. It is not possible to quantify the cost in staff time to sign, address and envelope the cards.

D-Day Commemorations

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the assistance his Department is giving to the Southern tourist board for its D-Day commemorations in 1994 and what additional help he plans.

Mr. Sproat: The English tourist board has given the Southern tourist board a grant totalling around £11,000 for 1993-94. The British Tourist Authority has provided both financial and administrative support for the Southern board's marketing activities on the D-day commemoration in the United States. In addition, they have provided free office space and equipment and under a joint scheme have subsidised the board's costs by 25 per cent. To date, this amounts to around £25,000.

Plans are still being drawn up for the additional funds announced by the Prime Minister on 6 January for the promotion and co-ordination of events associated with the commemoration of D-day.

Sport Facilities

Mr. Hinchliffe To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received about the effects of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 on the use of schools' and colleges' sports facilities by local sports clubs.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* None. However, I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education have a well-established joint policy of encouraging the community use of education premises when these are not required for the purposes of the school or college concerned.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on how many occasions the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage has been replaced by the right hon. Lady Baroness Trumpington on official engagements that he had agreed to attend.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* Since her appointment, Lady Trumpington has carried out four official engagements, which circumstances prevented me from attending as originally scheduled.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

No. 7 Millbank

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what was the cost of converting No. 7 Millbank into offices for hon. Members; and who was responsible for its design and arrangements.

Mr. Ray Powell: Accommodation in No. 7 Millbank was first acquired by the Secretary of State for the Environment for use of the House to replace St. Stephen's house which is to be demolished as part of the works associated with the Jubilee line extension. Further space was then acquired to help meet the shortfall in accommodation for Members and their staff. The estimated net cost of the conversion work is £6·3 million.

The design and arrangements were developed by the contractors together with the Parliamentary Works Directorate, and were approved by the Accommodation and Works Committee.

Lobbying Organisations

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will table a resolution to require commercial lobbying organisations to be registered.

Mr. Newton: I have nothing at present to add to what I said when this issue was debated in the House on 28 June 1993, *Official Report,* columns 784-86. I understand that the Select Committee on Members' Interests has subsequently resumed consideration of the topic.

Prime Minister's Question Time

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Lord President of the Council on how many occasions in each parliamentary Session since June 1983 the Leader of the House has deputised for the Prime Minister at Question Time.

Mr. Newton: This is a matter of public record.

Cars

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Lord President of the Council, if he will quantify the cost of the factors which led to an increase in the cost of cars for Ministers in his Department since 1990-91.

Mr. Tony Newton: The cars in question are provided by the Government car service (GCS). The increase in charges to my department largely reflects:

(i) increases averaging 12 per cent. over the period in pay and the cost of vehicles and fuel;
(ii) an increase in Value Added Tax on GCS bills on 1 April 1991 from 15 per cent. to 17·5 per cent.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Stevens Report

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the Stevens report was commissioned; and which elected representatives have access to all or part of it.

Sir John Wheeler: Mr. Stevens was appointed by the Chief Constable of the RUC to conduct an inquiry into

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allegations of collusion between members of the security forces in Northern Ireland and loyalist paramilitaries, and to make recommendations. A copy of Mr. Stevens's report was made available to my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and a summary of the report was placed in the Library of the House on 17 May 1990.

Schools (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he proposes to lift the current moratorium on capital expenditure on schools in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: My decision to slow down the building programme for schools and colleges was taken with great regret, and only because I judged it more important to protect standards in the classroom.

Planning of projects is still proceeding, but, at this stage, I cannot give a commitment as to when the moratorium will be lifted.

Nursery Schools

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children attend nursery schools; what percentage this is of the total age group available for nursery education; what is the present expenditure per annum on nursery education; and if he will make a statement on the provision of additional nursery schools.

Mr. Ancram: A total of 7,822 pupils attended nursery schools and nursery units in the 1992-93 academic year, which was 30 per cent. of the relevant age group.

Expenditure in 1992-93 on nursery education was some £7·6 million.

The expenditure priority continues to be given to the compulsory schools sector. Additional nursery places are provided as resources allow, with priority directed at areas of greatest social need. An additional 225 places have been made available in the past three years.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time nursery school places are available in the Belvoir estate; how many of each category will be available for the year commencing September; and if he will make a statement about the provision of nursery school education in the Belvoir estate.

Mr. Ancram: The two unit nursery attached to Belvoir Park primary currently provides places for 25 full-time pupils and 50 part-time pupils. From September 1994, the school will move to a dual-day system catering for a total of 100 pupils.

There are no plans to expand nursery provision in the Belvoir estate.

Milk Marketing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he received proposals from the Milk Marketing Board for the reform of the milk marketing schemes; what is the proposed timetable for this reform; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. and learned Friend received a scheme of reorganisation from the Milk Marketing Board for Northern Ireland for the reform of milk marketing arrangements on 31 December 1993. The scheme proposes a date of 1 April 1994 for the ending of the milk marketing scheme in Northern Ireland.

The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland issued a consultation document on the principles of the reorganisation scheme on 17 January. A period of five weeks until 18 February has been given for replies from interested organisations. Responses to the consultation exercise will be considered by the Department in deciding whether the scheme is a qualifying scheme under the terms of the Agriculture (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 and one which ought to be approved.

Loans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each scheme operated by his Department under which loans are available, the objectives of the scheme, the number of unrecovered loans, the total value of unrecovered loans, the average number of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990, the average value of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990 and the annual cost of recovering loans.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* Schemes operated by the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments under which loans are available and their objectives are as follows:

Urban Development Grant (UDG)
UDG is a discretionary grant designed to foster the physical and economic regeneration of inner city areas of Belfast and Londonderry by stimulation of private enterprise and investment. Assistance can be in the form of loans.

Community Economic Regeneration Schemes (CERS)
CERS are jointly funded by the Department of the Environment and the International Fund for Ireland. The objective is to foster property led community development in areas suffering from urban decay where the public sector is unwilling to invest. Assistance with capital costs is usually in the form of 80 per cent. grant and 20 per cent. loan.

Community Regeneration and Improvement Special Programme (CRISP)
The objective of CRISP is to provide finance for community groups to develop property related economic projects in their localities. Elements of assistance may comprise loans.

Belfast Action Teams (BATs)
Loans are paid by BATs to bring about an improvement in the quality of life and an enhancement of the opportunities and prospects of people living in the Action Team areas, and improve the effectiveness with which Government expenditure is used to benefit those living in those areas.

Industrial development board—Selective Financial Assistance (SFA) Scheme
The SFA scheme is administered by the Industrial Development Board to provide loan capital to industry. Funding in various forms including loan capital may, at the discretion of the Department, be offered to approved projects to encourage the introduction and development of internationally competitive companies in the manufacturing and tradeable services sectors in Northern Ireland so as to create the conditions of growth in durable employment.

Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU)
LEDU offers loans to small firms throughout Northern Ireland as part of its overall package of assistance to assist the development and growth of the small business sector.

Tourism Development Scheme (TDS)
TDS's aim is to assist the improvement of the tourist accommodation and amenities which Northern Ireland can offer

and thereby strengthen the competitive position of the tourism industry and improve its contribution to the economy of Northern Ireland. The range of assistance available includes loans.

Government Loans Scheme

The Government loans scheme in Northern Ireland has as its objective the funding of approved capital projects undertaken by local authorities and other prescribed bodies, including schools and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

General Medical Practitioner (GMP) Loans Scheme

This scheme was introduced to assist GMPs in improving practice premises, especially in deprived areas.

Social Fund Scheme

The Social Security Agency operates a Social Fund scheme under which people can apply for interest free loans to meet large intermittent or unexpected expenses. The scheme is intended to help people on a low income who cannot meet exceptional expenses from their regular income.

There are two types of loans available from the Social Fund, budgeting loans and crisis loans. Budgeting loans are available to people who have been receiving Income Support for at least 26 weeks to help with important expenses which are difficult to budget for out of weekly benefit. Crisis loans are available to people who need financial help to meet expenses in an emergency or disaster, whether or not they are receiving benefit. However a crisis loan can only be awarded if it is the only way to prevent serious risk, or serious damage, to their health or safety.

Information regarding unrecovered loans in the schemes for which Department of Economic Development is responsible—SFA scheme, LEDU and TDS—could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

A breakdown detailing unrecovered loans in respect of the other aforementioned schemes is as follows:

	At 31 March 1991	1992	1993
Urban Development grant			
Number of unrecovered loans	1	1	1
Value of unrecovered loans —£ million	0·300	0·300	0·300
Belfast Action Teams			
Number of unrecoverd loans	19	20	21
Value of unrecovered loans —£ million	0·050	0.069	0·080
Government Loans scheme			
Number of unrecovered loans	12,274	12,386	12,500
Value of unrecovered loans —£ million	1,298·400	1,500·800	1,711·000
GMP Loans Scheme			
Number of unrecovered loans	62	60	56
Value of unrecovered loans —£ million	4·304	4·238	4·004
Social Fund Scheme			
Number of unrecovered loans	80,860	99,297	107,662
Value of unrecovered loans —£ million	10·675	13·215	14·396

There are no unrecovered loans under CERS or CRISP.

The cost of recovering loans is not recorded in all Departments and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Paramilitaries

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all members of *(a)* proscribed loyalist and *(b)* proscribed republican organisations who are convicted prisoners in custody in Northern Ireland giving, in each case, the date of their original conviction, their offence or offences, the length of sentence given and their paramilitary affiliation.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* It would not be appropriate to name or divulge details of individual prisoners.

Prison Assaults

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many assaults have been made on prison officers in each Northern Ireland prison in each of the last 24 months; how many prison officers required hospital treatment in each month; and how many assaults in each month were made by *(a)* loyalist prisoners, *(b)* republican prisoners and *(c)* other prisoners.

Sir John Wheeler *[pursuant to the reply, 16 December 1993, columns 871-72]:* The affiliations of the prisoners who carried out assaults on 278 prison officers between December 1991 and November 1993 are as follows:

	Number
Attributable to loyalists	79
Attributable to republicans	34
Attributable to other prisoners	29
Unattributable	[1]136

[1] A large number of assaults on staff occurred during attempts to break up factional fighting and therefore it is not possible to say for certain which individual prisoner caused the assaults.

Information on the number of injured officers requiring hospital treatment could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the implications of the Government's "Back to Basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January, *Official Report,* column 849.

Mr. David Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what working definition of back to basics is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January, *Official Report,* column 849.

EMPLOYMENT

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many official Christmas cards were sent out in 1993 by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* civil servants and *(c)* staff of Government agencies working in or to his Department; and how much these cards cost (i) to buy, (ii) to post and (iii) in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information as requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will produce a table showing the working population of each EC country as a percentage of the total population for the latest figures available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The available information is as follows:

Total employment as a percentage of the population aged 15 to 64, 1991[1]

	Per cent.
Denmark	76
Portugal	71
United Kingdom	69
Germany	65
Nrtherlands	63
Luxembourg	61
France	60
Belgium	57
Italy	56
Greece	55
Ireland	52
Spain	49

Source: OECD, except United Kingdom (Employment Department).

[1] 1991 is the latest year for which comparable data are available.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the United Kingdom are unemployed and are not receiving benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest estimates from the labour force survey for summer—June to August—1993 are that there were 1,099,000 people in the United Kingdom classified as unemployed on the internationally standard ILO measure of unemployment, but not claiming unemployment related benefits; these estimates include spring 1993 data for Northern Ireland. Conversely, there were 1,038,000 claimants that were not ILO unemployed, so that the level of unemployment on the internationally standard definition—2,981,000—was only 61,000 higher, not seasonally adjusted, than the level shown by the claimant count for the equivalent period—2,919,000.

Multiple Unemployment

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the number of families who experience multiple unemployment.

Miss Widdecombe: The labour force survey shows that, in summer 1993, the estimated number of families in Great Britain in which two or more people were unemployed, on the International Labour Organisation definition, was 227,000. This represented 1·5 per cent. of all families in which there were at least two people aged 16 or over.

Temporary Employees

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration he is giving to considering changing the rules governing the protection of temporary employees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. The employment protection rights already extend to temporary employees on the same basis as for permanent employees.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employees are classified as temporary in the United Kingdom; what percentage of the working population this represents; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest estimates from the labour force survey for summer—June to August—1993 are that 1,473,000—7 per cent.—employees in the United Kingdom are employed on a temporary basis; these estimates include spring 1993 data for Northern Ireland. Except for a seasonal increase in the summer of each year, temporary employment in the United Kingdom has remained constant over the past decade at between 5 to 6 per cent.

Access to Work

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which statute empowers him to introduce the access to work scheme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is empowered to introduce Access to Work by the Employment and Training Act 1973, as amended by the Employment Act 1988.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Job Clubs

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what happened to the job club contracts at Bristol, Easton, Gloucestershire, Haverfordwest, Merthyr Tydfil and Newport, Gwent, after the financial collapse of Northavon Training;

(2) what training companies held job club contracts at Bristol, Easton, Gloucestershire, Haverfordwest, Merthyr Tydfil and Newport, Gwent;

(3) whether Happy Extra Ltd., North Avon Enterprise Ltd., Northavon Training, Personal Training or Development Group Ltd. have ever held job club contracts at Bristol, Easton, Gloucestershire, Haverfordwest, Merthyr Tydfil and Newport, Gwent;

(4) if he will list those companies to which job club contracts at Bristol, Easton, Gloucestershire, Haverfordwest, Merthyr Tydfil and Newport, Gwent, were transferred to other training companies, after the collapse of Northavon Training;

(5) what financial assessments his Department has made of Northavon Training.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Paul Murphy, dated 26 January 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the effect of the financial collapse of Northavon Training on Jobclub contracts in Bristol, Easton, Gloucestershire, Haverfordwest, Merthyr Tydfil and Newport in Gwent.

You asked what happened to Jobclub contracts which were previously held by Northavon Training in the above locations and which companies took over these contracts after the collapse of this organisation. Before the company went into receivership it operated eleven Jobclub contracts in the places you mention. Information about these Jobclubs together with details of the organisations who have taken the contracts over are in Annex 1.

It is unusual for a Jobclub contract to be interrupted or terminated because of financial problems on the part of the contractor. Where this does occur, the Employment Service (ES) takes steps to ensure there is as little disruption as possible to the Jobclub members. This can mean making temporary, short-term arrangements which will later be followed by our normal, fully competitive, tendering procedures. Such a process has occurred in several of the locations involved in your question.

I have listed at Annex 2 all organisations which held Jobclub contracts in December 1993 at the locations you mention.

You also asked whether Happy Extra Ltd., Northavon Enterprise Ltd., Northavon Training, Personal Training and Development Group Ltd. have ever held Jobclub contracts in these same locations. I asked my people to check our records and I can say that Happy Extra Ltd. have never held a Jobclub contract. Northavon Training was a subsidiary company of Northavon Enterprises Ltd. which ceased trading in December 1993. Following a management buy out, Northavon Training is now operating as part of the newly formed Personal Training and Development Group. All Jobclub contracts in Annex 1 where with Northavon Training except for the Jobclub in Newport which was awarded to Northavon Enterprise Ltd.

In the past we have not required a financial assessment of prospective programme contractors. This is mainly due to the low risk nature of Jobclub contracts where payments are made monthly in arrears after the service has been delivered. These arrangements mean there is no loss to public funds where a contractor ceases trading because of financial problems. However, some checks were made in the case of Northavon Training and these gave no cause for concern. The issue of more systematic financial scrutiny of potential contractors for Jobclub and other programmes is currently being considered by people concerned with policy development in my Head Office.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex 1

Northavon Training—Jobclub contracts

Locations	*Number of contracts*	*Action*
Bristol	2	Contracts transferred to Northavon Training, as operating division of newly formed Personal Training and Development Group.
Easton	Nil	Not applicable.
Gloucestershire		
Forest of Dean	3	Contracts transferred to Northavon Training, as operating division of newly formed Personal Training and Development Group.
Cheltenham	1	Transferred to caretaker provider—GLOSCAT, pending full competitive tendering exercise to be completed by April 1994.
Gloucester	2	Transferred to caretaker provider—JHP TRAINING, pending full competitive tendering exercise to be completed by April 1994.
Haverfordwest	1	Temporary arrangements to provide Jobclub service internally, pending full competitive tendering exercise to be completed by April 1994.
Merthyr Tydfil	1	Temporary arrangements to provide Jobclub service internally, pending full competitive tendering exercise to be completed by April 1994.
Newport, Gwent	1	Jobclubs within the area were able to accommodate all members. Competitive tendering exercise will be completed by April 1994.

Annex 2

Organisations holding jobclub contracts December 1993

Location	*Name of organisation*	*Type*[1]	*Number of contracts*
Bristol	Fifton College	CFE	4
	Scout Enterprises [Western Ltd.]	PR	4
	Northavon Training	PR	2
	Grant Met Trust Ltd.	PR	2
	Bowerman Associates	PR	1
	North Avon Chamber of Commerce	PR	1
	POC Associates Ltd.	PR	1
	Personnel and Training Services	PR	1
	South Bristol College	CFE	1
	South West Management Ltd.	PR	1
	Appex Trust	CH	1
	Barton Hill Settlement	CH	1
	Newfoundland Employment	CH	1

Location	Name of organisation	Type[1]	Number of contracts
Easton	Scout Enterprises (Western Ltd.)	PR	1
Gloucestershire	Northavon Training	PR	3
	JHP Training Ltd.	PR	3
	GLOSCAT	CFE	2
	Bennington Training Services Ltd.	PR	1
	Personnel and Training Services	PR	1
	Stroud College	CFE	1
Haverfordwest	Northavon Training	PR	1
Merthyr Tydfil	Northavon Training	PR	1
Newport, Gwent	Basil Hewell	PR	2
	Accents Ltd.	PR	1
	Northavon Enterprise Ltd.	PR	1

[1] Key.
PR—Private Provider.
CFE—College of Further Education.
CH—Charity.

EDUCATION

Nursery Education

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the local education authorities where fewer than half of three and four-year-olds attend a full time nursery school or class.

Mr. Robin Squire: In England in January 1993, there were no LEAs where more than half of the children aged three and four were being taught on a full-time basis in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools.

Schools

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools are *(a)* controlled by local education authorities, *(b)* voluntary aided and *(c)* grant-maintained in England.

Mr. Robin Squire: Figures taken from the "Index of Educational Establishments" indicate that the number of schools maintained by local education authorities in England, including maintained nursery, special and hospital schools, is 23,643, of which 4,075 are voluntary aided. In addition, there are 814 grant-maintained schools.

School Inspections

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many independent or private schools have been inspected by Her Majesty's inspectorate or the Office of Standards in Education in the last three years; and if he will list them.

Mr. Forth: The new Government Department, the Office for Standards in Education, was created on 1 September 1992. All inspections carried out by HMI or reports published since that date are a matter for OFSTED. I have asked Professor Sutherland to write to the hon. Member.

Prior to September 1992, when HMI were members of this Department, they undertook a variety of types of inspection visit to schools. Not all of these inspections were planned to lead to published reports. A list of the independent schools which received an inspection visit between 1 January 1991 and 31 August 1992 has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many grant-maintained schools have been inspected by Her Majesty's inspectorate or OFSTED in the last three years; and if he will list them.

Mr. Robin Squire: The new Government Department, the Office for Standards in Education, was created on 1 September 1992. All inspections carried out by HMI or reports published since that date are a matter for OFSTED. I have asked Professor Sutherland to write to the hon. Member.

Prior to September 1992, school inspections were carried out by HMI who were members of this Department. Up to July 1992, none of the visits to grant-maintained schools was a formal inspection intended to lead to a published report. Under the new independent inspection arrangements introduced from September 1993, schools maintained wholly or mainly from public funds, including grant-maintained schools, will be inspected every four years by registered inspectors with published reports and action plans. I will write to the hon. Member in regards to the information requested about HMI inspections before September 1992.

Private and Independent Schools

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is his Department's estimate of the number of private and independent schools currently operating.

Mr. Forth: There are currently 2,294 independent schools, including 15 city technology colleges, in operation in England.

Parents Charter

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which organisations have been asked to tender for contracts to distribute the revised parents charter; and how many copies are to be distributed.

Mr. Robin Squire: Organisations have not yet been invited to tender for the contract to distribute the parents charter later in 1994. Approximately 20 million copies will be distributed.

Moral Education

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what provisions currently exist to ensure that children receive proper moral education, with particular reference to safe sex, at the primary and secondary school levels.

Mr. Forth: The new arrangements for sex education introduced by the Education Act 1993, which will come into force in September 1994, require maintained secondary schools to provide sex education and give maintained primary schools discretion whether to do so. Section 46 of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 provides for sex education to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life. Section 1 of the Education Reform Act 1988 provides more generally for the maintained school curriculum to promote the moral development of pupils. We are currently consulting on a draft circular of guidance to schools on the implementation of the sex education provisions: the final version will be issued in the spring.

Student Unions

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if it is his intention, under his proposed principles to be observed in relation to student union services supported out of public funds, to prohibit student unions from funding or giving strategic support to community action schemes.

Mr. Boswell: The Government are determined to reform student unions and to secure that the principles of choice, democracy and accountability are universallly observed in their activities. It is not our intention to jeopardise student services, for which funding will remain available in institutions' budgets.

University College Fees

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the current level of college fees agreed with his Department in respect of undergraduates in all the colleges of universities who have recognised collegiate structures; and when the levels for the next academic year will be agreed.

Mr. Boswell: The current maximum levels of college fees reimbursed through a student's mandatory award in 1993-94 are shown in the table. The levels for 1994-95 will be agreed during the course of this academic year.

	Fee £
Cambridge colleges	
Christ's	2,526
Churchill	2,511
Clare	2,535
Clare Hall	2,460
Corpus Christi	2,619
Darwin	2,580
Downing	2,700
Emmanuel	2,565
Fitzwilliam	2,706
Girton	2,601
Gonville and Caius	2,562
Hughes Hall	2,460
Jesus	2,589
King's	2,526
Lucy Cavendish	2,616
Magdelene	2,694
New Hall	2,691
Newnham	2,691
Pembroke	2,688
Peterhouse	2,514
Queens'	2,640
Robinson	2,655
St. Catharine's	2,601
St. Edmund's	2,463
St. John's	2,478
Selwyn	2,691
Sidney Sussex	2,694
Trinity	2,460
Trinity Hall	2,628
Wesley	2,622
Wolfson	2,499
Durham Colleges	
University	182
Hatfield	182
Grey	182
Van Mildert	182
Collingwood	182
St. Hild and St. Bede	182
St. Cuthbert's	182
St. Mary's	182
St. Aidan's	182
Trevelyan	182
St. Chad's	945
St. John's	945
Ushaw	945
Kent Colleges	
Darwin	160
Eliot	160
Rutherford	160
Keynes	160
Lancaster Colleges	
Bowland	138
Cartmel	138
The County	138
Furness	138
Fylde	138
Grizedale	138
Lonsdale	138
Pendle	138
Oxford Colleges	
Balliol	2,936
Blackfriars	2,819
Brasenose	2,955
Campion Hall	3,129
Christ Church	2,953
Corpus Christi	2,946
Exeter	2,986
Greyfriars	3,008
Hertford	3,115
Jesus	2,959
Keble	3,183
Lady Margaret Hall	3,108
Lincoln	2,903
Magdalen	2,985
Manchester	3,012
Mansfield	3,297
Merton	2,870
New College	2,977
Oriel	3,108
Pembroke	2,962
Queen's	2,921
Regent's Park	3,116
Ripon (Cuddesdon)	2,775
St. Anne's	3,094
St. Benet's Hall	3,076
St. Catherine's	3,010
St. Edmund Hall	3,069
St. Hilda's	3,062
St. Hugh's	3,096
St. John's	2,918
St. Peter's	3,162
St. Stephen's House	3,011
Somerville	3,067
Trinity	2,939
University	2,972
Wadham	3,030
Worcester	3,021
Wycliffe Hall	3,011
York Colleges	

	Fee £
Alcuin	154
Derwent	154
Goodricke	154
Langwith	154
Vanburgh	154
Wentworth	154

Student Support

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when the report on discretionary student support currently being prepared by the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Sir John Cass Foundation with the Further Education Funding Council and his Department will *(a)* be completed and *(b)* be published.

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) on 7 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *161.*

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to enable local authorities to increase the number of discretionary awards available to students on access courses in further education colleges.

Mr. Boswell: Discretionary awards are made by local authorities, which meet the cost from their own resources. The Secretary of State has no power to intervene in the discretionary award policies of local authorities.

Access Courses

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether the Government intends to increase the number of places on access courses in further education colleges.

Mr. Boswell: The Government's expenditure plans for further education allow for the forecast increase of 25 per cent. in student numbers up to 1995-96 to be met in full, with an additional increase of 3 per cent. between 1995-96 and 1996-97. These plans include provision for students on access courses as defined by schedule 2 to the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Decisions about the number of places in individual subjects or types of courses are for individual colleges, in the light of demand from students and employers and the funding available to them.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Boswell: I have placed in the Library a list of the projects on which consultants were engaged in each year since 1987. The total cost of these was £7·4 million. Information for the years prior to 1987 is not available in the form requested.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* column *414,* how many official Christmas cards he and his junior Ministers sent out in 1993, and how much this cost.

Mr. Boswell: Ministers from the Department sent out some 820 cards in 1993, at a total approximate cost of £710.

TRANSPORT

M62 Relief Road

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total number of valid objections to the M62 relief road proposals received to date at *(a)* the north-west regional office, Department of Transport and *(b)* the Department of Transport, Marsham street.

Mr. Robert Key: So far, 5,180 representations have been received—4,850 at the north-west regional office and 330 at Marsham street. These figures include an element of duplication.

Transport Police

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 15 December, *Official Report,* columns *697-98,* what amendments will be required to the British Transport Police Scheme 1963 (Amendment) Order 1992 to take effect from April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The British Transport Police Force Scheme 1963 will need to be amended to take effect from April to enable the BTP to continue to operate in the restructured railway.

The amendments are needed to allow the British Railways Board, as employer, to enter into the agreements referred to in section 132(3) of the Railways Act 1993. These agreements will enable the BR Board to provide services to other users of the police on a repayment basis.

Some minor consequential amendments will also be needed to ensure compatibility of the scheme with the Railways Act 1993.

Following consultation with the BR Board, London Underground Ltd. and the Docklands Light Railway, the amendments will be laid before Parliament in the spring.

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 15 December, *Official Report,* columns *697-98,* what the budgetary, funding and charging arrangements will be for the British Transport police from April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: In the restructuring railway, the employer of the British Transport police, initially the BR Board, will be responsible for the BTP budget. The budget will be drawn up as now on a regional basis, for consideration by the police committee, in consultation with the BTP and users of their services.

Costs attributable to other users will be recovered in full by the employer through charging. It will be for the employer to ensure that all the appropriate charges are collected.

A licence condition will require operators to use and pay for the services of the BTP. Operators will pay the employer of the police—British Rail—direct. Policing costs will be split between Railtrack, train operating companies, independent station operators and open access operators. Operators will also pay for any specific additional policing requirements.

Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will consider appointing a special adviser for the Isle of Wight's coastal road problems and to assist the highway authority to prepare alternative routes in the event of further slippage;

(2) if he will ensure his officials visit the Isle of Wight to assess the landslip and stability problems and safety of the island's roads for holiday traffic.

Mr. Robert Key: If the Isle of Wight council needs technical advice from the Department of Transport on its road network, it should contact our south-eastern regional office and state its requirements. We shall be glad to provide any assistance we can. Should it prove necessary, officials will visit the island.

A19

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will detail his plans for improving the A19 between Peterlee and the roundabout known as Testo's; when works is expected to *(a)* begin and *(b)* end; and what plans there are to improve Testo's roundabout.

Mr. Key: The section of the A19 between Easington and Hawthorn services will be improved to modern standards by widening the carriageway by 2 m at the same time as essential maintenance work is undertaken during 1994-95.

There are no plans in the current programme for improvement to Testo's roundabout.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Norris: I regret that an answer to this question can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Rail Freight

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department expects to receive a report on the study being conducted by the piggy back consortium into conveyance of freight by rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that this consortium expects its study to be completed by April. I look forward to examining its findings.

Rail Infrastructure (Spending)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing spending on rail infrastructure for each country in the EC per capita for the latest year available.

Mr. Freeman: No. It is difficult to make realistic spending comparisons between railway systems because of differences in areas such as accounting methods, definitions of infrastructure and terrain. However, last January, Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Community, published "Transport Annual Statistics 1970-1990" which gives, at page 14 of the publication, infrastructure spending for seven of the 12 EC countries up to 1989. A copy of this publication has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

A2

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on when the public consultation period will begin on the proposals to dual the A2 road between Lydden and Dover; and by which date he will publish those proposals.

Mr. Key: Investigation of options for the A2 Lydden —B2060—to Dover improvement is continuing and the present programme is for public consultation later this year. The scheme is included in the current review of the road programme and I will make a further announcement about the outcome of the review as soon as possible.

HEALTH

Arboviruses

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work has been done on arboviruses in national health service hospitals by scientists from the Ministry of Defence's Porton Down chemical and biological warfare establishment since 1964; when this work was carried out; what was the conclusion of the work; if the results of the work were exchanged with the United States of America, Canada and Australia; and in which publications the results were published.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has no record of any collaborative work between national health service hospitals and the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data have been collected by her Department regarding the average length of time between the installation of national health service hospital beds and other ward furniture and their replacement.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the number of people suffering from asbestos-related diseases and the numbers of them who do not have bilateral pleural diffuse thickening.

Mr. Sackville: Information on which to base such an estimate is not available.

Complementary Therapies

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much the NHS spent on complementary therapies in each of the last three years for which figures are available;

(2) what definition the NHS uses of the therapies regarded as complementary; and if she will list the therapies;

(3) how many NHS hospitals provide treatment considered to be complementary medicine.

Mr. Sackville: There is no common definition in use within the national health service of complementary therapies, therefore figures on how much the NHS spent and the number of NHS hospitals where treatments are given cannot be provided.

Mental Health

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many districts have a policy and practice plans to deal with those who fall out of care/contact with services.

Mr. Bowis: Information is not collected on districts which have a policy and plans to follow up those who fall out of contact with mental health services. We are planning to issue guidance on discharge arrangements for mentally disordered people which will emphasise the need for follow-up procedures under the care programme approach.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the number of beds in each district for *(a)* special hospitals, *(b)* medium secure beds, *(c)* acute hospital in-patient beds, *(d)* hospital hostel beds and *(e)* community beds in (i) half-way hostels, (ii) crisis care, (iii) respite care, (iv) women only, (v) 24 hours staffed community beds and (vi) day-time staffed beds.

Mr. Bowis: The numbers of long stay beds, short stay beds and medium secure beds by district are published annually in "Bed Availability in England". The latest publication relating to 1992-93 is available in the Library. The remaining information is not available centrally.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the total expenditure of *(a)* West Berkshire health authority and *(b)* each of the other health authorities in the United Kingdom is spent on activities relating to mental health; and how much this represents per capita of the population served by each health authority.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 17 January 1994]:* This information will be placed in the Library.

Unleaded Petrol

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made by the Chief Medical Officer about the possible danger of vapour fumes from unleaded petrol; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Committees on Carcinogenicity—COC—and Medical Effects of Air Pollutants—COMEAP—set up by the Chief Medical Officer to advise him, have considered hazards to health from inhalation of benzene which is a component of vapour fumes from leaded and unleaded petrol. Benzene is an important component of leaded and unleaded petrol. It is limited by European Community directive to a maximum content of 5 per cent. by volume.

Benzene is toxic at high doses and is classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as a human carcinogen. Long-term occupational exposure to benzene at concentrations a thousand times greater than those typically found in urban air in the United Kingdom has been shown to increase the risk of certain types of leukaemia in adults: its use in industry is therefore strictly controlled. Although it is not possible to define an absolutely safe level of exposure to benzene, levels in outdoor air encountered in the United Kingdom are considered by COMEAP and the COC, to present a very low risk to health.

Treatment Facilities

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many districts have residential and general treatment facilities for those who have had challenging behavioural or forensic histories.

Mr. Bowis: Information on the number of beds by sector is published annually in the KHO3 summary booklet, "Bed Availability in England", a copy of which is available in the Library. The number of districts with residential and general treatment facilities of this kind is not recorded centrally, but guidance was issued to health and local authorities in October 1992, LAC(92)15 and HSG(92)42, which emphasised the need to provide a diverse range of services to meet the needs of people with learning disabilities.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will arrange for general practitioner contracts to be amended so that cervical smear tests are carried out every three years.

Mr. Sackville: Our first priority is to increase take up under the existing screening programme, as research shows that the majority of women who develop cervical cancer have not been screened.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health of she will list the management allowances payments made to GP fundholding practices and practices preparing to be fundholders *(a)* by wave and *(b)* in total for each (i) family health services authority and (ii) region.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested will be placed in the Library. General practitioner fundholding has delivered many improvements in quality of care for patients. The costs of the management allowance—at about 2 per cent. of budgets set, represents excellent value for money.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which special advisers in her Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's one special adviser is employed directly by the Department of Health.

Children (Slow Development)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children aged under 16 years suffer from developmental delay and learning difficulties where it has not been possible to establish the reason.

Mr. Bowis: Three to four per 1,000 children are known to have severe learning disabilities. In at least a quarter of these cases the cause is unknown.

Independent Sector Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of beds of an independent sector home in each year since 1979.

Mr. Bowis: The information is shown in the table. Figures for 1981 and 1982 have not been provided for residential care homes as the information held for these years is not considered reliable. No figures are available for nursing homes before 1982.

Mean number of beds available per home in the independent sector at 31 March 1979 to 1992

Year	Residential homes	Nursing homes
1979	21	n/a
1980	21	n/a
1981	n/a	n/a
1982	n/a	26
1983	19	27
1984	19	26
1985	18	26
1986	17	26
1987	17	[1]—
1988	17	26
1989	17	28
1990	17	29
1991	18	30
1992	18	31
1993	[2]—	32

[1] The year of collection for data on nursing homes changed from calendar to financial between 31 December 1986 and 1 April 1988, consequently the figures for 1987 are included in the 1988 entry.

[2] Figures are not yet available.

Sources: Nursing homes SBH212 (1982-1986), KO36 Returns (1987/88-1992/93).
Residential homes RA2-RA4 (1979-1986) RAC5 Return (1987-1992).

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* column *389,* how many official Christmas cards she and her junior Ministers sent out in 1993; and how much this cost.

Mr. Sackville: Some 1,800 charity Christmas cards were sent out, at an estimated cost of £1,080.

Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the size and nature of the list maintained by her Department of candidates for health authority and trust appointments.

Dr. Mawhinney: Nominations for appointment to national health service authorities and trusts, which are received from hon. Members and others, including self-nominations, are forwarded to regional health authorities who are responsible for making some appointments and whose chairmen are required to propose candidates for board appointments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Cold-related Illnesses

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what records are maintained annually as to the effect of cold weather spells on hospital admissions according to GP recommendations.

Mr. Bowis: Anonymised data from hospital patient administration systems are submitted to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in respect of each patient admitted to hospital for treatment. Extracts of the dataset are then analysed by the Department of Health. The patient record will show the condition for which admission was made and will include the date of that admission. There is no central record of the admission practice of individual general practitioners.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research has been undertaken by her Department into the effects of cold weather, hypothermia and chill-related illnesses on the overall health budget.

Mr. Bowis: None. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the most recent estimated cost to her Department of cold-related illnesses.

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available on which to base such an estimate since no precise definition of "cold-related illness" can be made.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure has been incurred by her Department to ensure public awareness of the dangers of cold weather to health and the measures required to combat them; and if she will give a breakdown by regional health authority and regional health boards.

Mr. Bowis: We spent approximately £445,000 on our "Keep Warm Keep Well" public information campaign for the winter of 1992-93. Contributions to the total cost, which approached £500,000, were also made by the Department of Social Security and the Welsh Office. A similar campaign for Scotland, "Keep Warm this Winter" is funded by the Scottish Office at a cost in 1992-93 of £103,000. These campaigns do not involve regional health authorities or regional health boards.

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out for each of the last five financial years, and for 1993-94, the amount of money spent on refurbishing and improving the Yorkshire regional health headquarters in Harrogate.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the Yorkshire regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Sir Brian Askew, for details.

NHS Beds (Private Use)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *534*, what are the safeguards that constrain the opportunities for health authorities and trusts in making available authorised pay-beds.

Mr Sackville: National health service trust hospitals may make beds available for private patients providing there is no significant interference with the performance by the trust of its obligations under NHS contracts. Similar provisions apply to directly managed units. These statutory requirements ensure that NHS patients are not disadvantaged by private practice within the health service.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific auditing or monitoring is undertaken to ensure that national health service private patient charges are calculated correctly and that all costs to the national health service are included.

Mr. Sackville: Auditors examine the adequacy of systems of financial control and compliance with them as part of their annual audit programme.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is her Department's policy on *(a)* collecting centrally and *(b)* for publishing information on the number of authorised pay-beds within the national health service since 1 April 1991;

(2) when she expects information on the number of authorised pay-beds in the national health service for the years 1991-92 and 1992-93 to become available; and what are the reasons for the delay in making public information on authorised pay-beds in the national health service for 1991-92.

Mr. Sackville: Since 1 April 1991, health authorities, on behalf of directly managed units, and trusts have, subject to certain safeguards, been able to determine their own private patient activity. Trusts record private patient income in their accounts but do not "authorise" pay-beds and therefore do not collect authorised bed numbers.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has received indicating abuses or omissions in the compilation of charges to private bed users within the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: None.

DEFENCE

Porton Down

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what tests and studies have been carried by the chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down into binary reactant DF; when these tests and studies were carried out; and what was the assessment of these studies and tests;

(2) if all the tests for the human volunteer programme run by the chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down since 1964 have been carried out on service personnel alone; and if all these tests have been conducted within the grounds of the establishments at either Porton Down or Nancekuke;

(3) what work has been conducted since 1964 inside NHS hospitals by scientists from the Porton Down chemical and biological warfare establishment; when this work was carried out; if this work involved NHS patients; what was the conclusion of the work; if the results of the work were exchanged with the United States of America, Canada and Australia; and in which publications the results were published;

(4) what was the nature of the collaborative work studied by the members of the chemical and biological defence establishment who were stationed for an extended period at the counterpart US military establishments in Edgewood and Fort Detrick and Maryland in recent years; and how much of this collaborative work has been published in open scientific literature;

(5) what is the procedure for monitoring and checking on the health of service personnel who have been tested with chemical and biological warfare agents at Porton Down in the years following the tests; for how many years after the tests check-ups are made; how often the check-ups are made; if this information is automatically made available to the doctors of the service personnel, whether requested or not; and what changes have been made to this procedure since 1964;

(6) what was the conclusion of Porton Down's work on coxiella burnettii referred to in his answer to the hon. Member of 16 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *712-19*, in which years information from this research was exchanged with the United States of America; and with which United States of America military establishment this information was exchanged;

(7) following his answer, from which source the QL referred to in his reply of 16 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *712-19*, was obtained, what was the conclusion of the study; and if VX was produced as a result of the study into the transesterification process involving QL;

(8) what studies and tests have been done by the chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down to assess a nerve agent which penetrates skin and clothes quicker than the G agents and VX; when these experiments were done; and what was the conclusion of the assessment;

(9) if he will make a statement on the considerations leading to the setting up by the chemical and biological defence board of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council of the new biomedical sciences committee and microbiology and biotechnology committee; and if he will name the academic members of these committees;

(10) what experiments his Department has carried out on Rocky Mountain spotted fever; when this work was carried out; what was the purpose of the work; and when and under which defence agreements the results of this work were passed to the United States of America, Canada or Australia.

Mr. Hanley: These are matters for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down—CBDE. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letters from Graham S. Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 26 January 1994:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what tests and studies have been carried by the chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down into binary reactant DF; when these tests and studies were carried out; and what was the assessment of these studies and tests (Question 9,

Order Paper, 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the evaluation of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Some work was carried out in the late 1940s and early 1950s into methyl phosphonyl difluoride at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Sutton Oak in a programme of work on unitary nerve agent precursors. The difluoride was subsequently used in mixtures with the dichloride in work at Nancekuke to prepare unitary nerve agents. No work has been carried out on DF as a binary reactant. More recently a limited study was carried out in 1993 to evaluate possible analytical techniques for DF as part of a programme examining the availability of the analytical techniques required to underpin the Chemical Weapons Convention.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if all the tests for the human volunteer programme run by the chemical warfare establishments at Porton Down since 1964 have been carried out on service personnel alone; and if all these tests have been conducted within the grounds of the establishments at either Porton Down or Nancekuke (Question 10, Order Paper 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,
b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and
c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. All studies for the human volunteer programme run by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment since 1964 are carried out using Service volunteers only and the majority of the studies are conducted within the grounds of the Establishment; a few are carried out at other military establishments. No Service volunteer studies have taken place at Nancekuke.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what work has been conducted since 1964 inside NHS hospitals by scientists from the Porton Down chemical and biological warfare establishment; when this work was carried out; if this work involved NHS patients; what was the conclusion of the work; if the results of the work were exchanged with the United States of America, Canada and Australia; and in which publications the results were published (Question 13, Order Paper 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the evaluation of British protective measures evaluated.

3. In carrying out its programme, CBDE does work in conjunction with academic institutions and hospital departments generally involving an extramural research contract from CBDE. Occasionally, members of CBDE staff participate in the work at these academic institutions or hospitals. No records are maintained of such participation. The involvement of NHS patients would be a matter for the academic institution or hospital concerned.

4. The results of work carried out in conjunction with academic institution and hospital departments forms part of the technology base drawn upon in collaboration with the United States of America, Canada and Australia. Our records do not indicate any publications involving work carried out inside NHS hospitals by scientists from CBDE.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what was the nature of the collaborative work studied by the members of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment who were stationed for an extended period at the counterpart US military establishments in Edgewood and Fort Detrick in Maryland in recent years; and how much of this collaborative work has been published in open scientific literature (Question 16, Order Paper 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. I regret that our records do not provide this information in a readily accessible form. However I have consulted my staff and a small number of them have been stationed in recent years at either Edgewood or Fort Detrick. The nature of the collaborative work studied by members of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment was as follows:

(a) Detection of airborne microorganisms.
(b) Rapid identification of microorganisms by means of immunofluorescence.
(c) Theoretical studies into the penetration of protective suits by aerosol particles.
(d) Studies into the detection of chemical warfare agents focusing on the application of ion mobility spectrometry.
(e) Atmospheric Dispersion Modelling.

3. The published open literature that appeared as a result of this collaborative work was:

(a) PHILLIPS A. P., MORRIS B. C., HALL D., GLENISTER M. and WILLIAMS J. E. Identification of encapsulated and non-encapsulated Yersinia pestis by immunofluorescence tests using polyclonal and monoclonal antibodies. *Epidemiol Infect* 101:59-73,1988.
(b) PHILLIPS A. P. and EZZELL J. W. Identification of Bacillus anthracis by polyclonal antibodies against extracted vegetative cell antigens. *J Appl Bacteriol* 66:419-432, 1989.
(c) EICEMAN G. A., SNYDER A. P. and BLYTH D. A. Monitoring of airborne organic vapors using ion mobility spectrometry. Internat J Environ Anal Chem, 1990. Vol 38 part 3 pp 415-425.
(d) EICEMAN G. A., SNYDER A. P. and BLYTH D. A. Continuous atmospheric monitoring of organic vapors by ion mobility spectrometry. Instrumen Trace Org Monit, 1992.
(e) EICEMAN G. A., BLYTH D. A., SHOFF D. B. and SNYDER A. P. Screening of solid commercial pharmaceuticals using ion mobility spectrometry. Analytical Chemistry, 1990. Vol 62 part 14 pp 1374-1379.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what is the procedure for monitoring and checking on the health of service personnel who have been tested with chemical and biological warfare agents at Porton Down in the years following the tests; for how many years after the tests check-ups are made; how often the check-ups are made; if this information is automatically made available to the doctors of the service personnel, whether requested or not; and what changes have been made to this procedure since 1964 (Question 18, Order Paper 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

(a) assess the ability of service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,
(b) develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and

(c) evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. The procedure in respect of Service volunteers is that on arrival at CBDE each volunteer is given a medical examination to see if they are fit for the proposed study. The nature of the study is explained to them and they are told that they may withdraw from the study without any explanation at any stage. At the end of the study they are given a second medical examination and the fact that they have participated at CBDE in a volunteer study is recorded on their medical records.

4. From time to time, Service volunteers have been recalled so that checks on their medical health can be made. There is no particular frequency or pattern to such recalls. In addition some volunteers return voluntarily to CBDE to take part in subsequent unrelated studies. There is no evidence that Service volunteers have had any deterioration in their health as a result of their participation as a volunteer in a human study.

5. Recently, the practice has been instituted in which all volunteers upon arrival at the Establishment have been read a lay statement by a military officer which states that "It is CBDE policy to call back some volunteer subjects for re-testing from time to time to ensure that the techniques used give consistent and reproducible results and that no changes in the way we apply the tests have occurred with time". The recall of any volunteers to CBDE is recorded on their medical records.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what was the conclusion of Porton Down's work on Coxiella Burnettii referred to in his Answer to the honourable Member of 16th July 1993, Official Report, column 714, in which years information from this research was exchanged with the United States of America; and with which United States of America military establishment this information was exchanged (Question 19, Order Paper 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the evaluation of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The work on Coxiella Burnettii has shown that a number of antibody reagents and gene probes could be produced which could be incorporated into test procedures for the indentification of the agent. This information was exchanged with the United States Army Research Institute for Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) and the US Army Edgewood Research, Development and Engineering Center (ERDEC) since the last 1980s.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking from which source the QL referred to in his reply of 16th July 1993, Official Report, column 712, was obtained, what was the conclusion of the study; and if VX was produced as a result of the study into the transesterification process involving QL (Question 20, Order Paper 18 Janaury 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The QL was obtained from the United States of America and the conclusion of the study into the transesterification process confirmed that it was possible to produce VX from QL.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what studies and tests have been done by the chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down to assess a nerve agent which penetrates skin and clothes quicker than the G agents and VX; when these experiments were done; and what was the conclusion of the assessment (Question 22, Order Paper 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the evaluation of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Our records do not indicate that any tests or studies have been carried out by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down to assess a nerve agent which penetrates the skin and clothing quicker than the G agents and VX.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will make a statement on the considerations leading to the setting up by the Chemical and Biological Defence Board of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council of the new Biomedical Sciences Committee and Microbiology and Biotechnology Committee; and if he will name the academic members of those committees (Question 23, Order Paper 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The Chemical and Biological Defence Board of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council has had three committees since the early 1980s: Physical Sciencies Committee, Life Sciences Committee and Medical Committee. In the late 1980s, an additional committee called the Biotechnology Committee was established under the Chemical and Biological Defence Board and was tasked to produce a report on the implications of biotechnology for defence. The Biotechnology Committee completed its work in early 1992. At the same time some of the activities of the Medical Committee were transferred to the CBDE Ethics Committee and the three committees of the Chemical and Biological Defence Board were reorganised into the Physical Science Committee, the Biomedical Sciences Committee and the Microbiology and Biotechnology Committee.

3. The individual independent members of these committees serve in a personal capacity and it would be inappropriate for the Ministry of Defence to name them.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what experiments his Department has carried out on Rocky Mountain spotted fever; when this work was carried out; what was the purpose of the work; and when and under which defence agreements the results of this work were passed to the United States of America, Canada or Australia (Question 25, Order Paper 18 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. We have no record that any work has been carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment or its precursor establishments into Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when was the last time the Ministry of Defence held discussions at a ministerial level with the United States of America concerning the production of chemical weapons; where these meetings were held; and who attended the meetings.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the dates and locations of all the meetings between his Department and the United States Government since 1979 to discuss the renewed production of chemical weapons by *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the United States of America.

Mr. Hanley: The United Kingdom abandoned its offensive chemical capability in the 1950s. Our policy emphasises the need for an effective defence against the use of chemical weapons and the implementation of international agreements on their control, destruction and eventual abolition. We have had a long-standing and continuing dialogue with the United States on a broad range of issues in the chemical warfare field, including in the 1980s United States plans to update their offensive chemical capability, which were subsequently cancelled by President Bush in May 1991. Details of all meetings where United States plans were discussed could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mutual Weapons Development Programme

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Britain and the United States of America set up the mutual weapons development programme; what was the range of the programme; why it was set up; which United Kingdom Ministry of Defence establishments were involved; and what is the current status of the programme.

Mr. Aitken: My Department is not aware of the mutual weapons development programme referred to by the hon. Member.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Mr. Nicolas Bevan, a former civil servant in his Department, has requested any special access to departmental documents in preparation for his appearance before the Scott inquiry.

Mr. Aitken: All current and former Ministry of Defence officials and Ministers called to give evidence to Lord Justice Scott's inquiry have been offered access to relevant departmental documents.

International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether all defence export sales by International Military Services Ltd. or any of its subsidiaries are subject to licensing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: All exports of defence equipment by International Military Services Ltd. and its subsidiaries are subject to the normal export licensing requirements.

Exports

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Government defence export sales are currently subject to export licensing and which are not; and what changes were made in this during the period after 1980.

Mr. Aitken: All Government defence exports have Crown status and are therefore not subject to export licensing requirements. They are, however, subject to the normal foreign and defence policy considerations.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether defence exports carried out as part of the successive Government-to-Government agreements with Jordan and Saudi Arabia were subject to export licensing.

Mr. Aitken: Sales of defence equipment to Jordan under the memoranda of understanding signed in 1985 and 1987 were subject to the normal export licensing requirements. Exports of defence equipment to Saudi Arabia under the Al Yamamah arrangement have Crown status and are therefore not subject to export licensing requirements, although they are subject to the normal foreign and defence policy considerations. All other sales of defence equipment to Saudi Arabia are subject to the normal export licensing requirements.

Mozambique (Assistance)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance the Government have given and will give to Mozambique to assist in clearing land mines.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence has not to date assisted the Government of Mozambique with the clearance of land mines, and there are no current plans to provide this type of assistance. The United Nations operation in Mozambique has embarked on an extensive mine clearance project.

South Africa

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance his Department is giving to South Africa, following requests, for help and advice in creating a multiracial peacekeeping force.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence, in conjunction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is actively considering with the parties involved how the United Kingdom might best help the process of creating integrated defence forces in South Africa. Any assistance must be at the request of the sub-council for Defence of the Transitional Executive Council in South Africa. The sub-council has approved the formation of a national peacekeeping force and has approached the Commonwealth Secretary-General for assistance to the force. The Government are giving urgent consideration to the request from the Secretary-General for British personnel to form part of a commonwealth advisory team.

Tank Imports

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what model is the tank imported from the Russian Federation in 1992, as listed in the United Nations register of conventional arms.

Mr. Hanley: The model is T-80U.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what comparative study he has carried out into the search and rescue Sea Kings operating and support costs at RAF Chivenor and RAF Brawdy for each of the next five years, from 1 July 1994; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will give his best estimate of the breakdown of operating and support costs for search and rescue Sea Kings from RAF Chivenor in the year commencing 1 August together with that of operating from RAF Brawdy in the same period.

Mr. Hanley:: I will write to the hon. Member.

Bases (Refurbishment)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those bases which are being refurbished in the next three years; and how much is being spent on each base.

Mr. Hanley: All defence establishments maintain a regular programme of maintenance work and, where necessary, new construction, both to maintain the operational effectiveness of the defence estate and to update facilities as defence needs change. Such planned refurbishment expenditure is the responsibility of individual budget holders; information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Government Expenditure

14. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the effect of Government spending plans on the services provided by his Department.

Mr. Lang: Within the total available for public expenditure in Scotland, I shall be imposing strict limits on what is spent directly on staff and the other costs of running the Scottish Office. All areas will be required to demonstrate greater efficiency in delivering services.

Forestry

15. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the working group established in 1993 to report on the options for the ownership and management of Forestry Commission woodlands; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Ministers expect to receive the advice of the forestry review group early this year.

New Towns

16. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of the new town development corporation boards to discuss the wind-up of the new towns; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Winding up of new towns was among the issues discussed when I met the chairmen of each new town development corporation in December 1993. My right hon. Friend last met all chairmen in October 1992 and those of Livingston and Irvine last October.

Local Government Reorganisation

17. **Mrs. Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local government reorganisation.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (M[illegible] Hogg) and for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm).

30. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from those local authorities which organised referendums on local government reform; and if he will give the results of these referendums.

Mr. Stewart: A number of local authorities have conducted referendums including Clydesdale district council in the hon. Member's constituency. However, comprehensive information on the results of these is not available centrally.

36. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from local authorities concerning local government reform and the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill; and of these councils how many indicated that they had conducted referendums on both subjects.

Mr. Stewart: A wide range of representations has been received from local authorities and other organisations about our proposals for local government reform. Some have taken the form of referendum while others have taken the form of opinion polls, petitions and postcard campaigns.

A90 (Dualling)

18. **Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been spent since 1979 in upgrading the newly renamed A90 from Aberdeen to dual carriageway.

Mr. James Douglas-Hamilton: Since 1979, we have spent some £139 million on a major upgrading of the A90 route between Perth and Aberdeen. The opening of the Brechin bypass this spring will complete the dualling of the route and fulfil our manifesto commitment.

Tourist Boards

20. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Scottish tourist board to discuss the reduction in the number of area tourist boards in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet the chairman of the Scottish tourist board to discuss the reduction in the number of area tourist boards in Scotland.

Housing

21. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he plans to meet representatives of tenants' groups to discuss housing needs and investment in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend does not currently have any plans to meet representatives of tenants' groups to discuss housing needs and investment in Scotland. It is for local housing authorities to consider the housing needs of their areas, and to identify their investment needs in their annual capital programmes.

School Buildings (Grampian)

22. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what account he has taken of the changes in the numbers on school rolls within each constituency in the Grampian regional council area when deciding the capital allocation for school buildings.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Capital allocations for school buildings are distributed according to our assessment of education authorities' relative needs and priorities. Several factors are taken into account, including pupil numbers. Each authority is considered as a whole, not on the basis of individual constituencies.

Roads (Strathclyde)

23. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met Strathclyde regional council to discuss road network development.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I met Councillor Malcolm Waugh, chairman of Strathclyde regional council's roads and transportation committee, on Friday 3 December 1993 to discuss progress on the A77 Ayr road route.

Quarries

24. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on allowing planning applications for very large quarries.

Mr. Stewart: Current policy on very large quarries is set out in the "National Planning Guidelines: Aggregate Working", 1977. A copy is available in the House Library. New guidance is to be issued soon.

Forestry Commission

25. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his timetable for the review of the work of the Forestry Commission.

Sir Hector Monro: I expect the forestry review group to present its advice to Ministers early this year.

Drug Addiction

26. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he has taken in order to reduce the crime rate, the increase in drug addiction and the number of drug-related deaths.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government have in place a range of measures aimed at reducing both the supply of, and the demand for, drugs. These measures seek to tackle the problem on a number of fronts, including enforcement of the laws against trafficking and misuse of drugs; prevention and education; and treatment and rehabilitation. The drugs task force led by my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State is currently reviewing what is being done and considering what further steps might be taken.

More broadly, the Government continue to seek to develop initiatives to prevent and deal with crime. Our new crime prevention strategy launched in November 1992 provides a framework within which action to prevent crime can be taken forward. It is encouraging that recorded crime in Scotland fell slightly in 1992 and recent reports from Scottish police forces have indicated that the trend towards lower crime figures continued in 1993.

Bypasses (Fife)

27. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the provision of bypasses for communities in north-east Fife.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government have no current plans for the construction of bypasses in north-east Fife.

Strikes

28. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what analysis he has made of the number of hours lost through strike action in Scotland in 1991 and 1992; and what comparison he has made with the comparable figures for 1978 and 1979.

Mr. Stewart: In Scotland, the number of working days lost through stoppages of work caused by industrial disputes was 28 per 1,000 employees in 1992 and 62 per thousand employees in 1991. The comparable figures for 1978 and 1979, per 1,000 employees, were 429 and 1,569 respectively.

Agriculture

29. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish National Farmers Union to discuss current problems in Scottish agriculture with particular reference to the arable sector.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend met Mr. John Ross, president of the Farmers' Union of Scotland, on Wednesday 24 November 1993 to discuss a range of issues affecting the Scottish arable sector.

European Development Fund

31. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with regional councils about European development fund grants.

Mr. Lang: Scottish Office Ministers have had a number of meetings recently with local authorities and local enterprise companies to consider cases for designation under the European structural funds. The hon. Member will be aware of the Government's success in securing designation, and therefore eligibility for European funding, for areas covering close to 85 per cent. of the Scottish population under objectives 1, 2 and 5b. Close and regular contact will continue to be maintained at official level as regional development plans for the designated areas are drawn up.

Quangos

32. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review his criteria for appointing people to quangos.

Mr. Lang: No. All public appointments must be made on the basis of aptitude and merit. I see no reason to change these criteria.

Hospital Waiting Lists

33. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the number of NHS trust hospitals in Scotland in breach of the patients charter waiting time limits.

Mr. Stewart: There were eight NHS trust hospitals which had patients on waiting lists at 30 September 1993 who had waited longer than the appropriate treatment guarantees.

Mines (Abandonment)

34. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to retain the Scottish mining abandonment plans in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: This is a matter for British Coal as custodian of the record.

Council House Sales

35. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Scotland since May 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is published in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin, housing series, No. HSG/1993/8, "Housing Trends in Scotland". This publication is available in the Library.

Health Care

37. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the chairpersons of health boards to discuss the provision of health care in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: My noble and learned Friend the Minister of State is due to meet health board chairmen on 25 February 1994.

Greater Glasgow Health Board (Management)

38. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to undertake a review of internal management practices at Greater Glasgow health board.

Mr. Stewart: Greater Glasgow health board faces a large agenda of change in implementing its mental health strategy and community care plan, in formulating and implementing strategies for acute and primary care services and in developing its role as purchaser.

The new chairman understands the need for effective management of the board's affairs and is responsible for ensuring that the board is as well placed as possible to undertake these important tasks. My right hon. Friend is ready to offer any necessary support.

Local Enterprise Companies

39. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about commercial confidentiality in relation to local enterprise companies.

Mr. Stewart: The local enterprise companies are required by their operating contracts with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to have in place arrangements to protect confidential and commercial in confidence information, including that of their own directors and others. Precise arrangements are for Scottish Enterprise Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies to determine.

Tourist Boards

40. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the future of tourist boards in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish tourist board has submitted a recommendation on a new area tourist board structure to my right hon. Friend. This is being considered carefully and an announcement will be made in due course.

Hospitals (Emergency Theatres)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if each national health service hospital which carries out operations has a theatre dedicated to emergencies.

Mr. Stewart: In larger hospitals, surgical teams take turns to be responsible for emergencies, typically for 24 hours each, during which they normally have sole use of a theatre for emergency operations. Smaller hospitals cannot operate the same system but will always give precedence to emergency operations over waiting list admissions.

Speech Therapy

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the waiting time for a first appointment with a speech therapist in each health board area.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

Sheriffs

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of a sheriff's time is taken on *(a)* civil and *(b)* criminal and other work.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is estimated that, on average, 30 per cent. of a sheriff's time is spent on civil work and 70 per cent. on criminal and other work.

Hospital Admissions

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many admissions to national health service hospitals for each of the last three years for which figures are available were elective admissions; and how many were emergency admissions.

Mr. Stewart: Information on elective and emergency admissions for the period 1990-92 is set out in the table.

Admissions to Scottish hospitals 1990-92.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*
Elective Admissions	437,538	447,635	484,142
Transfers[1]	83,286	89,344	96,818
Emergency Admissions	369,961	382,141	400,253
All Admissions	890,785	919,120	981,213

[1] Transfer Admissions are transferred from other units, specialties or consultants.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many admissions to national health service hospitals there were in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many of these admissions were re-admissions within a month of hospital discharge.

Mr. Stewart: The total number of admissions to hospital in Scotland and the total number of re-admissions within 28 days is set out in the table.

Total admissions and re-admissions in Scotland 1990-92

Period	*Admissions*	*Re-admissions within 28 days*
1990	803,930	101,209
1991	829,260	107,484
[1]1992	655,535	87,237

[1] First 9 months.

Electricity Privatisation (Severance Schemes)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish details of the severance schemes available to employees which were in operation immediately prior to the privatisation of the South of Scotland electricity board, including details of facilities to make early payment of pensions to staff under such schemes.

Mr. Stewart: Details of the severance and pensions schemes operated by the South of Scotland electricity board until privatisation, and by Scottish Power plc since, were and are matters for the managements of these organisations.

Nurses' Cars

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cars have been allocated to national health service nurses in *(a)* the hospital service and *(b)* the community service in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

NHS Trusts

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will define the purpose of consultation as employed during the process to establish trust status units within the NHS.

Mr. Stewart: The purpose of public consultation on NHS trust applications is to allow consideration to be given to the views of interested parties before deciding whether or not to approve an application.

Greenock Prison

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the size and composition of the visitors' committee of Her Majesty's prison, Greenock; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In a reply I gave to the hon. Member on 23 March 1993, *Official Report,* column *474,* I said that it was the intention of my right hon. Friend to appoint a visiting committee to Her Majesty's prison Greenock, when the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings Act 1993 became law. However, since then the Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules have been drafted and widely circulated for consultation. These rules seek, among other things, to amend the constitution of existing visiting committees and to establish new visiting committees for Her Majesty's prisons Greenock, Friarton and Longriggend. As the revised rules will be laid before the House in the spring, it seems sensible that the new visiting committees should be constituted on a basis which is consistent with them. The visiting committee appointed for Her Majesty's prison, Barlinnie will therefore continue to cover Her Majesty's prison Greenock until the new rules are approved.

Road Improvements

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been spent by each local enterprise company on road improvement programmes; how much has been spent on improvements to roundabouts; and how many roundabouts have been involved.

Mr. Stewart: Many of the local enterprise companies are likely to have been involved in road improvements where this has been an integral part of preparing and developing sites for industry; and some have been involved in the improvement of roundabouts either in this context, as part of their wider environmental and economic development responsibilities, or both.

Under the arrangements whereby responsibility for expenditure up to certain levels has been delegated to Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise companies, the Scottish Office does not hold comprehensive details of activity and expenditure by local enterprise companies on the many specific projects in which they are involved. I have however asked the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to write to the hon. Member with relevant details held by the core body. If, however, the hon. Member is seeking information on a particular project, he may wish to write to the chairman of the local enterprise company concerned.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reports have been commissioned from outside consultants by Scottish Enterprise since its creation; what areas were covered by these reports; what action has been taken by Scottish Enterprise on these reports; and how much has been spent by Scottish Enterprise on each of these reports.

Mr. Stewart: Scottish Office approval for consultancy studies is required only for those studies which cannot be undertaken within Scottish Enterprise's delegated authorities; and no comprehensive record is therefore held by the Scottish Office of consultancies commissioned, the subjects concerned, or action taken consequent to the report findings. These are essentially operational matters; and I have therefore asked the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to respond direct to the hon. Member.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those Scottish companies operating in the electronics sector that are or have been in receipt of regional selective assistance.

Mr. Stewart: Information on individual offers of regional selective assistance, including company name, travel-to-work area and standard industrial classification, is published quarterly in the "Department of Employment Gazette" following the first payment of grant. The gazette is available in the Library.

Tourism

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in the course of the consultation carried out on the review of tourism support in Scotland; and if he will place copies of the representations received in the Library.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: *[holding answer 17 January 1994]:* Responses were received from the following.

	Number
Statutory agencies	8
Tourist industry representative organisations	25
Tourism businesses	195
Area Tourist Boards and representative organisations	34
Local authorities (plus COSLA)	54
Local Enterprise Companies	17
Other organisations and individuals	88

I have arranged for a list of the non-confidential responses to be placed in the Library.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which agencies are employed by Ayrshire and Arran health board to deal with their public relations; how much this service costs; how this has changed since the establishment of Ayrshire's three NHS trusts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* The Ayrshire and Arran health board employs Alan Clark Associates to provide a public relations service. Prior to the setting up of NHS trusts in the board's area, the service cost £25,000. Subsequently, the cost has been £15,000. The board considers that this specialist service ensures that communications with other organisations and the public, which are an essential feature of the board's role as a purchaser of health services for its residents, are carried out effectively and to a high standard.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he has given to Scottish councils concerning tendering under EC directive 92/50.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* My Department has sent three letters to Scottish councils regarding EC directive 92/50. A letter dated 13 July 1993 reminded councils that the directive came into force on 1 July 1993; on 17 December 1993, councils were sent the revised threshold effective from 1 January 1994, and a letter was issued on 13 January 1994 which advised councils that the directive had been transposed into United Kingdom law by the Public Service Contract Regulations 1993, SI 3228.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 27 January 1994

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cuba

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding present United Kingdom relations with Cuba.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Relations with Cuba are correct. We are in diplomatic relations with Cuba and are in favour of increased trade between the two countries.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Waldegrave: Neither of my two special advisers is serving on secondment terms.

Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have no plans to buy or borrow any photographs for display in my ministerial office.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have six paintings and three engravings on the walls of my ministerial office.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Brian Charrington

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General what contact took place between his Department and the journalist John Merry of Darlington about the case of Brian Charrington; at what level this was authorised; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: None. The contact between Mr. John Merry and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), who had had no departmental involvement in the case at all, took place in my hon. Friend's capacity as a constituency Member of Parliament and without any reference to my Department.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General for what reason a representative of his office met counsel for Brian Charrington; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on Wednesday 26 January to the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris). The meeting which I held on 21 December 1992 followed a request by leading counsel for Mr. Charrington to see the Law Officers in order to make representations to them, in view of their general responsibility in relation to prosecutions, about the length of time his client had been in custody and the need for a final decision as to whether the case should proceed having regard to recent representations made by Mr. Charrington's solicitors in the light of the evidence.

The representatives of HM Customs and Excise at that meeting explained that further inquiries were already in hand. It was agreed that these should be expedited and a final advice obtained from prosecuting counsel as soon as practicable. The Commissioners of Customs and Excise, having received that advice, decided on 27 January 1993 to withdraw proceedings against Mr. Brian Charrington. Although the Attorney-General had been kept informed of progress he was not consulted about that decision.

WALES

Deeside

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his plans to improve the environment and tackle dereliction on Deeside, Clwyd.

Mr. Redwood: Considerable resources are being devoted to improving the environment of Deeside. The WDA has already completed over 40 land reclamation schemes covering almost 1,000 acres at a cost of over £13 million. A further 28 schemes costing £6·6 million are in progress or planned; these will lead to the reclamation of an additional 300 acres.

The agency also has a programme of environmental improvement projects to be carried out in partnership with the local authorities, the private sector and other bodies. Projects to be implemented this year include the landscaping of the bypasses at Bagillt and Ffynnongroyw and environmental improvements at the Greenfield business centre. Environmental enhancement will also be one of the aims of a planned joint venture currently being discussed by the agency, Alyn and Deeside district council and Clwyd county council. This will focus on north Deeside and encourage both economic and environmental regeneration.

Farm and Conservation Grant

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes there have been in the interpretation of expenditure incurred in the guidelines agreed between his Department and the Treasury for operation of the Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) Order 1993.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Cardiology

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement regarding the instructions given by Gwynedd health authority that all future referrals for cardiological opinion of Gwynedd patients are to be made to the cardiology unit in Manchester.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for Gwynedd health authority, taking into account a number of factors, including the views of patients, the assessment of clinical quality as judged by general practitioners and consultants, the waiting time for a first diagnosis, cost and the distance between a patient's home and the hospital.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to pay interest on all overdue sheep annual premium payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: No. Most of the 17 per cent. of payments outstanding cannot be paid until queries about their eligibility are resolved.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farmers in Wales are still awaiting payments with respect to their 1993 sheep annual premium scheme; and when he expects these payments to be made.

Mr. Redwood: A total of 17,442 eligible claims were received and 3,043 remain to be paid. As in earlier years, the majority of payments outstanding are awaiting the resolution of queries or farm visits by officials.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many outstanding claims there are to be processed with respect to the 1993 sheep annual premium scheme; and when he expects the remaining claims to be processed.

Mr. Redwood: A total of 2,489 claims remain to be processed out of the 17,442 valid claims received. The balance will be paid as soon as outstanding queries about their eligibility are resolved.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the total cash amount in sheep annual premium payments that has not yet been sent out to farmers with respect to 1993 payments.

Mr. Redwood: Over £80 million has been paid already and it is estimated that a further £10 million may be paid depending on the eligibility of the remaining claims.

Machynlleth Hospital

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his response to the conclusion of the Gwynedd health authority's contract review on the elimination of the 15 consultant beds at Machynlleth hospital; and what estimate he has made of the annual savings resulting from the implementation of these recommendations.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for Gwynedd health authority and Powys health care NHS trust, following discussions with general practitioners, hospital doctors and local community health councils.

Farmers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to pay interest on overdue headage and grant support payments made to farmers under the 1993 scheme.

Mr. Redwood: There are no such plans.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation in relation to the number of working weeks required by the corporation to comment on the financial management and policy review of the corporation; and what additional time he has allotted for consultation on the report prior to publication following the discussions.

Mr. Redwood: I have had no such discussions with the chairman. I have not set a detailed timetable: I will want the board of the corporation to have the opportunity to consider and respond to the draft report before its recommendations are published.

Valuation Panels

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many clerks to valuation panels there are in Wales and what was the budget for the panels or tribunals administration in the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are four valuation tribunal clerks. Gross provision for the Welsh tribunal service was £0·8 million for 1990-91, £0·876 million for 1991-92 and £1·921 million for 1992-93. The 1991-92 figure included a sum of about £1 million for the development and procurement of a new computer system.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current number of staffed beds for use by hospital in-patients in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There were 17,483 staffed beds in NHS hospitals in Wales at 30 September 1993.

Welshpool Bypass

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will call for a report on *(a)* the fatal road accident at the Welshpool bypass on 18 January and *(b)* all earlier accidents since the opening of that bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The fatality will be the subject of a coroner's inquest and the findings will be carefully considered by the Department. Accidents that have previously occurred on the bypass have already been investigated and additional road safety measures have been, or are being, introduced.

Vale of Glamorgan

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those representations that have been made to him favouring the inclusion of Wick, St. Brides Major and Ewenny in the proposed new unitary authority of the Vale of Glamorgan.

Mr. Redwood: I have received 16 representations in favour of my proposal to establish a Vale of Glamorgan unitary authority as set out in the White Paper, "Local Government in Wales: A Charter for the Future".

Of these, the following organisations specifically expressed support for the inclusion of Wick, St. Brides Major and Ewenny in the Vale of Glamorgan authority:

Penllyn Community Council
Colwinston Community Council
Llandough Community Council
Cowbridge and District Conservative Club
The Vale Defence Committee

Ynys Môn Borough Council

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will arrange for a copy of the file sent to him by Councillor G. O. Parry of Vallery containing allegations of corruption within Ynys Môn borough council to be sent to the chief executive of that authority.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I will be replying to the letter from Councillor Parry in due course and I am willing for him to show that to the chief executive.

Police (Finance)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of finance for police purposes is contained within the Welsh Office grant to each county council in Wales *(a)* for 1994-95, *(b)* for the current year and *(c)* for each of the past five years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: For 1994-95, the current financial year, and for each of the last five years the level of finance is that 49 per cent. of budgeted expenditure is met by county councils from resources available to them under the annual local authority revenue settlement for Wales. Under the settlement, revenue expenditure is funded mainly from central Government sources, revenue support grant and redistributed non-domestic rates income, with the balance coming from council tax payers. None of this settlement funding is earmarked for police spending. Expenditure on police and other services is determined by county councils in the light of their statutory responsibilities, local needs and available resources. Fifty-one per cent. of actual police expenditure is met by Home Office police grant.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the standard spending assessment set for each police authority in Wales *(a)* for 1994-95, *(b)* for the current year and *(c)* for each of the past five years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The standard spending assessments for county councils in Wales includes provision for police services.

Development Agency

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the Welsh Development Agency has been asked for a reference by the Further Education Funding Council for applicants to the post of property controller.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I understand that the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency was asked to be a referee and provided information accordingly.

Housing Policy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his housing policy.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Our policy is set out in "Housing in Wales: An Agenda for Action".

Homelessness

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes to tackle homelessness.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In keeping with the policy framework set out in "Housing for Wales: An Agenda for Action" I have recently invited local authorities to bid against a £4 million reserve to complement their homelessness capital projects in 1994-95.

In addition the Welsh Office consultation paper of 20 January 1993, "Access to Local Authority and Housing Association Tenancies" has initiated discussion on the way local authorities should approach homelessness in the future.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to lessen reliance upon bed-and-breakfast accommodation where young families who are homeless are concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available figures are those for 30 September 1993. These show a significant reduction compared with September 1992 in the number of statutorily homeless families temporarily accommodated in bed and breakfast, from 331 to 176.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he or anyone in his Department has been asked for a reference by the Further Education Funding Council for applicants to the post of property controller.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A senior official in the Department was asked to provide a reference and did so.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will announce his decision on the 1994-95 local government revenue settlement.

Mr. Redwood: I have given careful consideration to the representations I have received on the provisional settlement proposals I announced on 30 November. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has met the Assembly of Welsh Counties, and I chaired a meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance, at which settlement issues were discussed.

Having taken account of all the representations, I remain of the view that my proposals provide local authorities with an adequate level of funding for 1994-95, given the Government's view that local government should continue to pursue efficiency savings and meet the cost of pay increases from improved performance. I have therefore decided to set total standard spending—TSS—at £2,704·8 million and aggregate external finance—AEF—at £2,419·2 million for 1994-95. The settlement will increase the level of resources available to local government by over £100 million compared with 1993-94.

AEF will comprise £1,740·1 million in revenue support grant, £464·0 million in distributable non-domestic rates, and £215·1 million in specific and supplementary grants. My decisions are subject to the approval of the House.

The TSS I have announced for 1994-95 represents an increase of 4·2 per cent. on 1993-94, including £86·0 million for care in the community. My plans mean that 89 per cent. of all local authority revenue expenditure in Wales would be met by central Government and should ensure a reasonable level of council tax for local taxpayers in Wales.

I trust that local authorities will budget prudently and play their part in restraining public expenditure.

I propose to lay the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1994-95 before the House, for its approval, early next week. At the same time, I will be laying for the House's approval, the Local Government Finance (Amendment) Report (Wales) 1993-94. The amending report rectifies a deficiency in the description of the basis for distributing the distributable amount from the non-domestic rating account contained in the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1993-94—HC 412 of 1 February 1993. The amendment does not affect payments under the original report which have been made in the intended manner.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates

Dr. Howells: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action is available to him in respect of magistrates who allow party political considerations to determine penalties.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In the declaration and undertaking made on appointment magistrates certify that they understand and agree that their conduct must be free from any sexual, racial, political or other bias. The Lord Chancellor may reprimand a magistrate for his conduct or remove him from office, as appropriate, if there is evidence to show that he appears to be allowing party political considerations improperly to determine penalties.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines are issued to magistrates in respect of the making of political comments in *(a)* assessing penalties and *(b)* delivering judgments.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No specific guidelines are issued. The judicial oath taken by all magistrates requires them to

> "do right to all manner of people after the laws and usages of the realm without fear or favour, affection or ill will".

On appointment magistrates declare that they accept their conduct should be free from any sexual, racial, political or other bias. This is reinforced in the training given to magistrates. The clerk to the justices will also advise them on the need to avoid bringing their impartiality into question.

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines are issued to magistrates by his Department on speeches in mitigation with particular reference to political objectives.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No specific guidelines are issued by the Lord Chancellor but magistrates are advised on the law by their clerks. Magistrates on appointment undertake to conduct themselves in a manner which is free from sexual, racial, political or other bias; this is also covered in the training given to magistrates.

Common Hold

Mr. Pike: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to legislate to introduce commonhold; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government intend to introduce this legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding reply 20 January 1994]:* I refer to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 21 January at column *849*.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding reply 20 January 1994]:* I refer to the answer by the Prime Minister on 21 January at column *849*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Vehicle Registration Marks

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if owners of new cars requiring registration marks in Northern Ireland later this year will have the right to purchase all registration marks with the DAZ prefix; and what arrangements will be made for new car owners who do not wish to use that mark;

(2) what negotiations are taking place with commercial organisations about the use of the prefix DAZ in vehicle registration marks;

(3) what statutory provisions govern the withdrawal of motor vehicle registration marks from availability to the Northern Ireland public and offering these registration marks to the highest bidder.

Mr. Tim Smith: At present, there is no scheme in operation for the sale of registration marks in Northern Ireland and no arrangement could be made with any person or organisation for the use of any specific marks in issue by the Belfast local vehicle licensing office of Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland. When CAZ is exhausted later this year, new vehicles registered at that office will be assigned registration marks from the DAZ series.

Each of the eight local vehicle licensing offices in Northern Ireland allocates registration marks within a different series. The owner of a new vehicle can register it at any local office and, in this way, exercise a degree of choice over the registration mark assigned to the vehicle. An owner wishing to avoid a registration mark in the DAZ series need only apply to another local office other than Belfast whilst DAZ marks are being issued by that office.

The first registration number which will be issued from this new series will be DAZ 1000. In 1985 the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, which was then responsible for the administration of vehicle registration, introduced a policy of withholding from issue the first 99 numbers in each new series. This was extended to the first 999 marks in 1989. These unissued marks would be available for sale to the public should a scheme for the sale of registration marks be introduced in Northern Ireland in the future.

Under the provisions of section 19 of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 and regulation 10 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1973, the form of any registration mark issued to a vehicle being registered for the first time is a matter for the Secretary of State for Transport. There is no statutory obligation to assign any specific mark or to use any specific series of marks.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *404*, how many official Christmas cards he and his junior Ministers sent out in 1993; and how much this cost.

Sir John Wheeler: The total number of official Christmas cards issued was 2,266. The total cost of purchasing and postage was £2,909·10.

"Crime and the Community"

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he proposes to take following consultation on his discussion paper "Crime and the Community"; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: I have considered carefully the response to the discussion paper "Crime and the Community" and am today placing in the Library of the House the details of my proposals for implementing a wide-ranging strategy for dealing with crime in Northern Ireland. In the light of the positive and constructive comments I received on the discussion paper, I propose to commence implementation of the key recommendations in each of the areas identified in the paper. The resulting programme will improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in responding to the problem of crime in the years ahead. It will provide a sound statutory framework and will encourage a range of measures for preventing crime, challenging offending, and protecting victims.

Among the measures with which I propose to proceed are:

- a community safety strategy encouraging local crime prevention initiatives with community involvement;
- a pilot scheme for voluntary offence mediation;
- measures to ensure the appropriate use of cautioning;
- further action to reduce pre-trial delays;
- a statutory framework within which a wider range of penalties for adults and juveniles will be available to the courts;
- new arrangements aimed at securing better service to the public through improved co-ordination in the criminal justice system; and
- the publication of more information about the criminal justice system.

Together the measures represent an effective, integrated and relevant response to the problem of crime in Northern Ireland. Their implementation will require the active co-operation and support of a wide range of people both within and beyond the criminal justice system. I intend to continue the process of consultation as the details of these proposals are developed, building on the broad measure of support for the ideas set out in "Crime and Community".

HOME DEPARTMENT

Channel Tunnel (Fire Services)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision has been made for special training for fire service personnel likely to be required to provide service to the channel tunnel; how many such personnel have received specialist training; whether such training has included paramedic instruction; what is the expected reaction time for the fire service in the event of an emergency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Fifty-three specially trained members of the Kent fire brigade will permanently man the emergency centre at the United Kingdom terminal. They will respond immediately to calls for assistance in the tunnel. About 1,000 other brigade personnel are trained to support them if necessary. All the brigade receive first aid or advanced first aid training. Support from the fire station at Folkestone would take not more than five minutes to arrive from receipt of the call at brigade headquarters.

Police (Standard Spending Assessments)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the standard spending assessment for each police force in England and Wales, *(a)* for 1994-95, *(b)* for the current year and *(c)* for each of the past five years.

Mr. Howard: Standard spending assessments—SSAs—were introduced in 1990. Previously assessments of local authority spending needs were expressed as grant related expenditure assessments—GREs. Police components of GREs or SSAs from 1988-89 to 1993-94, and of the provisional SSAs for 1994-95, for English police authorities are shown in the table.

SSAs for Welsh local authorities are a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales.

£000s

Police authority	*1988-89 GRE*	*1989-90 GRE*	*1990-91 SSA*	*1991-92 SSA*	*1992-93 SSA*	*1993-94 SSA*	*1994-95 Provisional*
Avon and Somerset	42,254	46,568	50,802	55,443	63,999	66,489	69,275
Bedfordshire	13,945	15,727	18,039	20,238	25,127	26,498	27,790
Cambridgeshire	16,177	18,017	19,824	21,691	26,516	27,547	28,702
Cheshire	25,729	28,399	30,911	33,986	39,805	41,353	43,087
Cleveland	20,555	22,506	24,640	27,037	31,139	32,350	33,706
Cumbria	15,954	17,467	19,129	21,151	24,609	25,566	26,638
Derbyshire	25,004	27,376	29,670	32,276	38,354	39,846	41,516
Devon and Cornwall	38,963	43,164	47,096	51,536	60,702	63,064	65,706
Dorset	17,223	18,857	20,801	22,879	26,993	28,043	29,218

Police authority	*1988-89 GRE*	*1989-90 GRE*	*1990-91 SSA*	*1991-92 SSA*	*1992-93 SSA*	*1993-94 SSA*	*1994-95 Provisional*
Durham	18,924	20,719	22,753	24,751	28,796	29,917	31,171
Essex	38,643	43,226	49,255	54,851	64,662	67,767	71,273
Gloucestershire	16,232	17,772	19,262	20,953	24,546	25,501	26,570
Hampshire	43,300	47,760	54,289	59,904	71,551	75,453	79,134
Hertfordshire	23,746	26,472	29,917	32,973	38,803	40,290	42,413
Humberside	27,500	30,109	32,963	36,128	42,168	43,809	45,645
Kent	40,879	45,354	51,544	57,435	68,381	72,419	76,389
Lancashire	44,040	48,218	52,506	57,873	66,943	69,547	72,462
Leicestershire	24,167	26,460	29,124	32,636	38,416	39,910	41,583
Lincolnshire	16,497	18,063	19,576	21,547	25,002	25,975	27,064
Norfolk	18,380	20,429	22,538	25,345	29,978	31,144	32,450
Northamptonshire	14,977	16,887	18,550	20,539	24,671	25,630	26,705
North Yorkshire	19,077	20,887	22,886	25,345	29,398	30,541	31,821
Nottinghamshire	31,503	35,026	38,358	42,194	48,595	50,485	52,894
Staffordshire	30,066	33,071	36,207	39,638	45,921	47,707	49,707
Suffolk	16,539	18,108	19,626	21,673	25,562	26,557	27,670
Surrey	24,091	26,927	30,103	33,255	39,239	40,503	42,834
Sussex	40,801	44,809	50,825	56,093	60,754	64,004	67,155
Thames Valley	48,977	55,637	63,248	70,893	85,179	90,575	95,202
Warwickshire	13,680	14,978	16,415	18,451	21,520	22,443	23,384
West Mercia	27,235	29,972	32,946	36,415	42,562	44,218	46,071
Wiltshire	14,977	16,398	17,954	21,115	26,495	27,763	28,927
Greater Manchester	96,823	106,009	115,636	126,349	144,376	149,884	156,167
Merseyside	65,250	71,441	77,791	84,622	97,563	101,359	105,608
Northumbria	48,153	53,180	58,132	63,939	74,676	77,581	80,833
South Yorkshire	40,874	45,057	49,279	53,967	62,838	65,282	68,019
West Midlands	93,211	103,123	113,021	124,080	143,090	148,656	154,888
West Yorkshire	72,572	79,808	87,025	95,027	109,774	114,045	118,825
Metropolitan Police	484,112	531,107	613,875	676,931	729,511	761,712	791,008
City of London	14,267	16,010	17,983	20,639	23,187	26,570	29,690

Departmental Employees (Immigration Status)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports he has received concerning the immigration status of those employed directly or indirectly by his Department; and what actions he has taken upon such reports.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I am aware of only one such report. This was in connection with a recent joint Immigration Service and Metropolitan police operation to establish the immigration status of cleaners employed on a contract basis at the Passport Agency, Clive house. A number of people were interviewed on 22 December 1993, but no immigration offenders were detected.

ULE966

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the name of the charter company retained by his Department to supply a flight to Kingston from Gatwick on 25 December.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Air Holland.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children who arrived at Gatwick on 21 December on flight ULE966 were *(a)* refused entry to the United Kingdom, *(b)* given temporary admission pending further inquiry or *(c)* removed or deported from the United Kingdom; and how many are to be removed or deported from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Fourteen children aged 16 years or under who arrived on flight ULE966 were refused entry, one of whom was given temporary admission pending further inquiries and refused entry on 2 January. Ten have been removed from the United Kingdom. Four are still liable to be removed, one of whom has absconded from temporary admission. The other three are the subject of further consideration.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what decisions have been taken on applications to visit the United Kingdom by those passengers on flight ULE966 at Gatwick on 21 December who were given temporary admission pending their removal; how many *(a)* have been allowed to visit the United Kingdom, *(b)* have been refused a visit, *(c)* have had temporary admission extended, *(d)* are in detention and *(e)* have been or are to be deported.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information is as follows. Thirty-seven passengers on ULE966 were refused entry and granted temporary admission pending removal, of whom three were removed on 12 January and 24 left on 17 January. Ten others, none of whom is detained, remain liable for removal. Four of them had their temporary admission extended beyond 17 January pending further consideration of their cases and six have absconded from temporary admission.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department against whom penalty payments are being sought, under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987, for passengers on a British Caledonian charter flight arriving at Gatwick on 14 December and flight ULE966 arriving at Gatwick on 21 December, who were refused entry to the United Kingdom; whether the liability in each case is being sought because the passengers had defective travel documentation; and what representations he has received against liability for such penalty payments.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No charges under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 were levied in respect of either flight.

Immigration Service, London

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what internal inquiry he has authorised into the immigration service in London; when he authorised that inquiry; what are the terms of reference of the inquiry; who is conducting the inquiry; how many immigration officers have been suspended pending the outcome of the inquiry; and when the findings of the inquiry are expected.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Senior Home Office officials are investigating the possibility that unauthorised disclosure of information to a newspaper may have taken place. The investigation began in December 1993 and will be concluded as soon as possible. No member of the Immigration Service has been suspended from duty.

Leytonstone Fire Station

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals the London fire and civil defence authority has for reducing the effect of diesel exhaust emissions from fire appliances turning out from Leytonstone fire station on that fire station's personnel.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been informed by the chief fire officer that the emissions of diesel exhaust from London fire brigade fire appliances at Leytonstone fire station, which are inspected quarterly, are within the levels permitted by the Health and Safety Executive guidance on occupational exposure levels. Consideration is, however, being given to improvements in the layout of the station which would reduce exposure to such emissions.

Badgers

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to ensure that all perpetrators of attacks on badgers are brought to justice.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Badgers receive more protection in law than any other unendangered animal. The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 makes it an offence to kill, injure, ill-treat or take a badger, or attempt to do so, or to dig for one, except under licence or in certain particular circumstances defined in the Act. The baiting of any animal is prohibited by the Protection of Animals Act 1911.

The enforcement of the law is a matter for the police.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Enright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many dogs, registered with the index of exempt dogs, have been notified to the index as having been voluntarily destroyed;

(2) how many dogs were registered with the index of exempt dogs, in accordance with section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act, by 30 November 1991; how many were registered by 1 March 1992; and how many remained registered by 30 November 1993;

(3) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) of 14 January, *Official Report*, columns *334-36*, how many defendants prosecuted under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 pleaded *(a)* guilty or *(b)* not guilty.

(4) how many individuals have been prosecuted under section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 since its inception;

(5) how many compensation payments were made under the Dangerous Dogs Compensation and Exemption Schemes Order 1991—SI., 1991, No. 1744; and how many dogs have been destroyed under this order;

(6) how many forms were applied for to register dogs with the index of exempt dogs; and how many of these were returned *(a)* complete and *(b)* incomplete; and how many have not been returned to the index.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Index of Exempted Dogs issued 8,573 application forms to applicants, of which 7,015 were returned to the index: of these 5,223 were complete and resulted in the issue of a certificate of exemption. Of the remaining 1,792 applications, 709 were incomplete.

Information is not available on the number of certificates of exemption in force on the various dates mentioned. As at 25 January 1994 there were 4,584 certificates remaining in force.

The number of dogs destroyed under the compensation scheme was 294; payments were made in each case. The index has been notified of 576 dogs which have been voluntarily destroyed.

Information is not collected on how defendants pleaded in Dangerous Dogs Act proceedings. Information on the number of prosecutions under section 1 of the 1991 Act has been collected since 1 January 1992 and I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) on 14 January at columns 334-36. Statistics for 1993 are expected to be available in autumn 1994.

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether parish councils are offered grants from his Department for neighbourhood watch schemes.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Home Office does not provide direct funding to support individual neighbourhood watch schemes. The neighbourhood watch movement is essentially local in character with co-ordination provided by police forces. The Home Office provides support through the production of leaflets and posters together with grant in aid to Crime Concern which supports neighbourhood watch activities. For example, the Home Office provided funding towards the cost of a neighbourhood watch co-ordinators handbook which was published by Crime Concern last October.

Correspondence

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters addressed to Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* others have been forwarded for reply to each agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: In the period from 1 January 1993 to 31 December 1993, 736 letters from hon. Members addressed to myself and my right hon. and hon. Friends were forwarded to Home Office agencies for reply. Of these, 666 were forwarded to the Prison Service Agency, 66 to the United Kingdom Passport Agency and four to the Forensic Science Service Agency. Information is not available for similar letters received from others.

Fire Service

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the changing pattern or special service calls on the fire service over the last 10 years; how such calls are financed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The number of special service incidents attended by the fire service in England and Wales for each year from 1983 to 1992 is shown in the table. Fire authorities have been able to provide these services from within their existing resources.

Total number of special service calls for 1983 to 1992

Year	*Number of special service calls*
1983	88,880
1984	97,199
1985	121,953
1986	118,193
1987	175,846
1988	139,768
1989	160,090
1990	190,787
1991	168,970
1992	151,180

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with which organisation he has discussed the future of the fire service over the last 18 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The former Home Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, addressed the annual general meeting of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association—CACFOA—on 1 May 1993. I addressed the Fire '93 conference in September. I have also received delegations from West Glamorgan, Dyfed and Powys county councils to discuss the future of the fire service in Wales. In addition, I chair the central Fire Brigades Advisory Council for England and Wales, which meets twice a year, and which offers advice on any matter pertaining to the fire service. I continue to receive advice from a sub-committee of the council on the fire service implications of the recommendations of the Local Government Commission.

I also met representatives of the Fire Brigades Union in October 1993 and a range of issues relating to the future of the fire service were discussed.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the implications for the fire service of *(a)* privatisation of the coal mining industry and *(b)* deregulation legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Home Office is discussing with the Health and Safety Executive the possible need to issue guidance to chief fire officers on the implications for the fire service of developments in the coal industry. We have recently completed a review of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and are considering its findings and possible implications for business and the fire service.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of *(a)* fire stations, *(b)* fire service personnel and *(c)* pumps and other fire appliances in each fire brigade at the latest date for which figures are available; what the position was on the same basis 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The latest date for which information is available is 1 January 1993. Figures comparing the position on that date with that on 1 January 1984 are given in the following tables.

Number of Fire Stations

Brigades	*1984*	*1993*
Clwyd	19	18
Dyfed	26	27
Mid Glamorgan	24	22
South Glamorgan	8	8
West Glamorgan	12	12
Gwent	20	20
Gwynedd	26	26
Powys	18	18
Avon	23	23
Bedfordshire	13	14
Berkshire	19	20
Buckinghamshire	24	24
Cambridgeshire	28	28
Cheshire	24	24
Cleveland	14	15
Cornwall	32	32
Cumbria	38	38
Derbyshire	31	31
Devon	58	58
Dorset	26	27
Durham	18	17
Essex	51	51
Gloucestershire	20	20
Hampshire	58	55
Hereford and Worcestershire	26	26
Hertfordshire	32	32
Humberside	31	31
Kent	65	65
Lancashire	40	40
Leicestershire	19	19
Lincolnshire	37	37
Norfolk	40	40
Northamptonshire	21	22
Northumberland	18	18
Nottinghamshire	27	26
Oxfordshire	24	24
Shropshire	23	23
Isles of Scilly	5	5
Somerset	24	24
Staffordshire	30	30
Suffolk	35	35
Surrey	24	24
East Sussex	24	24
West Sussex	28	28
Warwickshire	20	20
Isle of Wight	10	10
Wiltshire	23	24
North Yorkshire	35	36
Greater Manchester	41	41
Merseyside	28	28
Tyne and Wear	19	18
West Midlands	41	40
South Yorkshire	27	25
West Yorkshire	53	51
London	115	113
Total	1,615	1,607

Whole-time staff

Brigades	*1984*	*1993*
Clwyd	200	182
Dyfed	191	223
Mid Glamorgan	321	341
South Glamorgan	309	334
West Glamorgan	265	235
Gwent	293	292
Gwynedd	93	106
Powys	27	31
Avon	633	640
Bedfordshire	288	309
Berkshire	404	434
Buckinghamshire	263	316
Cambridgeshire	264	267
Cheshire	610	638
Cleveland	625	641
Cornwall	181	183
Cumbria	282	287
Derbyshire	512	492
Devon	522	535
Dorset	297	307
Durham	442	429
Essex	861	922
Gloucestershire	219	232
Hampshire	738	778
Hereford and Worcestershire	329	342
Hertfordshire	531	573
Humberside	731	724
Kent	784	908
Lancashire	904	974
Leicestershire	440	452
Lincolnshire	180	190
Norfolk	304	288
Northamptonshire	225	292
Northumberland	253	238
Nottinghamshire	609	613
Oxfordshire	219	229
Shropshire	200	203
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Somerset	153	172
Staffordshire	455	492
Suffolk	243	262
Surrey	676	691
East Sussex	436	436
West Sussex	375	395
Warwickshire	298	321
Isle of Wight	46	48
Wiltshire	194	206
North Yorkshire	401	405
Greater Manchester	2,167	2,188
Merseyside	1,548	1,561
Tyne and Wear	1,065	1,077
West Midlands	2,012	2,095
South Yorkshire	1,096	1,030
West Yorkshire	1,805	1,830
London	6,954	6,563
Total	34,473	34,952

Retained Staff[1]

Brigades	*1984*	*1993*
Clwyd	194	185
Dyfed	291	295
Mid Glamorgan	206	201
South Glamorgan	11	17
West Glamorgan	68	80
Gwent	204	127
Gwynedd	304	328
Powys	204	199
Avon	187	182
Bedfordshire	125	124
Berkshire	157	136
Buckinghamshire	231	172
Cambridgeshire	293	288
Cheshire	204	133
Cleveland	59	59
Cornwall	397	379
Cumbria	365	382
Derbyshire	321	346
Devon	614	659
Dorset	280	313
Durham	201	143
Essex	390	403
Gloucestershire	240	253
Hampshire	523	567
Hereford and Worcestershire	295	313
Hertfordshire	209	218
Humberside	241	257
Kent	647	682
Lancashire	368	374
Leicestershire	206	196
Lincolnshire	410	441
Norfolk	440	448
Northamptonshire	204	215
Northumberland	146	149
Nottinghamshire	266	266
Oxfordshire	267	229
Shropshire	227	239
Isles of Scilly	29	29
Somerset	367	369
Staffordshire	303	296
Suffolk	378	391
Surrey	107	114
East Sussex	227	245
West Sussex	289	302
Warwickshire	222	168
Isle of Wight	150	151
Wiltshire	270	290
North Yorkshire	440	414
Greater Manchester	62	63
Merseyside	10	6
Tyne and Wear	24	18
West Midlands	22	10
South Yorkshire	116	70
West Yorkshire	316	198
London	0	0
Total	13,327	13,132

[1] Expressed in units of 24 hour cover.

Control Room Staff

Brigades	*1984*	*1993*
Clwyd	23	24
Dyfed	14	18
Mid Glamorgan	21	22
South Glamorgan	17	18
West Glamorgan	17	17
Gwent	20	20
Gwynedd	12	15
Powys	9	9
Avon	25	29
Bedfordshire	19	19
Berkshire	21	21
Buckinghamshire	15	18
Cambridgeshire	25	22
Cheshire	35	29
Cleveland	25	27
Cornwall	13	14
Cumbria	16	17
Derbyshire	24	26
Devon	24	25
Dorset	17	20
Durham	24	28
Essex	39	39
Gloucestershire	18	21
Hampshire	29	31
Hereford and Worcestershire	18	20
Hertfordshire	21	21
Humberside	29	30
Kent	33	38

Brigades	*1984*	*1993*
Lancashire	40	41
Leicestershire	20	24
Lincolnshire	20	21
Norfolk	23	22
Northamptonshire	17	17
Northumberland	14	15
Nottinghamshire	25	27
Oxfordshire	17	21
Shropshire	17	17
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Somerset	16	19
Staffordshire	24	21
Suffolk	17	21
Surrey	25	26
East Sussex	23	24
West Sussex	26	29
Warwickshire	18	19
Isle of Wight	11	12
Wiltshire	18	18
North Yorkshire	18	21
Greater Manchester	74	74
Merseyside	70	73
Tyne and Wear	34	38
West Midlands	66	68
South Yorkshire	37	36
West Yorkshire	49	58
London	177	143
Total	1,499	1,543

Pumping Appliances

Brigades	*1984*	*1993*
Clwyd	31	28
Dyfed	35	35
Mid Glamorgan	32	30
South Glamorgan	14	10
West Glamorgan	15	14
Gwent	49	36
Gwynedd	43	46
Powys	29	28
Avon	37	37
Bedfordshire	23	22
Berkshire	26	24
Buckinghamshire	39	33
Cambridgeshire	41	39
Cheshire	58	39
Cleveland	24	23
Cornwall	76	74
Cumbria	52	50
Derbyshire	48	46
Devon	84	83
Dorset	44	45
Durham	36	33
Essex	74	75
Gloucestershire	33	34
Hampshire	103	80
Hereford and Worcestershire	50	43
Hertfordshire	55	43
Humberside	54	53
Kent	86	86
Lancashire	67	66
Leicestershire	29	32
Lincolnshire	48	48
Norfolk	52	52
Northamptonshire	27	28
Northumberland	23	24
Nottinghamshire	38	37
Oxfordshire	36	36
Shropshire	33	33
Isles of Scilly	6	13
Somerset	39	42
Staffordshire	48	48
Suffolk	49	46
Surrey	36	36
East Sussex	38	38
West Sussex	43	45
Warwickshire	26	27
Isle of Wight	16	16
Wiltshire	35	35
North Yorkshire	45	55
Greater Manchester	67	68
Merseyside	42	44
Tyne and Wear	35	34
West Midlands	66	62
South Yorkshire	43	36
West Yorkshire	79	77
London	188	189
Total	2,545	2,456

Other Appliances

Brigades	*1984*	*1993*
Clwyd	14	11
Dyfed	8	24
Mid Glamorgan	11	19
South Glamorgan	11	21
West Glamorgan	9	10
Gwent	8	11
Gwynedd	6	5
Powys	10	17
Avon	17	54
Bedfordshire	20	22
Berkshire	9	16
Buckinghamshire	7	11
Cambridgeshire	9	13
Cheshire	18	21
Cleveland	9	11
Cornwall	9	13
Cumbria	16	13
Derbyshire	16	17
Devon	12	13
Dorset	30	9
Durham	16	6
Essex	12	18
Gloucestershire	11	16
Hampshire	38	40
Hereford and Worcestershire	11	4
Hertfordshire	8	8
Humberside	24	16
Kent	19	21
Lancashire	14	25
Leicestershire	7	14
Lincolnshire	14	34
Norfolk	9	12
Northamptonshire	8	5
Northumberland	0	4
Nottinghamshire	10	16
Oxfordshire	11	11
Shropshire	3	15
Isles of Scilly	0	4
Somerset	6	35
Staffordshire	16	21
Suffolk	8	20
Surrey	13	19
East Sussex	16	23
West Sussex	25	25
Warwickshire	11	6
Isle of Wight	8	8
Wiltshire	9	18
North Yorkshire	10	15
Greater Manchester	28	29
Merseyside	16	22
Tyne and Wear	13	16
West Midlands	22	34
South Yorkshire	19	24
West Yorkshire	36	28
London	37	72
Total	757	1,015

Data Protection

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make regulations with respect to sensitive personal information under the Data Protection Act 1984.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no such plans.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Members to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January at column 849.

ENVIRONMENT

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which his Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. Baldry: Consultancy work awarded to accountancy firms during 1992 and 1993 is detailed below with a total value respectively of £1·6 million and £886,000. No merchant banks were awarded consultancy work during the period in question. It is not our policy to reveal the cost of individual contracts.

Consultant and Description

1992

- BDO Binder Hamlyn
  - Cost Analysis of Estates Commissions
- Coopers & Lybrand
  - Security Furniture Review
  - Financial Recovery
  - Contract Costing
  - Invoice Support
- Coopers & Lybrand
  - Tyne and Wear Development
- Deloitte
  - Corporation "Health Check"
- Ernst & Young
  - Computer Operational Requirement Study
  - PSA Projects Completion Balance Sheet
  - London Docklands Development Corporation "Health Check"
  - Leeds Development Corporation "Health Check"
  - Information Systems Strategy—Financial Management Requirements
- Kidsons Impey
  - External Audit of SDC92/3
  - LDC "Health Check"
- Price Waterhouse
  - External Audit of SDC92/3
  - Design Improvement
  - Teeside Development Corporation Health Check"
  - Merseyside Development Corporation "Health Check"
  - Trafford Park Development Corporation "Health Check"
- Chapman Hendy Assoc.
  - Hull HAT Financial Model
- KPMG
  - Business Support
  - Audit
  - Contract Review
  - Adviser to Chief Planning Inspector
- Touche Ross
  - Interim Accounting Advice for PINS Agency
  - Central Manchester Development Corporation "Health Check"
  - Black Country Development Corporation "Health Check"
- R. E. Jones & Co
  - Financial Audit of Projects
  - Financial Audit of Projects
- Sachdevs
  - Underspace NNEB III

1993

- BDO Consulting
  - Client/Contractor Split for Housing Management CCT
- Coopers & Lybrand
  - IT Implications for Housing Management CCT
  - Small Authorities and Housing Management CCT
  - Computer Design Study
- Ernst & Young
  - Security Services Group Efficiency Review
  - Docklands Railway Privatisation Study
  - Docklands Light Railway Privatisation
  - Building Management Completion Balance Sheet
  - Inspector Scheduling Business Study
- Kidson Impey
  - Financial Audit of Task Force Projects
  - (1) Auditing of Task Force Projects
  - (2) Auditing of Task Force Projects
  - (3) Auditing of Task Force Projects
  - (4) Auditing of Task Force Projects
  - Financial Audit of Projects (Phase 1)
  - Financial Audit of Projects (Phase 2)
- Price Waterhouse
  - SDC "Health Check"
  - Sheffield Development Corporation "Health Check"
- KPMG
  - The TBA Options Study
- Touche Ross
  - Independent Professional Advice
- R. E. Jones and Co.
  - Financial Audit of Projects
- Moore Stephens
  - Review of Financial Control Systems
- Clarke Whitehall
  - Treatment of VAT
- Kumar and Co.
  - Financial Audit of Projects (WLTF)
- J. Debson
  - Financial Audit of Projects
- Castle Management Consultants
  - Independent Financial Advice on Market Testing
- Grant Thornton
  - Financial Audit of TF Projects
- Norstel Ltd.
  - Study into Structure and Funding of Vine Street

Police Reform

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the means by which the Government will determine the share which the new police authorities proposed in the White Paper on policereforms—Cm. 2281, June 1993—will have of non-domestic rate revenues.

Mr. Baldry: In England, the non-domestic rates pool is distributed to local authorities as an amount per head of resident population. Currently, where more than one authority provides services in an area, this amount per head is shared among the authorities in line with the national shares of standard spending assessments for the services which each provides. Our current intention is to determine the share of the pool to be received by the new police authorities in the same way. The arrangements in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Cetaceans (Acoustic Disturbance)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he will place in the Library a copy of the draft guidelines prepared by the sea mammal research unit on precautions to minimise acoustic disturbance to small cetaceans;

(2) which bodies or organisations his Department has consulted about proposed guidelines on minimising acoustic disturbance to small cetaceans; when it began consultations; and when he expects the guidelines to be published;

(3) what plans he has to consult non-governmental organisations on draft guidelines prepared by the sea mammal research unit on precautions to minimise acoustic disturbance to small cetaceans.

Mr. Atkins: No decision has yet been taken on publication of the draft guidelines.

The draft has yet to be agreed by the working party, drawn from the interdepartmental group on the implementation of the agreement on the conservation of small cetaceans of the Baltic and North seas, tasked with developing the guidelines which includes representatives of the Department of Trade and Industry, the British geological survey and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. A member of the sea mammal research unit is the chairman.

The draft guidelines will be discussed by other Government Departments with an interest in seismic testing and the agreement on the conservation of small cetaceans of the Baltic and North seas. A decision on whether to consult more widely will be taken at that stage.

I will ensure that when the guidelines are issued, either in draft or in their final form, a copy is placed in the Library of the House.

Waste Disposal

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of rate support grant for waste disposal purposes in North Yorkshire for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Baldry: Rate support grant—up to 1989-90—and revenue support grant, which replaced it from 1990-91, are unhypothecated block grants and do not contain specific amounts for particular services.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the outcome of consultation on the local government finance settlement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am today laying before the House the "Local Government Finance Report (England) 1994-95", the "Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1994-95", and the "Special Grant Report (No. 9)". These reports establish the amounts of revenue support grant—RSG—and non-domestic rates—NDR—to be paid to local authorities in 1994-95, and the basis of their distribution; specify the amounts which are to be used as the basis of comparison for measuring increases in certain local authorities' budgets in 1994-95 for the purposes of capping; and provide for two special grants to be paid to certain local authorities for 1994-95.

I shall be sending copies of these reports to all authorities as soon as possible, together with a table showing each authority's standard spending assessment and its entitlement to RSG, NDR and special grants. I have also placed copies of the reports and the table in the Library and the Vote Office.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he proposes to reflect the principles of sustainable development and biodiversity in the arrangements for the conservation of nature and the countryside in England.

Mr. Gummer: The launch on 25 January of the sustainable development strategy and biodiversity action plan represents a major step in taking forward the environmental commitments entered into at the 1992 Rio conference. These developments emphasise the importance of considering our environmental policies in the widest context and ensuring that individual elements are not treated in isolation. I therefore propose, as part of the process of ensuring the Rio commitments will be fully and effectively implemented, to give early consideration to bringing together the institutional arrangements for the delivery of nature and landscape conservation and the public's appreciation and enjoyment of the countryside in England.

The administration of nature and countryside conservation was brought together in Scotland and Wales when these functions were reorganised into three national agencies. The Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish National Heritage have rapidly established themselves as effective deliverers of these aspects of our environmental policies. Our 1990 White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", said that we would keep arrangements in England under review.

Since their inception, English Nature and the Countryside Commission have provided a first-class service to the nation within their separate areas of responsibility. However, I now believe it is time to consider bringing them together in one new body. Before taking a final decision I have asked my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to carry out an urgent study of the issues involved.

The study will be carried out with the co-operation of the two bodies, and there will be a full opportunity for the many people with an interest in these matters to give their views. The study will address the advantages and disadvantages, if any, of integration as well as issues of cost, implications for staff, timing, and the production of a set of forward-looking objectives for a new body.

An official-level steering group, led by the Department of the Environment, and involving both bodies, will supervise the day to day work. Legislation will be required for formal merger and I therefore propose that the study also looks at how closer working could be achieved in the interim or in the circumstances that formal merger was not proceeded with.

Buying Agency

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what performance targets he has set the Buying Agency for 1994.

Mr. Baldry: In support of the objectives set out in the agency's latest corporate and business plans, I have set financial, productivity, customer satisfaction and environmental targets for 1994.

The financial targets are:

to increase total sales by 14 per cent. from an expected £144·5 million in 1993 to £165 million; and

to achieve an overall surplus, after interest, of £1·5 million on total sales.

The customer satisfaction targets are:

to ensure delivery by the due date of at least 90 per cent. of orders handled directly; and

to resolve 80 per cent. of customer complaints within one month and the rest within three months.

The productivity targets are:

to increase the sales: staff ratio from £1·3 million per employee in 1993 to £1·375 million per employee; and

to reduce the cost of each £1 of sales achieved from an expected 2·8p in 1993 to 2·6p.

The environmental target is:

to require all suppliers to provide details of their environmental policies and practices as a first step towards establishing appropriate encouragement of best practice.

These targets will require the agency to sustain yet further improvements in growth, efficiency and service to its customers in 1994. They are challenging, but realistic, and I am confident of the agency's ability to meet them.

Regional Offices

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the regional and area offices of his Department, of the Property Services Agency—and its successors—the pollution inspectorate, the National Rivers Authority, the Countryside Commission, the Housing Corporation, the Audit Commission, the Rural Development Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council, and of other inspectorate, agencies and other public bodies for which he is responsible.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his reply, 11 January 1994, columns 16-17]:* The list of regional and area offices of the Department of the Environment inadvertently omitted the following:

Property Holdings Directorate: London, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Bristol, Harlow, Leeds, London, Manchester and Tunbridge Wells.

Property and Buildings Directorate (Contractor Management Information System): London, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester.

Sulphur Dioxide

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the cost of an 80 per cent. reduction on 1980 levels of United Kingdon emissions of sulphur dioxide if achieved by *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2005, and *(c)* 2010; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* Any estimates are uncertain since they depend on what is assumed about the future commercial decisions of the electricity supply industry and others as well as underlying assumptions about long-term economic growth and fuel prices. The Government have considered a variety of scenarios giving rise to a wide range of costs. We have not estimated the cost of meeting an 80 per cent. reduction target in 2000 since this target would not be feasible. Our estimates however suggest that, taking account of the anticipated refurbishment and replacement needs for relevant plant, 80 per cent. reductions by 2010 is an economically more practicable target, which will result in considerably fewer areas where critical loads are exceeded.

Trading Standards Departments

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement about the plans he has for trading standards departments currently in county councils in areas where the Local Government Commission recommends unitary authorities smaller than county councils;

(2) if he will make it his policy to set up a national Her Majesty's inspectorate of tradings standards, organised regionally, to replace all tradings standards departments currently operated by local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 17 January 1994]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Government consider that trading standards should remain a local authority function. Smaller authorities may wish to consider the option of collaborative arrangements.

The Local Government Commission has been asked to make recommendations for shared arrangements for particular functions in cases where a satisfactory structure is unlikely to be achieved without them. The Government will give careful consideration to any such recommendations.

SCOTLAND

Stammerers

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the percentage of children who are likely to grow into adult stammerers.

Mr. Stewart: It is estimated that about 80 per cent. of children who stammer overcome their condition by adulthood. However, dysfluency affects about 1 per cent. of the population.

Speech Therapy

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will investigate the provision of speech therapy in each health board area.

Mr. Stewart: Education authorities have a statutory responsibility to ensure speech therapy services are available to children with a recorded special educational need. An additional £3 million has been made available to local authorities over the two years 1993-95 to enable them to purchase speech therapy services from health service providers who are the principal employers for speech therapists.

Speech therapy for non-recorded children and adults are the responsibility of health boards whose function it is, in the light of the assessed needs of their population, to determine the volume. pattern and quality of services required and through contracts with providers ensure that these standards are met.

My right hon. Friend has, at present, no specific plans to investigate the provision of speech therapy services.

NHS Trust Hospitals

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost of employing managers, advisers, adminstrators and clerical staff in national health service hospitals in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Stewart: The information is set out in the table. Two factors have largely contributed to the increase shown. As part of the NHS reforms, Scottish health boards have devolved many of their functions to directly managed units and NHS trusts. The figures also include those senior nurses and clinicians who have transferred to the general-senior manager's pay scales, particularly in latter years

Gross Salaries and Wages of Hospital Administration and Clerical Staff[1]

Year	*£000's*
1990-91	70,828
1991-92	88,220
1992-93	101,335

[1] Includes general and senior managers.

National Health Service

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of total national health service expenditure has been spent on the employment of managers, advisers, administrators and clerical staff within the whole of the NHS in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Stewart: The information is set out in the table. The figures for salaries include those senior nurses and clinicians who have transferred from clinical to general-senior managers pay scales particularly in later years.

Gross Salaries and Wages of Administration and Clerical Staff[1]

Year		*Total NHS Expenditure*	*Per cent.*
	(£000s)	(£000s)	
1990-91	171,270	3,066,000	5·6
1991-92	198,286	3,466,000	5·7
1992-93	228,048	3,789,000	6·0

[1] Includes general and senior managers.

Sheriff Court Fees Amendment (No. 2) Order 1993

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultation, advice and representation he has received from the Scottish Legal Aid Board regarding the Sheriff Court Fees Amendment (No. 2) Order 1993.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The implications of the order for legal aid expenditure have been the subject of correspondence and discussion between the Scottish Legal Aid Board and the Scottish Office Home and Health Department on a number of recent occasions.

Prescriptions

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prescriptions were issued in each health board area in Scotland in each year since 1990 for *(a)* temazepam, *(b)* dihydrocodeine, *(c)* methadone and *(d)* buprenorphine.

Mr. Stewart: The information by health board is not available prior to 1992.

The information for each health board for the calendar years 1992 and 1993 and totals for Scotland for 1990 and 1991 are set out in the tables:

Number of Prescriptions

Health Board	*1992*	*1993*
Temazepam		
Argyll and Clyde	95,408	85,717
Ayrshire and Arran	91,452	83,649
Borders	20,315	19,526
Dumfries and Galloway	30,946	29,643
Fife	49,377	46,437
Forth Valley	60,717	57,088
Grampian	83,186	80,657
Greater Glasgow	216,188	191,570
Highland	25,849	25,810
Lanarkshire	125,126	115,659
Lothian	129,967	128,488
Orkney	2,236	2,105
Shetland	1,602	1,652
Tayside	95,979	86,897
Western Isles	4,892	4,533
All Scotland Total	1,033,240	959,431
Dihydrocodeine		
Argyll and Clyde	25,061	27,904
Ayrshire and Arran	25,226	28,297
Borders	2,837	3,289
Dumfries and Galloway	8,274	8,614
Fife	13,954	15,128
Forth Valley	18,512	19,505
Grampian	17,623	19,739
Greater Glasgow	90,964	99,075
Highland	10,324	11,708
Lanarkshire	26,004	28,992
Lothian	44,929	48,274
Orkney	631	626
Shetland	882	946
Tayside	19,678	21,565
Western Isles	1,434	1,375
All Scotland Total	306,333	335,037
Methadone		
Argyll and Clyde	3,033	4,131
Ayrshire and Arran	3,004	4,836
Borders	354	262
Dumfries and Galloway	1,284	2,327
Fife	1,705	1,990
Forth Valley	4,558	4,238
Grampian	7,502	10,311
Greater Glasgow	11,066	25,995
Highland	1,014	688
Lanarkshire	714	1,178
Lothian	16,526	18,011
Orkney	27	44
Shetland	18	57
Tayside	13,564	14,390
Western Isles	9	1
All Scotland Total	64,378	88,459
Buprenorphine		
Argyll and Clyde	3,759	2,060
Ayrshire and Arran	5,471	2,916
Borders	460	433
Dumfries and Galloway	1,321	1,067

Health Board	*1992*	*1993*
Fife	2,797	2,575
Forth Valley	2,041	1,793
Grampian	3,923	3,422
Greater Glasgow	11,479	3,284
Highland	1,329	1,210
Lanarkshire	5,277	3,178
Lothian	4,528	4,070
Orkney	150	104
Shetland	15	17
Tayside	5,494	4,906
Western Isles	198	151
All Scotland Total	48,242	31,186

Drug	*Number of prescriptions*
1990	
Temazepam	791,578
Dihydrocodeine	223,556
Methadone	26,440
Buprenorphine	51,833
1991	
Temazepam	879,868
Dihydrocodeine	269,400
Methadone	33,402
Buprenorphine	55,399

Forestry Commission Land

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether access agreements entered into with a new owner when a portion of Forestry Commission land is sold are binding on *(a)* the original purchaser alone or *(b)* all subsequent owners of the land.

Sir Hector Monro: Access agreements made between the Forestry Commission and local authorities prior to the sale of commission land are binding on all subsequent owners.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Lang: I have no special advisers on secondment.

Greenock Prison

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons have been detained in Her Majesty's prison, Greenock, whilst awaiting deportation in each of the past four years; what extra financial assistance has been given to the prison governor and his staff in relation to such persons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* I have asked Mr. E. W. Frizzell, the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, to arrange for a reply to be given to the hon. Member.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 27 January 1994.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about how many persons have been detained in HM Prison, Greenock whilst awaiting deportation in each of the past four years and what extra financial assistance has been given to the prison governor and his staff.

The number of persons who have been detained in the past four financial years are as follows:

1990-91	15
1991-92	37
1992-93	60
1993-94	50 (to 21 January 1994 only)

The annual budget for Greenock Prison takes account of the strategic priorities of the establishment, and the resources available to the Scottish Prison Service as a whole, but does not differentiate between types of prisoner or detainee.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the designated capacity of Her Majesty's prison, Greenock; and what was the total number of persons detained therein on 1 September in each of the past four years.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* I have asked Mr. E. W. Frizzell, the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, to arrange for a reply to be given to the hon. Member.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 27 January 1994.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the design capacity of HM Prison Greenock; and what was the total number of persons detained therein on 1 September in each of the past four years.

The information is as follows:

Design capacity	179
Population	
1 September 1990	157
1 September 1991	186
1 September 1992	222
1 September 1993	300

The population of HM Prison Greenock on 14 January 1994 was 189. The reduction was due in part to the implementation of the Prisoner and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993 on 1 October 1993.

Roads Directorate

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about possible executive agency status for the roads directorate of the Scottish Office Industry Department.

Mr. Lang: I have decided that the roads directorate of the Scottish Office should be considered as a candidate for executive agency status, under the next steps initiative. A "prior options" study will be undertaken to establish whether agency status or other options would be appropriate. I would welcome comments from interested parties. Comments should be sent by 1 June 1994 to:

The Secretary
The Scottish Office Industry Department
Room 5/118
New St. Andrew's House
EDINBURGH
EH1 3TG

Livestock Improvement Schemes

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the result of the review of the livestock improvement schemes for crofters; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The livestock improvement schemes are among the special forms of help available to crofters and others of similar status in the former crofting counties. The aim of the review was to assess the current arrangements and to consider alternative ways of providing assistance which might achieve better value for money. Careful consideration was given to the varying needs of the different crofting areas and to the particular requirements of cattle and sheep production.

In the light of the findings of the review, including the responses to the consultation paper issued last year, I have decided to retain the bull supply scheme for crofting townships. This is a unique scheme which provides quality pedigree bulls purchased by my Department on loan to crofting township committees which, in most cases, return the bulls to the Department's stud farm at Inverness for over-wintering. The review has identified that this scheme plays an important role, particularly in the remoter areas, in helping crofters to continue in cattle production which, in turn, has significant social and environmental benefits. I have also decided that my Department should continue to provide an artificial insemination service for crofters' cattle in Lewis and Harris, providing there continues to be sufficient demand and no other suitable alternative is available, since this is particularly appropriate to the circumstances there.

However, for sheep, instead of hiring out rams, my Department will in future purchase suitable rams of the Blackface and Cheviot breeds and sell them at a subsidised price to those crofting townships who wish to participate in the scheme. The intention is to provide rams of at least equivalent quality to the previous scheme.

For the forthcoming year, the cost to crofting townships of new rams delivered to the crofting areas will be £115 per ram. For this price, the crofting townships will be able to acquire a ram which, with suitable care, should provide useful service for up to three years. This is a much better bargain than the existing scheme under which crofting townships would pay over £175 for an equivalent period of time.

The new scheme will also ensure that assistance is provided in a more cost-effective way than at present since it will no longer be necessary for the Department to maintain a stock of rams. This should reduce the annual net deficit associated with the livestock schemes by approximately 25 per cent.

In conjunction with this new scheme, the existing Shetland sheep scheme will be continued but the new arrangements will supersede the Outer Isles ram lamb scheme which will be discontinued. The livestock purchase loan scheme, for which there is very limited take-up, will also be closed.

These new arrangements will ensure that an attractive package of assistance is available for crofting townships who wish to improve the quality of their livestock and thereby help to maintain the traditional crofting lifestyle and environment. They will be introduced in time for new applications for the 1994-95 season and the detailed administrative rules for the various schemes, together with the relevant charges, will be publicised to potential applicants in due course.

Forestry

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his policy objectives for private commercial woodlands and forestry.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* The Government's forestry policy objectives are described in the booklet "Forestry Policy for Great Britain", a copy of which is in the Library.

Consultants

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Lang: The information required could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NATIONAL FINANCE

CCT Agency

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the loss of invoices by the Compulsory Competitive Tendering Agency that was discovered after the transfer of responsibility to the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Nelson: In 1984-85 CCTA introduced charges to cover part of the cost of the work which it carried out on behalf of other Departments. The coverage of these charges was subsequently extended by the agency until full cost recovery for all services provided directly to Departments was introduced on 1 April 1992. It came to light in 1991-92 that invoices to other Departments totalling just over £1 million relating to the period 1984-85 to 1989-90 remained uncleared. Attempts were made to link these to payments received, but this was not possible because of changes to the billing arrangements and accounting procedures.

Since the invoices related to transactions between Departments and no funds have been lost to the Exchequer, the Cabinet Office decided that the outstanding invoices should be written off. The same treatment would have been required had responsibility for CCTA remained with the Treasury.

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which his Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. Nelson: The following table lists merchant banks and those companies which have accountancy arms who have carried out work for Her Majesty's Treasury during 1992 and 1993.

Companies	*Type of consultancy work*	*Cost (including VAT) (£)*
Barings	Privatisation	[1]—
BDO Binder Hamlyn	Auditing	5,348
Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte	Auditing	20,285

Companies	Type of consultancy work	Cost (including VAT) (£)
Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte	Privatisation	[1]—
Ernst & Young	Privatisation	[1]—
Ernst & Young	Market Testing	21,018
Kleinwort Benson	Privatisation	[1]—
KPMG Peat Marwick	Training	52,875
KPMG Peat Marwick	Research Project	21,200
KPMG Peat Marwick	Privatisation	[1]—
Osborne Clark	Privatisation	[1]—
Price Waterhouse	Management Consultancy	35,250
Price Waterhouse	Privatisation	[1]—
Price Waterhouse	Advice on Pay and Management Issues	5,330
Price Waterhouse	Research Project	28,500
Touche Ross	Market Testing	26,438
Towers Perrin	Job Evaluation	132,599
The Wyatt Company	Risk Management	36,438

[1] On privatisation it is Her Majesty's Treasury policy not to disclose fees paid to individual advisers as these are regarded as commercial-in-confidence.

Income and Tax Statistics

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 January, *Official Report*, columns *190-93*, if he will provide the same information on income and tax levels for the United Kingdom for *(a)* 1980-81, *(b)* 1989-90, *(c)* 1991-92, *(d)* 1992-93 and *(e)* 1993-94.

Mr. Dorrell: Estimates based on the survey of personal incomes are in the tables. For 1980-81 and 1989-90, married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. Following the introduction of independent taxation, for 1990-91 onwards, husbands and wives are counted separately. The estimates of total income relate to income tax and exclude non-taxable income such as certain social security benefits.

£ million

Quantile group of taxpayers per cent.	Total income	Income tax liability
1980-81		
Top 1[1]	7,400	2,900
Top 5[1]	21,500	6,500
Top 10[1]	34,400	9,300
Bottom 50[1]	39,500	5,200
All taxpayers[1]	138,400	26,900
1989-90		
Top 1[1]	24,200	7,800
Top 5[1]	61,700	16,600
Top 10[1]	93,400	22,600
Bottom 50[1]	86,600	8,500
All taxpayers[1]	323,400	53,400
1991-92		
Top 1	31,200	10,400
Top 5	73,900	20,700
Top 10	109,600	27,500
Bottom 50	98,200	9,300
All taxpayers	373,800	63,500
1992-93		
Top 1	31,700	10,600
Top 5	75,000	21,100
Top 10	111,500	28,100
Bottom 50	98,700	8,500
All taxpayers	380,000	63,200
1993-94		
Top 1	32,600	10,900
Top 5	77,000	21,900
Top 10	114,400	29,100
Bottom 50	98,200	8,600
All taxpayers	385,400	65,000

[1] Tax units for years prior to 1990-91.

Duty Free Goods

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the concession that duty-free goods purchased on both the outward and return journeys on carriers within the single market should be legitimately imported into the country where the travellers' journey started is the subject of an EC agreement; and if he will make it his policy to ensure that the applicable duty-free regime should be decided by each member state in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

Sir John Cope: EC law permits, but does not require, member states to continue with duty-free shopping for a transitional period until 30 June 1999. Like other EC countries the United Kingdom has allowed duty-free shopping to continue, to avoid an adverse effect of the single market on the duty-free industry in the United Kingdom which is the biggest in the EC.

In the single market, there are no routine fiscal checks at frontiers, and the duty-free system now operates by controls on what the vendor sells, rather than what the traveller imports. EC law envisages that the vendor will sell no more than the previous "allowance" to a passenger on an intra-EC journey, so it is legitimate for a passenger to acquire one "allowance" on each leg of a return journey.

Excise Duties (Alcohol)

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what level of trade, in terms of money and jobs, has been lost in the United Kingdom as a result of the differential in excise duties on alcoholic beverages and tobacco as levied by France and by the United Kingdom since the creation of the single market.

Sir John Cope: Customs do not maintain records in these terms. However, duty receipts for alcoholic beverages and tobacco are generally up on previous years, as detailed below. This suggests that much cross-border shopping represents new consumption.

£ million

Product	1991	1992	1993
Tobacco products	5,963	6,417	7,394
Spirits	1,681	1,675	1,724
Wines	899	967	1,043
Beer	2,282	2,376	[1]2,228
Cider/Perry	74	85	100

[1] The change to end-product duty entailed a one-off cash flow loss in 1993 of about £200 million (indicating an underlying increase of about 2 per cent.).

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions there have been, and what was the value of goods involved, where persons have been prosecuted for importing excisable beverages or tobacco products purporting to be for their personal use, over the last 12 months.

Sir John Cope: During 1993 Customs and Excise prosecutions have been concluded in 51 cases involving the illegal disposal of excise goods purported to have been imported for personal use. The estimated value of the goods involved was about £500,000. A further 76 cases are in the prosecution system but have not yet been concluded.

In the 11 months to 30 November 1993, Customs made 1,016 detections of illicit practices involving £1,624,543 revenue, equating approximately to a retail value of about £2·7 million. In addition to the prosecutions mentioned above, Customs limited their action in 338 cases to seizure only of the goods, of which 161 of those cases involved also the seizure of vehicles. The balance of 551 cases have been settled under Customs' power to compound proceedings on payment of penalties in lieu of prosecution or are awaiting the outcome of considerations as to the course of action to be taken.

Contraband

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of the last 10 years the quantities and estimated value of contraband seized, categorised by type, and indicate how it has been disposed of.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* Customs and Excise have records for contraband seizures for the period from 1 April 1991. An analysis of these years can be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Smuggling, South Coast

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many front-line anti-smuggling staff are currently deployed at each port on the south coast; and how many were deployed at each south coast port in each year since 1983.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* This information is not gathered centrally and the cost of supplying staffing figures for all south coast ports is considered to be disproportionate. However, the number of staff years deployed on anti-smuggling duties for the main south coast ports are as follows.

Numbers for earlier years are no longer available as the records have now been destroyed. The figures for 1992-93 and 1993-94 relate purely to anti-smuggling staff but the numbers for earlier years also cover other duties which include collection of duty and other fiscal work. The figures were not sub-divided between anti-smuggling and other tasks for those earlier years.

Year	*Ramsgate*	*Dover*	*Southampton*	*Portsmouth*	*Newhaven*	*Poole*	*Plymouth*
1988	30	380	45	130	45	23	108
1989	29	389	45	145	70	42	111
1990	47	361	60	130	75	55	111
1991	45	[1]280	66	120	70	59	104
1992	34	260	74	104	66	58	83
1993 (current)	34	[2]208	84	93	54	61	83

[1] The re-organisation to separate anti-smuggling and demand-led staff started earlier in Dover than in the other ports.

[2] This does not include anti-smuggling staff who will be working at Channel Tunnel locations.

The deployment of anti-smuggling staff at any given time in a port can vary according to the perceived risk. They can also be augmented, when necessary, by staff from elsewhere in the executive units.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the additional cost to the average first-time buyer would have been for the latest financial year for which figures are available had mortgage interest relief been restricted in that year to *(a)* 20 per cent. and *(b)* 15 per cent.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* It is not possible to provide an estimate since accurate information on the mortgage interest rates paid by first-time buyers is not available. The average new loan for first-time buyers in 1993-94 was over £30,000.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average interest rate payable on mortgages qualifying for mortgage interest relief is expected to be in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* Interest rates will continue to be set to achieve the Government's objectives for low inflation and sustainable growth.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what working assumption has been used for interest rates to calculate forecasts of the cost of changes to the rate of mortgage interest relief published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1994-95."

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* Using the conventional assumption of mortgage interest rates remaining at their then current level, 8 per cent. was used.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost of mortgage interest relief would be in 1994-95 and 1995-96 if the rate at which it were available were unchanged from 1993-94.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* The estimated costs if mortgage interest relief were given at 25 per cent. are £4·3 billion in 1994-95 and £4·7 billion in 1995-96. These estimates are based on the conventional assumption that mortgage interest rates remain at their current levels.

Business Support

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total budget of the European Community's support for small and medium-sized enterprises under *(a)* Eurotech capital, *(b)* the venture consort scheme, and *(c)* seed capital funds in each year since their establishment; and what was the total allocation of each to (i) the northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

Most of the separate annual figures are not readily available, but the information available from the European Commission of the total budgets for these schemes is as follows:

Eurotech Capital

Eurotech Capital expenditure by the Commission since the inception of the programme mid-1991 is around 8·5 MECUs (approximately £6·3 million).

Separate figures for expenditure in the nothern region or in the United Kingdom are not available.

The Venture Consort Scheme

The European Commnity spent a total of 10·4 MECUs —approximately £8 million—on the scheme, which ran from 1985-1993. Of this, 2·1 MECUs—approximately £1·6 million—was spent in the United Kingdom. Separate figures for expenditure in the nothern region are not available.

Seed Capital Funds

Between 1989 and 1992 the Community budget was 4·381 MECU—approximately £3·3 million. In 1993 the budget was £1·498 MECU—£1·1 million—and in 1994 it is 2·16 MECU—£1·6 million.

Separate figures for expenditure in the United Kingdom or the northern region are not available.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total budget of the European Community scheme to create a network of business and innovation centres in each year since their establishment; and what was the total budget awarded under this scheme to *(a)* the northern region and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

The total European Community budget available for business and innovation centres since the network was established in 1984 is as follows

Year	*MECU*	*£ million*
1984	1·5	0·9
1985	0·8	0·5
1986	2·8	1·9
1987	2·4	1·7
1988	3·9	2·6
1989	6·0	4·1
1990	5·5	3·9
1991	7·9	5·5
1992	7·0	5·1
1993	7·0	5·3
1994	8·0	6·0

Separate figures for expenditure in the northern region or the United Kingdom are not readily available.

Sterling/ECU conversion rates are shown at the average rate prevailing in each calendar year.

EDUCATION

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education in which publications, over what period, and at what cost, the current advertisement, or advertisements, for grant-maintained schools are being placed; and what is the cost of the associated freephone information service.

Mr. Robin Squire: The advertisements providing factual information on grant-maintained status will run for five weeks from 20 January in a range of publications at a cost of some £200,000. They coincide with the introduction of the relevant provisions of the Education Act 1993. Requests for booklets arising from the advertisements will be fielded through the Department's distribution arrangements for GM information, which include a freephone service; it is not possible at this time to disaggregate the costs related to telephone calls prompted specifically by the advertising campaign.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what representations he has received on the appointment of Phillip Head, the former chief executive of the Welsh Development Agency as property controller of the Further Education Funding Council;

(2) whether the Further Education Funding Council takes up references before formally appointing senior executives;

(3) how many candidates were shortlisted for the post of property controller for the Further Education Funding Council.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received no representations about the appointment by the Further Education Funding Council to the post of head of property services. I understand that the council advertised the post on two separate occasions. Twelve candidates were interviewed before a final appointment was made. It is the council's policy to take up references before formally appointing senior executives. My right hon. Friend is satisfied that this appointment was made on the basis of fair and open competition.

EMPLOYMENT

Access to Work Scheme

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the estimated costs for the administration of the access to work scheme in its first year of operation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlilse) on the 24 January 1994, *Official Report,* column 100.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will produce a table showing unemployment levels as a percentage of the working population for each of European Community countries for the latest years available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested can be found in the "Unemployment Bulletin" published by the Statistical Office of the European Community. The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development also publishes similar information in its publication "Monthly Economic Indicators", although on a slightly different basis and not for all countries. Copies of both these publications can be found in the Library.

Unemployment Benefit

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for the United Kingdom in total, and by standard region including Greater London, the number of households claiming unemployment benefit for each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* Estimates from the labour force survey—LFS—of the number of households where either the head, or the cohabiting partner of the head, is claiming unemployment related benefits are given in the following table, for each spring since 1983. Prior to this, the monthly administrative unemployment figures were based upon a registrant count rather than a claimant count. As a result, no complete information about those claiming unemployment-related benefits is available from the labour force survey before 1983.

Households where either the head, or the cohabiting partner of the head, is claiming unemployment related benefits.
Not seasonally adjusted

Thousands

	Spring each year										
Standard regions	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
South East	451	465	475	517	468	363	225	202	297	452	508
Greater London	218	241	231	258	233	197	131	115	155	214	250
Rest of South East	233	223	243	259	235	166	94	87	142	238	258
East Anglia	58	48	57	60	55	36	20	23	33	36	51
South West	118	123	115	126	132	103	57	48	82	116	134
West Midlands	255	243	250	235	229	183	115	80	137	162	170
East Midlands	121	135	153	147	156	127	81	62	88	96	94
Yorkshire and Humberside	193	201	215	221	209	194	120	93	110	140	128
North West	289	280	268	290	270	245	166	139	150	178	175
North	146	155	149	146	149	145	98	83	84	83	89
Wales	115	99	109	116	126	108	65	55	64	70	68
Scotland	193	221	231	246	248	204	137	109	124	128	125
Northern Ireland	80	75	83	84	89	79	62	65	57	58	58
UNITED KINGDOM	2,018	2,044	2,105	2,189	2,132	1,788	1,147	960	1,226	1,519	1,599

Source: Labour Force Survey.
Note: Figures are based on the eligibility rules for claiming unemployment related benefits at the time of each survey.

Industrial Inquiry

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what amount was recovered, under section 22 of the Social Security Act 1989, from the damages paid to victims of industrial injury for Durham for each year since 1989.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Numbers of injuries for County Durham, as reported to the Health and Safety Executive's field operations division and local authorities—who enforce the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 for certain premises—for each year since 1989 are:

Year	*Number of injuries*
1988-89	2,916
1989-90	2,890
1990-91	2,932
1991-92	2,679
1992-93	2,344

This does not include numbers of reported injuries in mines and on railways which are not available in the form requested.

The Health and Safety Executive does not hold, and has no access to, information relating to payments as a result of industrial injury.

Misbehaviour Dismissals

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what instructions are provided to unemployment benefit offices on the rules regarding reduction of unemployment benefit for dismissal for misbehaviour and the number of weeks that any reduction should be imposed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Bob Cryer, dated 27 January 1994.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question regarding the reduction of unemployment benefit for dismissal for misbehaviour.

The Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 Section 28 (1) (a) contains provisions for disqualification from receiving unemployment benefit if employment is lost through misconduct.

Copies of the legislation are held in all Employment Service Offices responsible for paying unemployment benefit, and adjudication offices.

When a client has been dismissed from their employment, payment of benefit is suspended whilst enquiries are made of the employer. The Benefits Agency (BA) is informed and if Income Support is claimed it may be payable at a reduced rate. It is for BA to decide the percentage of any reduction in accordance with Income Support Regulations 1987.10, and Income Support (General) Regulations 1987.22. Copies of these Regulations are held in Benefits Agency Offices.

If the reply from the employer indicates that employment was lost through the employee's misconduct the claim is referred to an adjudication officer, as it is a matter for the independent adjudication authorities to decide the length of any disqualification arising from misconduct. The current maximum period of disqualification is 26 weeks.

I hope this is helpful.

Job Interviews (Travel Expenses)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what regulations prevent the payment of travel allowance for job interviews to unemployed persons unless they have been unemployed for at least four weeks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Bob Cryer, dated 27 January 1994.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the four week unemployment regulation which excludes people from assistance to travel to job interviews.

I assume you are asking about one of the Travel to Interview Scheme (TIS) eligibility rules. One of the TIS rules, is as you suggest, that people need to be unemployed for four weeks before they can become eligible. This eligibility condition is not a statutory requirement but part of the arrangements of the scheme. The reason for this is that there would be no advantage in spending money on encouraging people to broaden their jobsearch if there were jobs available locally. The qualifying period helps target the assistance on those who have explored their locality for work but who now have a need to look further afield.

The Travel to Interview Scheme was introduced in 1986 to help with the travel costs of unemployed people attending job interviews beyond daily travelling distance of their home area, thus widening the applicant's jobsearch improving their chances of obtaining work and encouraging labour mobility. During 1992-93 the scheme helped over 45,000 applicants at a cost of £1·5 million. A few basic conditions must be met before assistance can be granted, to ensure that the funds available are concentrated on those unemployed people in most need. A leaflet outlining the scope of the scheme is enclose.

I hope this is helpful.

PRIME MINISTER

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the public appointments made by *(a)* Her Majesty the Queen in Council and *(b)* the Privy Council; and if he will give details of the appointments made by these categories since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The information requested at *(a)* and *(b)* is as follows:

(a) Appointments made by Her Majesty in Council

Members of the Privy Council
Members of the Cabinet
High Sheriffs for the Counties of England and Wales (excluding Cornwall and the Duchy of Lancaster)
Governors of the British Broadcasting Corporation
Visitor of Brunel University
Civil Service Commissioners
Visitor of Cranfield University
Visitor of the University of Essex
6 Members of the General Dental Council
13 Members of the General Medical Council
6 Members of the Governing Body of Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine
(Until April 1992) Inspectors of Schools in England and Wales
Chief Inspector of Schools in England
Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales
Inspectors of Schools in Scotland
Visitor of King's College, London
3 Members of the Court of the University of Leeds
5 Members of the Court of the University of London
Holder of the Lord Northcliffe Chair at University College, London
Members of the Board of Visitors of The Queen's University Belfast
Visitor of the Royal Postgraduate Medical School
Visitor of the University of Ulster
Visitor of the School of Oriental and African Studies
The Clerk of the Privy Council
The Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council

(b) Appointments made by the Privy Council

2 Members of the Council and 5 Members of the Academic Advisory Council of the University of Buckingham
5 Members of the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine
3 Members of the Court of the University of Kent at Canterbury
Chairman and 5 other Members of the General Optical Council
4 Members of the Court of the University of Lancaster
3 Members of the Council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and Chairman of the Statutory Committee of the Society
One Member of the Council of the University of the South Pacific
4 Members of the Court and 3 Members of the Conference of the University of Stirling
3 Members of the General Convocation of the University of Strathclyde
3 Members of the Court of the University of Sussex
4 Members of the Council of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
One Member of the Council of the Royal Veterinary College.

Well over 1,000 appointments under these categories have been made since 1979, and details of the individuals concerned could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Hong Kong

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on discussions held and agreements made with China in regard to safety arrangements and precautionary evaluation procedures for the Crown territories of Hong Kong for the Daya bay nuclear plant near Hong Kong.

The Prime Minister: Talks with the Chinese authorities on the co-ordination of contingency arrangements for an emergency at the Guangdong nuclear power station at Daya bay began in June 1992. A memorandum of understanding was signed with the Guangdong authorities on 22 September 1993 on the contingency arrangements for information release and co-operation in the event of an off-site emergency at Daya bay. Discussions on the arrangements for on-site incidents are still in progress.

Lords Lieutenant

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will advertise in the national press vacancies for Lords Lieutenant as and when they become available and give the details of the qualities sought.

The Prime Minister: Lords Lieutenant are appointed by Her Majesty the Queen under the royal prerogative, on my advice.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 January.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Malaysia (Hydro-electric Project)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister how many files marked, "Not for NAO eyes", relating to the Pergau hydro-electric project in Malaysia are held by his secretariat and the Cabinet Office.

The Prime Minister: None.

One-Parent Families

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if the comments made by the Secretary of State for Wales on 10 January, with regard to one-parent families, reflect Government policy; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 January 1994]:* My right hon. Friend was correct in saying that the single parent issue is important to the Government. The growth in single parent families inevitably has an impact on Government policies. For example, rates of pregnancy among 13 to 15-year-old girls have risen substantially in recent years, which is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has adopted a target of a minimum reduction of 50 per cent. on the 1989 rates by 2000. Similarly, the Child Support Agency was established because of concern about absent fathers and support for children in single parent families.

British Legion Medal

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will recommend Her Majesty the Queen that her permission be granted for any uniformed members of the public services and armed forces who did national service to wear on their uniforms the medal struck for ex-national service men by the Royal British Legion, or the related ribbon.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* The medal struck on behalf of the Royal British Legion is unofficial and produced as a commercial venture to raise funds for their Poppy appeal. It would not therefore be appropriate for me to approach Her Majesty the Queen as requested. People who served on national service were eligible for the various official medals approved by the sovereign at the time.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Agencies (Letters)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many letters addressed to Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* others have been forwarded for reply to each agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: The number of letters from hon. Members forwarded to each executive agency during 1993 is in the table.

	Number
Benefits Agency	1,820
Contributions Agency	189
Child Support Agency[1]	548
Resettlement Agency	2
Information Technology Services Agency	1

[1] April-December 1993 after achieving agency status.

Information on letters from other people which have been forwarded to agencies is not available.

Heating Equipment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what supplementary help is to be made available to pensioners and benefit receivers for extra heating equipment necessitated by the reduction in voltage in electricity supplies.

Mr. Burt: The effect on the output of electrical heating equipment in making the change to a nominal voltage of 230 volts in accordance with the time scales and tolerances required for EC voltage harmonisation will be insignificant. Additional supplementary help is not appropriate.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support recipients have been subject to a benefit penalty as a result of awards made by the Child Support Agency since April 1993.

Mr. Burt: A reduced benefit direction is issued by a child support officer to the Benefits Agency only where a parent with care has refused to co-operate in pursuing child support maintenance without good cause.

The Child Support Agency issued 81 reduced benefit directions in the period 5 April 1993 to 30 November 1993. These include parents with care on income support, family credit, and disability working allowance. Separate figures for income support are not available.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if instructions have been given to officials of the Child Support Agency on requests from community groups for a speaker to address public meetings and answer questions from the audience.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mrs. Maria Fyfe, dated 27 January 1994.

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security on whether instructions have been given to Child Support Agency staff in respect of the provision of speakers for public meetings.

No general instructions have been issued about the provision of speakers for meetings. Since the formation of the Agency, it has been a function of Agency Customer Services Managers to provide help and information to organisations and groups representing our clients. Liaison with many such organisations is now extensive, and requests for speakers at meetings are considered locally.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford will receive a reply from the chief executive of the Child Support Agency to her letters concerning *(a)* B. Lawrence, *(b)* P. Bennett, *(c)* C. S. Chaplin, *(d)* A. Hawkins, *(e)* M. Smith and *(f)* T. Rickward; and what is the reason for the delay.

Mr. Burt: Recent press interest has stimulated a great deal of correspondence from constituents and the necessary steps are being taken to ensure that correspondence from hon. Members will be answered as promptly as possible. I am sorry that the responses have been slower than usual from this Department. However, I replied to the hon. Member concerning Mr. M. Smith on 25 January, and Mr. B. Lawrence today. The other cases are in an advanced state of preparation, and the chief executive of the Child Support Agency will reply to the hon. Lady shortly.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what instructions his Department has given the chief executive of the Child Support Agency to expedite answers to letters from hon. Members about constituents' problems on child maintenance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: All letters from hon. Members addressed to the chief executive of the Child Support Agency are acknowledged and she aims to respond within an average of 20 working days. Recent press interest has stimulated a great deal of correspondence from constituents and although that target is not being met at the moment, the necessary steps are being taken to ensure that correspondence from hon. Members will be answered as promptly as possible.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing what the retirement pension for a single person and a couple would be in April if it had continued to be uprated with earnings or prices, whichever the higher, since this link was broken.

Mr. Hague: It is estimated that the weekly rate of category A retirement pension would be £76·70 from April 1994 and the combined rate of category A pension and category B pension payable to a couple would be £122·75.

Children (Statistics)

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 16 December, *Official Report*, column *836*, if he will recalculate the last column of figures to show the number of children in families getting income support as percentages of the number for whom child benefit was being paid.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the table and is for Great Britain only.

Supplementary Benefit/Income Support Recipients and Dependants

Year	*Number of dependants of SB/IS recipients (000's)*	*As a percentage of children attracting child benefit*
1979	955	7·2
1989	2,138	17·9
1992	2,874	23·2

Notes:

1. Sources: supplementary benefit/income support statistics annual inquiries, November 1979, May 1989, May 1992. Social Security Statistics.
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand. Percentages are correct to one decimal place.
3. The number of dependant children is expressed as a percentage of the number of children for whom child benefit was in payment.
4. The figures are for dependant children under the age of 19.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the latest figures showing how many *(a)* families with children are living on income support and *(b)* how many children are living on income support; and how these figures compare with 1979.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Income support supplementary benefit cases with children

	1979 (000's)	*1993 (000's)*
Cases with children	477	1,574
Number of children	923	2,970

Notes:

1. Source: Supplementary Benefit Statistics Annual Enquiry, November 1979 and the Income support statistics quarterly enquiry, February 1993.
2. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Children are defined as being under 16 years of age.

Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no such plans.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* paintaings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls on his rooms.

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has 10 paintings on the walls of his rooms of which four were painted and provided by his wife. He has one photograph.

Weather Stations

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what records he has maintained, or intends to maintain, on the number of weather stations which record temperatures of 0°C or less for three, four, five and six nights in any given week.

Mr. Scott: The administration of cold weather payments is a matter for Mr Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. he will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mrs. Margaret Ewing, dated 26 January 1994.

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recently Parliamentary Question about what records are currently maintained, and what records it is intended will be maintained on the number of weather stations which record temperatures of 0 degrees Centrigade or less for three, four, five and six nights in any given week.

As I stated in my letter to you of 2 December 1993 [OR Vol 233 Cols 811-812] data provided by the Meteorological office does not include information on those Meteorological stations which have registered an average of 0 degrees Centrigade for three, four, five or six nights. This is because the regulations relating to cold weather payments define a period of cold weather as a consecutive period of seven days during which the average mean temperature is 0 degrees Centigrade or less.

The Agency therefore, has no plans to begin requesting this information from the Meteorological Office, and will not be compiling and maintaining records relating to the information you require.

I hope this reply has been helpful.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will modify the regulations relating to the independent living fund in order to enable local authorities to make direct payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

We have currently no plans to enable social services authorities to make direct cash payments.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Licences

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has in regard to the application for export licences from *(a)* Heckler and Koch, *(b)* Royal Ordnance and *(c)* GEC for exporting military equipment to the former Yugoslavia since July 1992.

Mr. Needham: It has been the practice of successive administrations not to disclose information about export licence applications from individual companies. A mandatory UN arms embargo was imposed in September 1991; export licences have been issued in respect of equipment for UN and EC peacekeeping activities, and for the protection of those undertaking humanitarian and media work.

EC Business Support

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total budget of the European Community's scheme to support business under *(a)* BC-NET, *(b)* EUROPARTENARIAT and *(c)* SPRINT in each year since their establishment; and what was the total allocation of each to (i) the northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. McLoughlin:

BC-NET (Business co-operation network) and Europartenariat

BC-Net and Europartenariat are part of the Community's action programme for small and medium-sized enterprises. Separate information on budgets for them is not readily available, but the total budget for the action programme since its commencement in 1989 is as follows:

Year	*Mecu*	*£ million*
1989	18·0	12·1
1990	21·3	15·2
1991	20·4	14·2
1992	24·7	18·2
1993	24·8	18·7
1994	26·8	20·2

Separate figures for expenditure in the northern region and the United Kingdom are not available.

SPRINT (Strategic Programme for Innovation and Technology Transfer)

Prior to 1989, SPRINT was an experimental programme with a comparatively small budget of 18·6 mecu over the period 1983-89.

The main phase of the programme started in 1989 and the annual expenditure since then is as follows:

Year	*Mecu*	*£ million*
1989	5·1	3·4
1990	17·5	12·5
1991	22·8	16·0
1992	22·0	16·2
1993	23·0	17·4
1994	19·0	14·3

Again separate figures for the northern region and the United Kingdom are not available.

Sterling/Ecu conversion rates are shown at average rates prevailing in each calendar year.

Comité Européen des Normes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the composition of the Comité Européen des Normes by nationality to give the names and backgrounds of the British members.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Comité Européen de Normalisation—CEN—consists of the national standards organisations of the 17 countries of the European economic area and Switzerland. The United Kingdom member is the British Standards Institution—BSI—which was founded in 1901 and is an independent body incorporated under royal charter.

The United Kingdom delegation to the CEN General Assembly is led by the director and general manager of BSI Standards and normally comprises appropriate BSI staff, together with representatives of industrial and other economic interests. The BSI divisional director, Standards International represents the organisation on the CEN technical board which is responsible for overall control of the CEN technical programme. The United Kingdom delegation to each of the seven CEN sector technical boards usually comprises two representatives from the sector together with a member of the BSI staff. CEN prepares individual standards in technical committees. The United Kingdom representatives on these committees are usually experts from industry: they are appointed by the relevant BSI committees and are accompanied when appropriate by BSI staff.

Off-shore Fabrication Yards

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many full-time employees were registered at each offshore fabrication yard in the United Kingdom for each of the past five financial years.

Mr. Eggar: I regret that this information is not held centrally.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many fabrication orders relating to the United Kingdom continental shelf gas and oil industry have been allocated per company to United Kingdom-based fabrication yards in each of the past five financial years; and how many orders from operators in the United Kingdom continental shelf area have been allocated to *(a)* EU countries and *(b)* Korea.

Mr. Eggar: Information on major orders for the calendar years 1988-1993 is contained in the table:

Yard	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Amec	2	3	1	4	3	1
Consafe	—	—	—	2	—	1
Hi-Fab	2	4	2	5	1	1
McDermott	—	5	2	—	—	—
SLP (L)	—	2	2	—	1	1
SLP (M)	—	3	1	2	1	2
THC	—	—	2	1	—	1
THOF (Methll)	1	1	4	2	1	1
THOF (Teesidc;	1	1	3	2	—	1
UIE	1	—	—	1	2	—
United Kingdom Total	7	19	17	19	9	9
Other EU Yards	—	1	5	5	3	2
Korea	—	—	—	1	—	1

Jewellery Industry

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what cost-benefit assessments have been made of the impact of the proposed EC directive 76/769/EEC: Restrictions on the marketing and use of dangerous substances and preparations; and what assessment he has of the effect of consequential job losses in the jewellery industry.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information on the possible costs to affected United Kingdom industries—in particular the suppliers of costume jewellery, certain suppliers of items to the clothing industry, such as buttons, and the makers of spectacle frames—as well as potential cost savings in treatment of nickel dermatitis arising from this proposal were set out in the Department's supplementary explanatory memorandum dated 9 December 1993 reference 5916/93. It should be noted that when political agreement on a common position was reached at the subsequent Internal Market Council meeting of 16 December it was decided to delete spectacle frames and ordinary buttons from the text of the proposal.

Post Offices

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish figures which show the level of balancing losses for *(a)* franchised post offices and *(b)* Crown post offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: This is an operational matter for the Post Office.

Deregulation

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the proposals in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill with existing obligations under European Community legislation currently in force.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I am satisfied that the proposals in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill, if enacted, would be consistent with the United Kingdom's European Community obligations.

Regional Development Funds

Mr. Hicks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the outcome of the negotiations between the European Commission and United Kingdom Government over the designations of Saltash and Torpoint for eligibility for European regional development funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The European Commission eventually agreed to my request to include these areas among the United Kingdom's objective 5(b) areas.

As a result the whole of Cornwall is eligible under objective 5(b). Together with the coverage of much of Devon and part of Somerset, this is an excellent result for the south-west.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Mr. Cryer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the current state of negotiations in the GATT, listing the tariffs concessions so far agreed.

Mr. Needham: The GATT Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations was substantively concluded on 15 December. Tariff concessions tabled at that date cannot be withdrawn but may be improved up to 15 February, the deadline for the submission to the GATT secretariat of final schedules of tariff reductions. The European Community is seeking improvements where possible in the concessions offered by other countries and in particular from India, Pakistan and Indonesia on textiles and clothing.

Eighty-seven participants in the round, including the European Community, have so far lodged draft schedules of tariff concessions with the GATT secretariat in Geneva where comprehensive details, which are too extensive to list, are held. My Department's international trade policy division has received some schedules. Inquiries about particular concessions may be addressed to it.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 25 January concerning Christmas cards sent out in 1993 by the Minister for Trade, how many Christmas cards were sent at public expense in 1993 by himself and by each of the other Ministers in his Department; and for each Minister, how much this cost.

Mr. Eggar: Other DTI Ministers did not send out Christmas cards at public expense last year.

Iron and Steel Industry Employees

Mr. Milligan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will make a statement on the transitional arrangements to apply to the termination of the iron and steel employees readaptation benefit scheme—ISERBS.

Mr. Sainsbury: A statutory instrument was laid today and comes into force tomorrow.

When I announced the termination of the scheme on 29 October 1993 I said that permanent closures, capacity cuts or changes in activities at steel companies which were imminent would be considered under transitional arrangements. The proposals for those arrangements, that closures and capacity cuts occurring on or after 1 January 1994 should not be eligible for consideration, were issued in a consultation paper and all the comments received have been considered.

The regulations provide that, subject to the other provisions of the scheme, benefits may still be paid where such events have occurred before 28 January 1994 and the transfer or redundancy relating to those events, including any period of notice, occurs on or before 1 May 1994; providing that the European Commission approves the provision of aid in respect of those events and the individual concerned.

Where such events have already been accepted by the Commission as justifying payments under the ECSC treaty, the regulations provide that, subject to the other provisions of the scheme, payments may be made to any steel employee whose redundancy or transfer—whenever it occurs—relates to those events, provided that the Commission also approves the provision of aid in respect of that individual.

One-stop Shops

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the estimates he has made since 1 July 1992 of the number of first-stop shops, one-stop shops or business links he wished to see established with the dates on which his estimates changed; and if he will give reasons for the changes in the estimates.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 19 January 1994]:* When I announced in July 1992 our intention to run a competition for pilot one-stop shops, I said that in the longer term I wished to see a network of about 200 such shops established across England. My estimate has not changed since then. I expect a national network of over 200 business links to be established over the next two to three years.

Already, approval in principle has been given to 16 business link plans which will lead eventually to the establishment of 54 business link outlets. Four of these outlets are already open, in Birmingham, Congleton, Leicester and Macclesfield. Plans are at an advanced stage of preparation in many other areas and the national assessment panel, which I have appointed to advise me on the quality of proposals, will shortly consider plans from a further five areas involving 18 business link outlets.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on the number of facilities equivalent to first-stop shops, one-stop shops or business links currently provided in Germany.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 19 January 1994]:* In Germany there is no equivalent to the business link programme.

Business support activities are carried out by a number of different agencies including the Federal Government, the individual landers and municipalities. Policy for smaller firms in relation to education and training is the responsibility of the 83 chambers of industry and commerce—which have public law status—and the 57 chambers of handwerk. The chambers are responsible for vocational training and organise skill centres and examinations under statutory federal training regulations. The landers are responsible for start-up, investment promotion, company consultancy and apprenticeships.

In England our intention is that the business link will provide one place for companies to obtain access to the full range of available business support services.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the budget provided for the establishing of first-stop shops, one-stop shops or business links in each year for 1992 to 1995; how much has actually been spent; and what proportion this is of the sum allocated.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 19 January 1994]:* There was no DTI expenditure on the business link programme in the financial year 1992-93. The forecast for DTI expenditure on the programme in the financial year 1993-94 is £2·9 million, £496,000 of which has now been spent. This is 14·6 per cent. of the original 1993-94 budget of £3·4 million. In 1994-95 the budget is £17·1 million.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to accelerate the establishing of more first-stop shops, one-stop shops or business links.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 19 January 1994]:* Since the initial one-stop shop competition for pilots in March 1993, we have moved to create a national network through a rolling programme of assessment panels which are scheduled on a quarterly basis: November 1993, February 1994, June 1994 and November 1994. My Department is working closely with local partnerships, to help them put proposals together and to implement them.

I am keen to complete the national network as soon as possible, but we must put quality first. In addition, we have to recognise that it takes time to achieve such a radical step change in the provision of business support services.

Warrants

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the Director General of Fair Trading to report on the warrants provided to consumers by manufacturers and retailers.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* The Office of Fair Trading is gathering information from the suppliers of extended warranties and the director general will make his views known shortly.

Office of Water Services

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the criteria used by the Director General of the Office of Water Services, in appointing or reappointing to the role of chairman of regional customer service committees.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* This is a matter for the director general of Water Services.

Angola

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government on arms shipments and weapons sales to the Government of the Republic of Angola.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* Under the Angola (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1993 (SI 1993 No. 2355)—made in pursuance of the United Nation Security Council Resolution No. 864—it is prohibitied to export arms to Angola without licence issued by the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department considers each application for a licence on a case-by-case basis.

Nora Heeren

Mr. Nicholas Winterton; To ask the President of the Board of Trade what cargo is being carried by the German registered vessel Nora Heeren; for where that cargo is destined; whether the cargo manifest is in order; whether he is aware of any breach of either United Kingdom or international law in connection with this vessel and its cargo; why the vessel is being held by his Department at Plymouth; when the vessel will be allowed to continue to its destination; if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* It has been the practice of successive Administrations to control the transhipment of licensable goods in accordance with procedures agreed with COCOM partners; it has also been the practice not to disclose information about such licences. My officials are currently reviewing the basis of United Kingdom transhipment controls with other interested Departments.

Post Office Review

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost to date of the review of the Post Office conducted by Kleinwort Benson.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* The cost of work undertaken by individual contractors is commercially confidential.

"Prospects for Coal"

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all the consultants commissioned by him to help produce the White Paper, "Prospects for Coal"; what were their terms of reference; when each piece of work was commissioned; and when it was completed.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* Details of the consultants appointed by the Department to assist in production of the White Paper were:

Consultant	*Date*	*Scope of work*	*Completion*
John T. Boyd	20 November 1992	Viability of the 21 pits identified for closure by British Coal	22 January 1993
Caminus Energy	20 November 1992	Study of the markets for coal	22 January 1993
Ernst and Young	20 November 1993	Study of British Coal's competitiveness	22 January 1993
Ernst and Young	1 December 1993	Study of the costs of nuclear generation	8 February 1993
PIMS Associates	20 November 1993	Study of British Coal's cost structure and productivity in relation to international comparators	22 January 1993

In addition, the Department commissioned other pieces of analysis that, in the event, were not directly relevant to the conclusions in the White Paper and were pursued no further.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Friday 21 January, *Official Report*, column *849*.

HEALTH

Disability Information Projects

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what direct contribution her Department makes to disability information projects in the west midlands; and if she will make a statement on the changes proposed as a result of the plans to abolish the regional health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: Since October 1991 the Department of Health has provided funding of over £314,000 to disability information projects in the west midlands as part of the national disability information project.

A rigorous analysis of the functions carried out in the national health service is currently being undertaken to determine how the new structure will operate in practice. Functions provided by regional health authorities and the NHS management executive are being considered to establish what can be more appropriately dealt with at local level.

Decisions on this matter have yet to be reached.

Mental Health

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* health personnel were attacked by patients and *(b)* patients were attacked by doctors and other health personnel in each year since 1973.

Mr. Sackville: In line with the recommendations of the Lord Skelmersdale "Advisory Committee on Violence to Staff—Report 1988", copies of which are available in the Library, the collection of data has not been centralised but all health care organisations have been recommended to have a system of reporting and recording of incidents to enable the development of an accurate data base on their cause and nature of the problems which arise. If the hon. Member has an interest in data for a particular locality he may wish to approach the individual national health service unit direct.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, columns *457-58*, if she will publish figures showing the percentage of calls to which the London ambulance service failed to respond within its 14-minute call-out standard time in November and December.

Mr. Sackville: The percentage of calls to which the London ambulance service failed to respond within 14 minutes in both November and December was 43 per cent. The information was supplied by the London ambulance service. On 15 December 1993, *Official Report*, column *721*, we announced the further investment of £14·8 million in the London ambulance service which will be tied to firm targets for improving ambulance performance.

Portable Oxygen Containers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances a patient is entitled to a portable oxygen container for use in a car; what arrangements are made to issue the container on prescription; what is the cost of this service; and what special regulations apply to this provision.

Mr. Sackville: Consultants may prescribe portable oxygen cylinders to patients which can be topped up from standard 1,360 litre cylinders supplied against a general practitioner's prescription. Information on the cost of this service is not separately identifiable. If a portable oxygen container was for use in a motor vehicle the driver would be required to be fit at all times to drive the vehicle safely. The safety aspect would fall to the police to enforce. A driver using oxygen in a motor vehicle must not have a relevant disability within the meaning of section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. Such a disability might include obstructive airways disease causing sleep apnoea. Drivers suffering such disabilities are required by law to notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Nurses

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were employed in NHS hospitals by region in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what are the corresponding figures for nurses employed in the community alongside family doctors.

Mr. Sackville: The number of nurses and midwives employed within NHS hospitals are shown in the table:

Nursing and midwifery staff in NHS hospitals by regional health authority at 30 September
Whole-time equivalents

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
England	352,160	352,560	348,810	346,720	333,400
Northern	24,640	24,720	24,250	24,320	22,040
Yorkshire	26,660	26,610	26,560	26,060	24,290
Trent	33,760	33,630	33,750	33,470	31,310
East Anglia	14,230	14,440	14,490	14,030	13,720
North West Thames	22,970	23,210	22,920	23,140	21,630
North East Thames	29,130	29,130	29,210	29,110	27,620
South East Thames	26,820	27,090	25,620	25,130	25,290
South West Thames	20,160	20,040	19,180	18,950	19,710
Wessex	21,110	20,830	21,140	21,000	19,520
Oxford	14,660	14,650	14,770	14,460	14,090
South Western	24,240	24,120	24,290	23,930	23,050
West Midlands	36,940	37,160	37,170	36,390	36,330
Mersey	19,620	19,450	18,630	17,670	17,020
North Western	32,680	32,700	32,210	31,740	30,610
SHAs	4,550	4,780	4,610	7,330	7,170

The number of community nurses, from within the hospital and community health service, and practice nurses, who are employed by general practitioners are shown in the following tables.

Nursing and midwifery staff in the community by Regional Health Authority (excluding agency) at 30 September — Whole-time equivalents

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
England	42,660	42,270	43,160	42,220	42,040
Northern	2,940	2,900	2,870	2,770	2,890
Yorkshire	3,260	3,270	3,200	3,130	2,990
Trent	4,270	4,230	4,210	4,190	4,160
East Anglia	1,610	1,590	1,540	1,580	1,530

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
North West Thames	3,320	3,230	3,200	3,140	2,990
North East Thames	3,400	3,450	3,450	3,320	3,320
South East Thames	2,340	2,090	3,360	3,020	3,130
South West Thames	2,610	2,610	2,580	2,270	2,300
Wessex	2,450	2,390	2,410	2,430	2,490
Oxford	2,120	2,130	2,120	2,190	2,110
South Western	2,820	2,870	2,880	2,900	2,920
West Midlands	4,660	4,680	4,600	4,610	4,660
Mersey	2,310	2,330	2,270	2,220	2,160
North Western	4,530	4,480	4,450	4,420	4,370
SHAs	20	20	20	20	20

Practice Nurses by Regional Health Authority at 30 September
Whole-time Equivalents

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
England	3,480	4,630	7,740	8,780	9,120
Northern	220	280	430	500	550
Yorkshire	210	280	570	610	650
Trent	320	460	770	850	930
East Anglia	240	270	440	550	510
North West Thames	320	390	610	680	700
North East Thames	230	280	540	730	700
South East Thames	230	360	660	630	650
South West Thames	200	280	490	550	560
Wessex	280	330	530	680	590
Oxford	230	340	450	490	540
South Western	330	460	680	710	760
West Midlands	410	490	750	830	910
Mersey	100	170	330	340	440
North Western	170	250	490	640	640

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.
2. The tables show that, in England, during the period 1988 to 1992 there was a 5·3 per cent. decrease in the numbers of nurses and midwives employed within NHS hospitals; this decrease was mainly a result of the exclusion of Project 2000 student nurses from workforce statistics. Project 2000 learners are regarded as supernumerary and are not included in workforce numbers. In 1992 there were 18,300 Project 2000 students. In addition a number of senior nurses have transferred to senior management grades. During the same period there was an insignificant decrease of 1·4 per cent. in nursing and midwifery staff in the community and a 162 per cent. rise in the number of practice nurses.

Child Abuse

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases, in the most convenient period for which records are kept, have come to light of abuse or of welfare concerns as a result of the inspection of independent boarding schools under the Children Act 1989;

(2) how many cases have come to light of abuse or of welfare concerns as a result of the inspection of independent boarding schools under the Children Act 1989 in the most convenient period for which records are kept.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Intensive Care

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions children's intensive care units have had to turn away critically ill patients for the years in which records have been kept.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on non-admissions may be held on individual patient records, but the Department does not hold confidential personal information of this nature.

Press Releases

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many press releases were issued for each quarter since she became Secretary of State; and how many were issued in each of the past 12 years.

Mr. Sackville: Information for the years 1981 to 1988 is not available in the form requested.

The number of press releases issued from 1989 are:

	Number
1989	575
1990	632
1991	638
1992	471
1993	675

The number of press releases issued in each quarter from April 1992 are:

	Number
1992	
April to June	80
July to September	99
October to November	158
Total	337
1993	
January to March	208
April to June	151

	Number
July to September	150
October to December	166
Total	675

Parents' Visiting Costs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue a guidance circular to general practitioners and health authorities classifying the right of medical practitioners to specify visiting costs incurred by parents in visiting their children in hospital as an integral part of the cost of medical treatment, when that is appropriate and necessary; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I have undertaken to keep under review the arrangements for helping parents participate in the treatment of children admitted to hospital.

Day Care (Children)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she plans to publish the report of the survey on day care services for children carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in 1991.

Mr. Bowis: The preparation of the report is nearing completion and we expect it to be published in the early summer.

Pharmaceutical Product Licences

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers she or the Medicines Control Agency has to terminate or vary a product licence held by a pharmaceutical manufacturer; and under what circumstances those powers may be used.

Mr. Sackville: Section 28 of the Medicines Act 1968 sets out the powers of the licensing authority—United Kingdom Health Ministers—to suspend, revoke or vary a medicinal product licence. Section 28 also specifies the grounds on which the powers can be used. The procedures to be followed when the licensing authority proposes such action are contained in section 29 and schedule 2 of the Medicines Act. The licensing authority also complies with the requirements of the European Directive 65/65.

Dentists

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of dentists under contract with family health services authorities in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

Numbers of dentists[1] [2]
under contract to family health services authorities at 30 September from 1989 to 1993

Year	Numbers
1989	15,351
1990	15,480
1991	15,451
1992	15,411
1993	15,773

[1] Includes principals, assistants and vocational trainees.

[2] Principals counted only once: some have more than one contract.

Hepatitis B

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of hepatitis B have been recorded in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Number of notifications of hepatitis B in England and Wales 1988-1992.

Year	Notifications
1988	390
1989	432
1990	435
1991	488
1992	489

Day Nurseries

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time day care places in day nurseries for under-fives are provided in the Durham area.

Mr. Bowis: The latest available information about full-time day nursery places in Durham is contained in the publication "Children's day care facilities at 31 March 1992, England". Copies are available in the Library.

Non-human Somatotropins

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has funded into the possible effects of non-human somatotropins on diabetics and people with liver complaints.

Mr. Sackville: The Department is not at present undertaking research into the possible effects of non-human somatotropins on diabetics and people with liver complaints. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Tickhill Road Hospital

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the long-term plans of the Doncaster Healthcare Trust for continuing care of the elderly at the Tickhill Road hospital.

Mr. Sackville: This is a local matter for the Doncaster healthcare national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the trust chairman, Mr. David Bertram, for details.

Wythenshawe Hospital

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to be able to reply to the representations, under urgent cover, made to her by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, in regard to facilities at Wythenshawe hospital for admission and treatment overnight there in cases of emergency.

Mr. Sackville: Shortly. The right hon. Member's representations of 13 January have been put to South Manchester health authority which is responsible for the management of the facilities at Wythenshawe hospital.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 14 January, *Official Report*, columns *317-20*, how many whole-time equivalent speech therapists there are in East Cumbria, West Cumbria, South Cumbria and Darlington; and if she will give the exact number in each case.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information available is shown in the table.

Qualified speech therapists by district health authority area as at 30 September 1992:
Whole-time equivalents and numbers

	WTE	*Number*
East Cumbria	12·45	15
South Cumbria	12·66	13
West Cumbria	4·50	6
Darlington	8·00	8

Source: Department of Health non-medical work force census.

Community Residential Places

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community residential places have been established within each regional health authority in each of the last five years.

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* The figures available by regional health authority, for places in staffed residential care homes catering primarily for people who are mentally ill or have learning disabilities, are shown in the table.

Number of places for people with mental health problems in staffed residential care homes by regional health authority, at 31 March 1988 to 1992, England

Regional health authority	[1]*1988*	[1]*1989*	[1]*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Northern	2,300	2,410	2,680	2,940	2,910
Yorkshire	3,020	3,590	3,830	4,050	4,360
Trent	3,110	3,440	3,770	4,170	4,400
East Anglian	1,810	1,890	2,070	2,220	2,320
North West Thames	2,500	2,590	2,610	2,940	3,030
North East Thames	2,680	2,830	3,260	3,530	3,860
South East Thames	4,170	5,210	5,460	5,920	6,200
South West Thames	2,880	3,040	3,660	3,900	4,330
Wessex	2,430	2,840	3,000	3,150	3,400
Oxford	1,770	2,270	2,340	2,560	2,700
South Western	4,120	4,050	4,390	4,700	5,470
West Midlands	4,740	4,760	5,000	5,250	5,480
Mersey	2,260	2,390	2,460	2,630	2,690
North Western	3,210	3,590	3,680	3,670	3,730
England[2]	41,000	44,900	48,200	51,600	54,900

[1] The figures for 1988 to 1992 include estimates for a minority of records which did not have details of the health authority area concerned.

[2] Totals may not agree due to rounding.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animals (Transport)

13. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a further statement on efforts to achieve common EC rules on the transport of live food animals.

Mr. Soames: In December the United Kingdom blocked the introduction of a European Community package of further measures on the transport of animals because they did not offer real improvements in standards of protection.

We shall continue to press for the United Kingdom's high standards to become the norm throughout the Community.

Milk Marque

14. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has received recently about the proposed creation of the Milk Marque.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I received a number of representations on the board's reorganisation scheme in response to our recent consultation on it.

Field Drainage

15. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action she is taking to advise farmers of the need to ensure that run-off water from fields does not inundate property; and what help is available to farmers to pay for drainage work.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Farmers have access to a range of advice from our regional offices and the Agricultural Development Advisory Service.

Free Trade Agreement

17. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the implications for British agricultural exports of the North American free trade agreement; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The North American free trade agreement principally removes tariffs in trade between the three participating countries.

In so far as it leads to increased economic activity in north America it should benefit all exports to these markets.

United Kingdom Enterprises

18. **Mr. Heald:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to generate opportunities for United Kingdom agricultural enterprises in the developing world.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My Department's trade promotion programme in 1993 included ministerial-led business missions to six countries in the developing world as such.

We also target the developing markets of central and eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and China, where plans this year include attendance at trade fairs in China, the Baltic States, Russia and Poland.

In total, the Ministry promoted United Kingdom industry at four overseas exhibitions, generating some 500 business inquiries.

Apple Juice

20. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she next expects to meet apple growers in East Anglia to discuss output of apple juice.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend and I meet apple growers regularly to discuss a wide range of issues.

Park Land

21. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sales of Forestry Commission land in England have involved park land since the start of the current programme of sales.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Forestry Commission owns very little park land and does not identify it separately in its disposal records. The information requested is therefore not available.

Mushrooms

23. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to have a meeting with her Irish counterparts to discuss the question of subsidies on the production of mushrooms.

Mr. Jack: Responsibility for enforcing the EC rules relating to state aids rests with the Commission with whom we have raised the legality of assistance to Irish mushrooms growers.

Wages Board

24. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people are covered by the agricultural wages board.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: All agricultural workers in England and Wales are covered by the provisions of the Agricultural Wages Orders produced by the agricultural wages board.

The total number of regular family and hired workers, including seasonal and casual workers, at 1 June 1993 was 217,770.

Fishing

25. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals she has for reducing the British fishing effort to the multi-annual guidance levels.

Mr. Jack: As I explained on 14 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) our decision to suspend the implementation of controls on days at sea means that we have to review the means by which we can work towards our MAGP targets—which require action on fishing activity as well as on capacity.

Fishery Discussions

26. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she plans to meet her French counterpart to discuss fishery issues.

Mr. Jack: I meet my French counterpart regularly at meetings of the Council of EU Fisheries Ministers, the next meeting of which is scheduled for 12 April.

Forestry Review Group

27. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Scotland about the forestry review group.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have not had any recent formal discussions with my right hon. Friend about the forestry review group.

Organic Aid Scheme

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she expects to launch the organic aid scheme in England; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Our proposals for the organic aid scheme in England are currently with the European Commission.

I expect to make an announcement on the starting date for the scheme in the near future.

Fisheries Council

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the outcome of the meeting of the EC Council of Fisheries Ministers in Brussels on 20-21 December 1993; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on 12 January at column *226-28*.

Equine Exports

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how she ensures that minimum values apply to all equines leaving the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Animal Health Act 1981, and orders made under the Act, require a minimum valuation to be provided for specified categories of equines before a welfare export licence is issued. There are exemptions for thoroughbred horses certified by the Jockey Club and other horses intended for breeding, riding, exhibition, jumping and polo are also exempted.

EC Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total budget awarded to the EC's guidance section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund in each year since its establishment; and what proportion of this was granted to (i) the northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Jack: Total EC payments from the guidance section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, and the proportion of this received by the United Kingdom since its accession to the EC, is set out in the table. The reduction in the proportion of total payments received by the United Kingdom since 1981 is due in part to the accession to the EC of Greece in 1981, and of Spain and Portugal in 1986. I regret that figures for the proportion of these payments received by the northern region could be provided only at disproportionate cost, as information on the various schemes subject to funding by guidance section is not kept on regional basis.

	Total EC payments from the EAGGF Guidance Section	*Of which United Kingdom receipts per cent.*
Million units of accounts		
1973	124	0·00
1974	128	0·04
1975	184	9·00
1976	218	20·00
1977	297	22·00
Million European units of account		
1978	324	12·00
1979	403	16·00
1980	601	18·00
Million ECU		
1981	566	19·00
1982	638	11·00
1983	720	21·00
1984	647	17·00
1885	690	16·00
1886	727	11·00
1987	863	9·00
1988	1,142	7·00
1989	1,349	5·00
1990	1,825	5·00
1991	1,915	5·00
1992	2,584	4·00

Sources: Annual Reports of the European Court of Auditors except for United Kingdom receipts 1973-1975 (EAGGF Annual Reports).

Rabies

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to reduce the British quarantine period for animals with rabies vaccination certificates imported from rabies-free countries; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Government have no plans to reduce the present six months quarantine requirement for imported pet dogs, cats and a wide range of other rabies susceptible animals. Separate arrangements were agreed under the Balai directive (92/65/EEC) for commercially traded animals from other member states in the European Community. A statement on those changes was given in the reply to the hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on 16 June 1992, *Official Report,* column *455-56.*

Biodiversity Objectives

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action she intends to take to develop clear biodiversity objectives for the range of schemes available for the positive management of farming habitats.

Mr. Jack: The steps we are taking to apply environmental conditions to agricultural support will help maintain farming habitats.

The objectives of the environmentally sensitive areas schemes include the conservation, enhancement and restoration of specific wildlife habitats and, where appropriate, increases in species diversity. Similar objectives are being developed for the proposed habitat scheme and moorland scheme.

TRANSPORT

Airport Landing Charges

Mr. Kenneth Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing, for a number of typical aircraft, the landing charges expressed per passenger, on the assumption that the aircraft are 80 per cent. full, at peak times at Gatwick, Stansted, Manchester, Birmingham and East Midlands airports.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Charges are based on the assumption that the aircraft concerned meets ICAO chapter 3 noise standards and qualify for any noise rebates available at the airports concerned. The following aircraft assumptions also apply:

	Maximum take off weight	*Seats*	*Passengers at 80 per cent. load factor*
747-200B	378	374	299
737-200	53	109	87
BAe 146-2	43	84	67

All landing charges include aerodrome navigation services charges.

All passenger charges include security charges and are based on charges for international services.

Comparison of off-peak airport charges

	BAe146-200 Landing	BAe146-200 Pax	BAe146-200 Total	737-200 Landing	737-200 Pax	737-200 Total	747-200 Landing	747-200 Pax	747-200 Total
Total Charges									
Gatwick	£130	£130	£260	£149	£169	£318	£618	£580	£1,198
Stansted	£125	£141	£266	£156	£183	£338	£923	£628	£1,551
Manchester	£193	£426	£619	£238	£553	£791	£1,697	£1,902	£3,599
Birmingham	£507	£697	£1,204	£625	£905	£1,530	£4,460	£3,110	£7,570
East Midlands	£495	£688	£1,183	£611	£893	£1,504	£4,355	£3,071	£7,425
Charges per-Passenger									
Gatwick	£1·94	£1·94	£3·88	£1·72	£1·94	£3·66	£2·07	£1·94	£4·01
Stansted	£1·87	£2·10	£3·97	£1·79	£2·10	£3·89	£3·09	£2·10	£5·19
Manchester	£2·88	£6·36	£9·24	£2·74	£6·36	£9·10	£5·68	£6·36	£12·04
Birmingham	£7·57	£10·40	£17·97	£7·19	£10·40	£17·59	£14·92	£10·40	£25·32
East Midlands	£7·39	£10·27	£17·66	£7·02	£10·27	£17·29	£14·56	£10·27	£24·83

These charges are based on winter, off-peak rates. However, the periods covered by these rates are different for each airport and the off-peak periods which apply for each airport follow:

Airport	*Charges*	*Times*
Gatwick	Landing Charges	Any time, 1 November to 31 March
	Passenger Charges	1600-0529, 1 May to 30 September and any time between 1 October and 30 April
Stansted	Landing Charges	Any time, 1 November to 31 March
	Passenger Charges	1600-0659, 1 May to 30 September and any time between 1 October and 30 April
Manchester	Landing Charges	1400-1559 Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 1 November to 30 April
	Passenger Charges	Any time, 1 November to 30 April
Birmingham	All Charges	Any time of the day throughout the year
East Midlands	Landing Charges	Any time of the day throughout the year
	Passenger Charges	Any time, 1 November to 29 February

Comparison of peak airport charges

	BAe146-200 Landing	BAe146-200 Pax	BAe146-200 Total	737-200 Landing	737-200 Pax	737-200 Total	747-200 Landing	747-200 Pax	747-200 Total
Total Charges									
Gatwick	£350	£630	£980	£368	£818	£1,186	£655	£2,811	£3,465
Stansted	£138	£515	£652	£191	£668	£859	£1,485	£2,296	£3,782
Manchester	£387	£691	£1,078	£476	£898	£1,374	£3,047	£3,086	£6,133
Birmingham	£507	£697	£1,204	£625	£905	£1,530	£4,460	£3,110	£7,570
East Midlands	£495	£753	£1,248	£611	£978	£1,588	£4,355	£3,361	£7,715
Charges per Passenger									
Gatwick	£5·23	£9·40	£14·63	£4·23	£9·40	£13·63	£2·19	£9·40	£11·59
Stansted	£2·05	£7·68	£9·73	£2·20	£7·68	£9·88	£4·97	£7·68	£12·65
Manchester	£5·77	£10·32	£16·09	£5·48	£10·32	£15·80	£10·19	£10·32	£20·51
Birmingham	£7·57	£10·40	£17·97	£7·19	£10·40	£17·59	£14·92	£10·40	£25·32
East Midlands	£7·39	£11·24	£18·63	£7·02	£11·24	£18·26	£14·56	£11·24	£25·80

These charges are based on summer, peak rates. However, the periods covered by these rates are different for each airport and the peak periods which apply for each airport follow:

Airport	*Charges*	*Times*
Gatwick	Landing Charges	0600-1509 and 1700-1859, 1 April to 31 October
	Passenger Charges	0530-1559, 1 May to 30 September
Stansted	Landing Charges	Any time, 1 May to 31 October
	Passenger Charges	0700-1559, 1 May to 30 September
Manchester	Landing Charges	Any time except 1400-1559 Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 1 November to 30 April
	Passenger Charges	Any time, 1 May to 31 October
Birmingham	All Charges	Any time of the day throughout the year
East Midlands	Landing Charges	Any time of the day throughout the year
	Passenger Charges	Any time, 1 March to 31 October

London-Warsaw Flights

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when and on what basis Ministers were involved in negotiations with their Polish counterparts and representatives of Lot Airlines during October;

(2) why Lot airlines has been forbidden to land at Heathrow with effect from 1 November;

(3) what representations the Government have received from Lot Airlines or the Polish Government on the number of winter flights to Warsaw by British Airways originating in *(a)* London and *(b)* North America, and on the summer schedules;

(4) when and in what circumstances agreement was made between Her Majesty's Government and the Polish Government and Lot Airlines on the winter flights schedule; and what is his policy on the number of British Airways flights between London and Warsaw;

(5) on what occasions over the past 10 years a dispute has occurred between British Airways and the national carriers of other countries about the increase in the number of flights from London to the other countries' principal airports where *(a)* Her Majesty's Government have been involved and *(b)* the sanction of removing the permit for the other national carriers to land at Heathrow has been imposed;

(6) what is the policy underlying Her Majesty's Government's support for British Airways to increase the frequency of its winter flights between London and Warsaw; and what impact he expects the increase to have on transatlantic flights made by United Kingdom and Polish air carriers;

(7) what intergovernmental agreements govern flights between London and Warsaw.

Mr. Norris: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 4 November 1993 and the subsequent letter I wrote to him on 16 November which was deposited in the Library. Since then there has been continuing contact between the United Kingdom and Polish Governments and between the airlines concerned and I hope that it will be possible to reach agreement on the resumption of services soon.

Trunk Road Assessment

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 15 December, *Official Report*, column *714*, when he expects the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment to finish looking into the question of generated traffic and report to his Department.

Mr. Key: I understand the standing advisory committee on trunk road assessment is aiming to submit its report on generated traffic to Ministers in the spring of this year.

Traffic Area Office Network

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on executive agency status for the traffic area office network.

Mr. Key: We are considering the traffic area offices as possible candidates for executive agency status.

Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prohibition notices were issued in respect of large goods vehicles in 1992-93; and how many were *(a)* immediate, *(b)* delayed or *(c)* defect notices.

Mr. Key: During 1992-93, the vehicle inspectorate examined 196,475 large goods vehicles. The examinations resulted in 11,041 immediate prohibitions, 11,040 delayed prohibitions and 18,379 defect notices being issued.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by traffic area office *(a)* the number of goods vehicle operator licences and *(b)* renewal applications for goods vehicle operator licences refused on environmental grounds over the last five years.

Mr. Key: The number of goods vehicle operator licences and renewal applications for goods vehicle operator licences which were refused over the last five years are listed in order of traffic area office:

Traffic Area Office	*Applications refused (1988-89—1992-93)*
North Eastern	158
North Western	271
West Midland	233
Eastern	196
South Wales	155
Western	212
South Eastern and Metropolitan	717
Scottish	221

Figures for applications refused on environmental grounds are not available and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by traffic area office the number of objections received from members of the public, local authorities and the police to the renewal of goods vehicle operator licences during the last two years.

Mr. Key: The number of objections received from members of the public, local authorities and the police to applications for goods vehicle operator licences during the last two years—1991-92 and 1992-93—are listed in order of traffic area office:

Traffic Area Office	*Number of objections and representations (1991-92—1992-93)*
North Eastern	908
North Western	1,121
West Midland	1,663
Eastern	4,467
South Wales	733
Western	2,815
South Eastern and Metropolitan	5,429
Scottish	786

Figures for the number of objections that were made to applications for the renewal of goods vehicle operator licences are not available and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by traffic area office the number of renewal applications for goods vehicle and passenger carrying vehicle operator licences that have been refused due to *(a)* poor maintánance records or *(b)* poor conduct or repute.

Mr. Key: The number of renewal applications for goods vehicle and passenger carrying vehicle operator licences which were refused during 1992-93 are listed in order of traffic area office:

Traffic area office	*Applications refused*
North Eastern	11
North Western	5
West Midlands	6
Eastern	9
South Wales	5

Traffic area office	*Applications refused*
Western	21
South Eastern and Metropolitan	41
Scottish	7

Figures for applications refused due to (a) poor maintenance records or (b) poor conduct or repute are not available and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North (Ms Walley) of 15 December, *Official Report*, column 709, on how many of the 132,000 cheques DVLA took prosecution action; and on how many of these the DVLA recovered money.

Mr. Robert Key: A total of 13,205, of which 12,842 resulted in revenue recovery.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which functions of the traffic area office network are intended for market testing.

Mr. Key: I keep all parts of my Department under review with the aim of identifying scope for market testing including the traffic area offices.

Deregulation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of the deregulation of goods and passenger operator licensing and the staffing levels of traffic area offices.

Mr. Norris: It is not possible at this stage to make a detailed assessment of the likely effect of the deregulation proposals for goods and passenger operator licensing on the levels of staff in the traffic area offices. Our best estimate is that the effect of deregulation and changes to the fee system will be broadly neutral in terms of staffing.

Prohibition Notices

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prohibition notices were issued against passenger carrying vehicles in 1992-93; and how many of them were *(a)* immediate prohibitions, *(b)* delayed prohibitions and *(c)* defect notices.

Mr. Key: In the financial year 1992-93 the vehicle inspectorate examined 39,065 public service and other passenger carying vehicles. The examinations resulted in these vehicles being issued with 1,825 immediate prohibitions, 1,363 delayed and 4,275 defect notices.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by traffic area office the number by grade of staff employed and the salary costs.

Mr. Key: The total number of staff employed in the traffic area offices is 447·5 and the total salary cost is £6·3 million. The number of traffic area office staff by grade and salary cost is as follows:

North Eastern

Grade	*Number*	*£*
Commissioner	1·0	58,562
Grade 7	1·0	37,240
HEO	3·0	68,367
EO	7·0	125,363
AO	26·0	331,604
AA	14·5	141,491
Personal Secretary	1·0	13,625
Typing Manager	1·0	16,973
Typists	4·0	43,160
SGB1	0·0	0
SGB2	2·0	19,128
TOTAL	60·5	855,513

North Western

Grade	*Number*	*£*
Commissioner	1·0	58,562
Grade 7	1·0	37,240
HEO	3·0	68,367
EO	7·0	125,363
AO	34·0	433,636
AA	14·0	136,612
Personal Secretary	1·0	13,625
Typing Manager	1·0	16,973
Typists	4·5	48,555
SGB1	1·0	11,247
SGB2	2·5	23,910
TOTAL	70·0	974,090

West Midland

Grade	*Number*	*£*
Commissioner	0·5	29,281
Grade 7	0·5	18,620
HEO	2·0	45,578
EO	5·5	98,500
AO	20·0	255,080
AA	10·0	97,580
Personal Secretary	1·0	13,625
Typing Manager	1·0	16,973
Typists	3·5	37,765
SGB1	0·0	0
SGB2	5·0	47,820
TOTAL	49·0	660,822

Eastern

Grade	*Number*	*£*
Commissioner	1·0	58,562
Grade 7	1·0	37,240
HEO	3·0	68,367
EO	7·5	134,317
AO	28·0	357,112
AA	13·5	131,733
Personal Secretary	1·0	13,625
Typing Manager	1·0	16,973
Typists	3·0	32,370
SGB1	1·0	11,247
SGB2	2·0	19,128
TOTAL	62·0	880,674

South Wales

Grade	*Number*	*£*
Commissioner	0·5	29,281
Grade 7	0·5	18,620
HEO	2·0	45,578
EO	4·0	71,636
AO	12·5	159,425
AA	6·0	58,548

Grade	*Number*	*£*
Personal Secretary	0·0	0
Typing Manager	1·0	16,973
Typists	2·0	21,580
SGB1	0·0	0
SGB2	1·0	9,564
TOTAL	29·5	431,205

Western

Grade	*Number*	*£*
Commissioner	1·0	58,562
Grade 7	1·0	37,240
HEO	3·0	68,367
EO	6·0	107,454
AO	25·5	325,227
AA	12·0	117,096
Personal Secretary	1·0	13,625
Typing Manager	1·0	16,973
Typists	4·0	43,160
SGB1	0·0	0
SGB2	2·0	19,128
TOTAL	56·5	806,832

South Eastern

Grade	*Number*	*£*
Commissioner	1·0	58,562
Grade 7	1·0	37,240
HEO	3·0	68,367
EO	5·5	98,500
AO	27·5	350,735
AA	15·0	146,370
Personal Secretary	1·0	13,625
Typing Manager	1·0	16,973
Typists	2·0	21,580
SGB1	0·5	5,623
SGB2	3·5	33,474
TOTAL	61·0	851,049

Scottish

Grade	*Number*	*£*
Commissioner	1·0	58,562
Grade 7	1·0	37,240
HEO	3·0	68,367
EO	7·0	125,363
AO	26·5	337,981
AA	14·0	136,612
Personal Secretary	1·0	13,625
Typing Manager	1·0	16,973
Typists	2·5	26,975
SGB1	0·0	0
SGB2	2·0	19,128
TOTAL	59·0	840,826

School Transport

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to bring forward to help prevent or mitigate accidents involving school transport.

Mr. Key: Draft regulations, which will make the display of a distinctive sign on buses carrying children to or from school mandatory, are currently being finalised. They will also allow vehicles displaying the sign to use their hazard warning lights, when stationary, to indicate to other road users that children are boarding or alighting or are in the vicinity of the vehicle.

We are also reviewing the full technical and cost implications of seat belts in minibuses and coaches, irrespective of their use. Until this review is complete we do not feel that it would be wise to introduce new legislation in this area.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the electrification of the Leeds, Bradford, Ilkley and Skipton railway lines to be completed; and what rolling stock will be provided.

Mr. Freeman: These are matters for British Rail and the West Yorkshire passenger transport executive. However, I understand that electrification is expected to be completed next winter, and that this will be followed by a phased introduction of local electric services. A full service is expected to start in May 1995. It is planned to use refurbished class 308 rolling stock initially; the PTE is still examining possible arrangements for the leasing of new rolling stock in the longer term.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders regarding prohibition of use of vehicles older than 10 years; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what proposals he has to introduce legislation to curtail the use of motor vehicles manufactured prior to 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: No representations have been received from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. There are no proposals being considered by the Department to curtail the use of motor vehicles which are more than 10 years old.

High Speed Rail Link

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the total amount of public expenditure used for *(a)* the King's Cross project and *(b)* the now abandoned south London route for the channel tunnel high speed link.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail's accounts show £332 million cumulative expenditure on the channel tunnel rail link project up to 31 March 1993 £252 million net of interest payments. Of this net cost Union Railways assign some £46 million to Kings Cross and £89 million to the abandoned section of the southerly route. A more detailed assessment is not possible because the Kings Cross project was not conceived solely for the rail link and a proportion of the southerly approach is still part of the route. It also remains to be seen what additional reduction in net cost will be achieved through further property sales.

Channel Tunnel Stations

Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the Stratford Promoter Group to discuss the proposal prepared by the group for the siting of an international channel tunnel station at Stratford.

Mr. Freeman: Yes. I suggest that the promoter group first study Union Railways' report published on 24 January, in the light of my right hon. Friend's statement on the same day; have further discussions with Union Railways; then contact my office to arrange a mutually convenient time.

Airport Passengers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing the total number of passengers leaving from United Kingdom airports for each year since 1989 and as a total over the same period, broken down into passengers travelling to (i) destinations within the United Kingdom or elsewhere in the EC including the Channel islands and Isle of Man and (ii) elsewhere.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* The information requested is shown in the table:

Departing terminal passengers at United Kingdom airports

	Departing passengers to	
	Domestic and EC	*Other international*
1989	32,533,219	16,074,396
1990	33,571,797	17,125,797
1991	31,665,121	15,848,694
1992	34,374,452	18,296,967
January to October 1993	31,395,765	16,826,031
Total of above	163,540,354	84,171,885

1. *Source:* CAA Airport Statistics.
2. Includes United Kingdom and Foreign Airlines.
3. Includes Scheduled and Non-scheduled services.
4. Domestic passengers on return journeys will be counted twice, once on the outward leg, once on the return journey.
5. Passengers are allocated to the point at which they disembark from their flight. This may not be their ultimate air destination.
6. Includes Departing passengers at the following airports:

Aberdeen
Belfast
Belfast City
Bembridge
Benbecula
Birmingham
Blackpool
Bournemouth
Bristol
Cambridge
Cardiff
Coventry
East Midlands
Edinburgh
Exeter
Gatwick
Glasgow
Gloucester
Hawarden
Heathrow
Humberside
Inverness
Islay
Kirkwall
Leeds/Bradford
Liverpool
London City
Luton
Lydd
Manchester
Manston
Newcastle
Norwich
Prestwick
Southampton
Southend
Stansted
Stornoway
Sumburgh
Teesside
Tiree
Tresco
Uist
Wick

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics' policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Members to the Prime Minister's answer to the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey on 21 January at column *849.*

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Attachment of Earnings

Mr. Betts: To ask the Lord President of the Council which legislation allowing for the attachment of earnings includes an exemption for *(a)* hon. Members or *(b)* Ministers of the Crown; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton The Attachment of Earnings Act 1971 includes no specific exemptions for hon. Members or Ministers and I am not aware of any exemptions in any other legislation. But attachment of earnings orders can be served only on a debtor's employer, and there is no employer for this purpose in the case of hon. Members and Ministers.

DEFENCE

Porton Down

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what work his Department has carried out on the alcohol-amine binary reactant OPA; when and at which establishment these experiments were carried out; and what was the assessment of this work;

(2) when the chemical and biological warfare establishment at Porton Down and Nancekuke carried out experiments on *(a)* sea wasp toxin, *(b)* ricin toxin and *(c)* abrin toxin; what was the purpose of the work; and what were the conclusions and assessments of each toxin;

(3) how many liaison officers from the former military establishment at Nancekuke were stationed at United States military chemical and biological warfare establishments before Nancekuke was dismantled; what were the functions of these officers; at which US establishments they were stationed; and through which defence agreement these liaison officers were arranged;

(4) what studies and trials the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down has carried out into the dissemination of agent aerosols at sea; what are the names of these experiments; when and where these experiments took place; and what was the conclusion of each of the experiments;

(5) in which year the Department's research into phencyclidine referred to in his answer of 20 July 1993, *Official Report,* column *171,* ended; when the results of the research were first shared with the United States of America; with which United States military establishment the information was exchanged; and in what form this exchange occurred;

(6) pursuant to his answer of 20 July 1993, *Official Report,* columns *170-74,* what tests and studies Porton Down has carried out on *(a)* trytamines and *(b)* mescaline sulphate; if these experiments involved animals and service personnel; and where the results were published;

(7) when staff from the chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down and Nancekuke visited or were stationed at the United States Department of Defence naval weapons

centre in China Lake, California; what was the purpose of these visits; how many staff were involved; and through which defence agreement the visits were organised;

(8) in which years the chemical and biological warfare establishment at Porton Down and Nancekuke carried out research into saxitoxin/shellfish poison; how many animals and service personnel were involved in the research; what was the conclusion of the research; when the results of the work were exchanged with the United States of America, Canada or Australia; and under which defence agreement this exchange was arranged.

Mr. Hanley: These matters are for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letters from Graham S. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 27 January 1994.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what work his Department has carried out on the alcohol-amine binary reactant OPA; when and at which establishment these experiments were carried out; and what was the assessment of this work (Question 13, Order Paper 19 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of the materials which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor.

3. The alcohol-amine binary reactant (OPA) consists of isopropylalcohol and isopropylamine. Our records indicate that no work has been carried out by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment or its precursor establishments on the binary reactant (OPA) although isopropylalcohol has been used as a precursor in the preparation of the unitary nerve agent, Sarin (GB), at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down, at Nancekuke and at Sutton Oak.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when the chemical and biological warfare establishment at Porton Down and Nancekuke carried out experiments on *(a)* sea wasp toxin, *(b)* ricin toxin and *(c)* abrin toxin; what was the purpose of the work; and what were the conclusions and assessments of each toxin (Question 18, Order Paper 19 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Our records indicate that no work has been carried out on sea wasp toxin by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment or its precursor establishments.

4. Ricin has long been recognised as a potential chemical warfare agent and experiments involving ricin were first carried out during World War II. Since then ricin has been considered as appropriate in studies of the potential hazards to the United Kingdom Armed Forces experimental work on ricin aimed at medical countermeasures started in the early 1990s.

5. Abrin is structurally related to ricin and work on medical countermeasures to abrin also began in the early 1990s.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many liaison officers from the former military establishment at Nancekuke were stationed at United States military chemical and biological warfare establishments before Nancekuke was dismantled; what were the functions of these officers; at which United States establishments they were stationed; and through which defence agreements these liaison officers were arranged (Question 19, Order Paper 19 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. Our records indicate that no liaison officers from Nancekuke were stationed at United States military chemical and biological warfare establishments before Nancekuke was dismantled.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what studies and trials the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down has carried out into the dissemination of agent aerosols at sea; what are the names of these experients; when and where these experiments took place; and what was the conclusion of each of the experients (Question 20, Order Paper 19 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. Studies into the potential hazard to the UK Armed Forces resulting from the use of chemical or biological agents are carried out on a continuing basis in order to ensure that effective protective measures are taken against the threat of chemical or biological weapon attacks.

3. Trials into the dissemination of agent aerosols at sea have taken place over a number of years. These are as follows:

(a) Scapa Flow trials carried out in 1923 which examined the vulnerability of Naval vessels to attack with a toxic chemical particulate agent.

(b) Operation HARNESS which took place in Caribbean waters off the Behamas from December 1948 to February 1949 to determine the practicability of conducting biological warfare trials at sea.

(c) Operation CAULDRON in Scottish waters off Stornaway in the Isles of Lewis in May-December 1952 which established that several pathogens could constitute a hazard if used as BW agents.

(d) Operation HESPERUS in Scottish waters in May-August 1953 which aimed to consolidate data and compare several dissemination and collection methods.

(e) Operation OZONE in Caribbean waters at a site 20 miles off Nassau in February-May 1954 when data on the decay of viability at longer ranges was obtained.

(f) Operation NEGATION again in Caribbean waters off the Bahamas in November 1954-March 1955 which consolidated data from the previous trials.

4. The United Kingdom abandoned offensive chemical and biological weapons in the late 1950s and since then the role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has been to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking in which year the Department's research into phencyclidine referred to in his Answer of 20th July 1993, Official Report column 171, ended; when the results of the research were first shared with the United States of America; with which US military establishment the information was exchanged; and in what form this exchange occurred (Question 21, Order Paper 19 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. As stated in the Answer of 20 July 1993, Official Report, column 171, this work was carried out in the early 1960s. Information gained was then drawn upon in subsequent years as required by the chemical defence programme and additional work carried out when necessary. It is therefore not possible to say when research ended as the information obtained continues to be drawn upon as required. Likewise, it forms part of the technical database drawn upon in cooperation with the United States of

America under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence, the Technical Cooperation Programme and its predecessors.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer to the honourable Member for Leyton on 20th July 1993, Official Report, column 171, what tests and studies Porton Down has carried out on (a) trytamines and (b) mescaline sulphate; if these experiments involved animals and service personnel; and where the results were published (Question 22, Order Paper 19 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Tryptamines are indole derivatives, some of which produce psychotomimetic effects similar to those produced by lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD_{25}). In the early 1960s a series of tests were carried out to determine structure activity relationships and all the tryptamines synthesised were found to be less potent than LSD_{25} and were therefore regarded as a less serious toxic hazard than LSD_{25}. These tests involved the use of animals but did not involve the use of Service volunteers. The following publication was published following this research:

BRIMBLECOMBE R W, DOWNING D F, GREEN D M and HUNT R R (1964). Some pharmacological effects of series of tryptamine derivatives. Brit J Pharmacol *23*, 43-54.

4. Mescaline is a substituted phenylalkylamine compound possessing similar psychotomimetic activity to that produced by LSD_{25} and tests and studies were carried out in the 1960s and early 1970s to determine whether or not mescaline might be used by an aggressor as an incapacitating agent. The studies showed that mescaline was considerably less potent than LSD. The tests involved the use of animals but did not involve the use of Service volunteers. The work on mescaline resulted in the following publications:

a. BRIMBLECOMBE R W (1963). Effects of psychotropic drugs on open field behaviour in rats. Psychopharmacologia, *4*, 139-147.
b. ALDOUS F A B, BARRASS B C, BREWSTER K, BUXTON D A, GREEN D M, PINDER R M, RICH P, SKEELS M AND TUTT K T (1974). Structure-activity relationships in psychotomimetic phenylalkylamines. Journal of Medicinal Chemistry, *17*, 110-1111.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when staff from the chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down and Nancekuke visited or were stationed at the US Department of Defence Naval Weapons Center in China Lake, California; what was the purpose of these visits; how many staff were involved; and through which defence agreement the vists were organised (Question 24, Order Paper 19 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. Our records do not indicate that staff from the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down or Nancekuke have visited or been stationed at the US Department of Defense Naval Weapons Center in China Lake, California. Some members of staff, however, may have visited the US Naval Weapons Center before or after their period of duty at CBDE Porton Down or Nancekuke.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking in which years the chemical and biological warfare establishment at Porton Down and Nancekuke carried out research into saxitoxin/shellfish poison; how many animals and service personnel were involved in the research; what was the conclusion of the research; when the results of the work were exchanged with the United States of America, Canada or Australia; and under which defence agreement this exchange was arranged (Question 30, Order Paper 19 January 1994) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work it is necessary to investigate the effectiveness of protective measures against the range of potential agents.

3. A study on saxitoxin was carried out in 1982 to determine whether such toxins have any effect on medical countermeasures against nerve agents. This study involved the use of about 90 mice but did not involve the use of Service volunteers. This study indicated that futher work on the interaction between saxitoxin and nerve agents was not required.

4. Information arising from this study was part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would therefore be part of the technical database drawn upon in cooperation with the United States of America, Canada and Australia under the international agreements referred to by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the Rt. Hon. Archie Hamilton, MP in his answer of 21 May 1992, Official Report, columns 255-256.

Housing Stock

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the salary of the person appointed to manage his Department's housing stock; and what comparisons he undertook of salary levels in housing associations with similar levels of stock.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence has advertised for a chief executive of a new private sector organisation which will own and manage the defence married quarters estate of some 68,000 properties in Great Britain. An appointment to the post has not yet been made. The post was advertised at a salary level of circa £100,000. There are no housing associations with housing stock of a similar size.

Officers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officers of two-star rank are in the medical services of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

	Numbers
(a) Army	3
(b) Royal Navy	2
(c) Royal Air Force	[1,2]5

[1] Includes one Tri-service rotational post currently filled by the RAF and from September 1995 by the Royal Navy.

[2] Due to reduce by 2 as of 1 April 1994.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officers of two-star rank there are in each of the armed services; and what have been the figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

1 January	*RN Services Rear Admiral RN Major General RM*	*Army Major-General*	*Royal Air Force Air Vice-Marshal*	*Total*
1979	45	83	43	171
1980	46	81	47	174
1981	50	75	47	172
1982	48	72	44	164
1983	46	70	42	158
1984	40	74	41	155
1985	40	73	43	156
1986	43	67	45	155
1987	42	58	50	150
1988	42	64	48	154
1989	42	61	48	151
1990	40	67	42	149
1991	41	66	41	148
1992	35	59	46	140
1993	32	56	40	128
1993[1]	33	57	37	127

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[1] (1 October) Latest available figures.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the rank of the commanding officer of each of the military districts; and if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying variations.

Mr. Hanley: United Kingdom Land Forces—UKLF—is divided into five military districts; Southern, Eastern, Wales and Western, London and Scotland. With the exception of Southern district, each General Officer Commanding—GOC—is a major general (2 star). The GOC of Southern district is a Lieutenant General (3 star). The variation is a consequence of the comparative size of the district, measured in terms of units under command.

Mr. Dennis Thomas

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Mr. Dennis Thomas, a constituent of the hon. Member for Ilford, South, will receive the campaign stars and medals earned by his service in the second world war with the British Army in India and Malaya; and when he first applied to the Army medal office for these decorations.

Mr. Hanley: Mr. Thomas applied to the Army medal office for his medals in November 1992. That office expects to issue Mr. Thomas with his full medal entitlement in the very near future. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member to advise him of the outcome of Mr. Thomas's claim, as soon as his full entitlement of awards is known.

Contracts (Prices)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those Ministry of Defence contracts in the past year which cost over the contract price, giving the figures for bid price and final cost for each contract.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 28 January 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Court Clerks

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement concerning fixed-term contracts and performance-related pay for magistrates court clerks.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Fixed-term contracts and performance-related pay have a role to play in the effective provision of all public services, including the magistrates courts service. A number of magistrates courts committees have already chosen to introduce fixed-term contracts.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration he has given to buying or borrowing photographs for the walls of his office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Most of the works of art in my office are on loan from the Government art collection, which includes 190 photographs. I considered, but did not select, a photograph from the collection's reserve to hang in my office.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many paintings and/or photographs there are on the walls of his office.

Mr. Brooke: I have six paintings on loan from the Government art collection in my office, and one engraving of my own.

Royal Parks

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans there are to hold major events in the Royal Parks in the future.

Mr. Sproat: The Royal Parks are a very important part of the capital. Londoners and visitors alike draw huge benefit from them. Summer entertainment for the public has long been a key part of this success and forms part of the character and the tradition of all the Royal Parks. The Royal Parks will soon be unveiling its largest-ever programme of summer entertainment. To complement this, I intend to encourage medium to large-scale events that would add to the public's enjoyment of the Royal Parks, while not detracting from their unique character. The chief executive of the Royal Parks would be pleased to hear from anyone who has innovative ideas or proposals.

Sport

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has for changes in the structures for sport at United Kingdom and home country levels.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* I hope to be able to announce proposals for the organisation of sport at United Kingdom level and in England by Easter. The structure of sport in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the appropriate Secretaries of State.

Proscribed Organisations (Broadcasts)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration he has given to the ban on broadcasting the voices of members of proscribed organisations following the Irish Government's decision not to continue to impose a ban.

Mr. Brooke: Broadcasting in the Republic of Ireland is a matter for the Irish Government. A review of the broadcasting restrictions in the United Kingdom is in progress.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of those aged *(a)* 16 to 18 years, *(b)* 18 and 19 years and *(c)* 16 to 24 years unemployed in the London borough of Newham; what percentages they are of the cohort; how many people under the age of 25 years in the London borough of Newham have never worked; and what percentage of those aged 16 years in the London borough of Newham (i) stayed on at school, (ii) went into jobs or (iii) went into youth training.

Miss Widdecombe: In October 1993 unadjusted claimant unemployment in the London borough of Newham stood at 259 16 to 18-year-olds, 575 18 and 19-year-olds and 2,252 16 to 24-year-olds.

This represents the extent of the available information.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the most recent residence-based unemployment rates for each appropriate area of Durham constituency, giving the figures overall and broken down for male and female; what is the change in the number of unemployed claimants in Durham for the same month in each of the last six years; and what has been the percentage change since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on residence-based unemployment rates are available from the labour force survey, LFS, and are based on the internationally standard International Labour Organisation definition. At present, these are not available below the level of standard region except for training and enterprise councils, TECs, and local enterprise companies. The residence-based ILO unemployment rate for the County Durham TEC area in summer —June to August—1993, was 7 per cent. for all persons and 16·2 per cent. for men, not seasonally adjusted. The LFS sample size was not large enough to provide equivalent rates for women.

Data on the numbers of unemployed claimants in the Durham local authority district are on the unadjusted basis and are not available prior to 1983. Those data are given for December of each year.

Date	*Number of unemployed claimants*
1983	4,248
1988	3,215
1989	2,571
1990	2,764
1991	3,238
1992	3,590
1993	3,467

Apprenticeships

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are his objectives for the modern apprenticeships scheme.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that modern apprenticeships will improve our economic competitiveness by increasing the number of young people qualifying to the key technician and supervisor levels. When the scheme is fully operational, it is envisaged that up to 150,000 young people in England will be in modern apprentice training at any one time. The Government want modern apprenticeships to increase to over 40,000 the number of young people reaching national vocational qualification level 3 through training in England each year—roughly tripling the current number.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide a table showing, for each TEC in Greater London, the amount of funding *(a)* allocated and *(b)* paid under each block of expenditure for 1991-92 and 1992-93 and the amounts allocated for 1993-94.

Miss Widdecombe: The table shows the amount of funding allocated and paid under each block of expenditure for training and enterprise councils in the Greater London area for the period 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Training and enterprise council budgets and outturn
London region

£ million

	AZTEC	*CENTEC*	*CILNTEC*	*LETEC*	*NLTEC*	*NWLTEC*	*SOLOTEC*	*STTEC*	*WLTEC*	*RORUNEA*	*Region*
1991-92 Budget											
Block 1	4·5	3·9	3·6	12·6	3·3	2·3	9·9	7·0	4·5	—	51·6
Block 2	3·3	3·8	2·6	10·1	3·9	1·7	4·3	8·6	2·3	0·3	40·9
Block 3	1·6	2·7	1·5	2·7	1·7	0·9	1·8	3·1	1·3	—	17·3
Block 4	0·7	1·1	0·8	1·3	0·8	0·3	1·4	1·6	0·9	—	8·9
Block 5	1·0	1·2	0·6	2·0	0·7	0·6	1·5	1·8	0·8	—	10·2
TOTAL	11·1	12·7	9·1	28·7	10·4	5·8	18·9	22·1	9·8	0·3	128·9
1991-92 Outturn											
Block 1	4·2	3·4	3·1	11·5	2·5	2·3	8·5	7·6	4·2	—	47·3
Block 2	2·2	3·5	2·0	8·2	3·6	2·1	3·6	8·6	2·1	0·1	36·2
Block 3	1·5	2·7	1·5	2·5	1·8	1·0	1·7	3·0	1·4	—	17·0
Block 4	0·4	0·7	0·4	0·9	0·2	0·2	1·0	0·6	0·2	—	4·6
Block 5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	8·4	10·3	7·0	23·1	8·1	5·6	14·9	19·9	7·9	0·1	105·1
1992-93 Budget											
Block 1	5·2	8·1	8·9	16·1	6·3	4·3	11·2	12·4	9·3	—	81·6
Block 2	3·3	8·4	7·4	13·0	7·5	3·5	4·2	12·9	3·8	—	64·1
Block 3	1·7	4·3	2·8	2·8	2·4	1·3	2·0	3·4	1·9	—	22·6
Block 4	0·5	0·7	0·9	0·8	0·9	0·3	0·8	1·4	1·1	—	7·6
Block 5	1·2	2·8	2·2	3·3	2·0	1·3	2·0	2·8	1·9	—	19·6
TOTAL	11·9	24·3	22·3	36·0	19·1	10·8	20·2	32·8	18·0	—	195·6
1992-93 Outturn											
Block 1	4·6	7·2	8·0	15·1	5·9	4·2	11·1	10·0	8·6	—	74·7
Block 2	3·1	7·3	7·0	11·0	7·3	3·4	3·7	11·6	3·5	—	57·9
Block 3	1·6	4·3	2·6	2·7	2·4	1·3	1·9	3·2	1·9	—	22·0
Block 4	0·6	0·7	0·9	0·8	0·9	0·4	0·6	1·4	0·8	—	7·1
Block 5	1·1	2·7	2·1	3·1	1·9	1·2	1·8	2·6	1·8	—	18·3
TOTAL	11·0	22·2	20·6	32·8	18·5	10·6	19·1	28·8	16·6	—	180·1
1993-94 Budget											
Block 1	5·4	8·3	9·6	17·7	6·1	4·8	10·6	15·0	10·2	—	87·6
Block 2	3·4	8·6	7·2	12·5	6·8	3·5	4·3	13·4	4·0	—	63·7
Block 3	1·3	2·9	2·1	2·0	2·1	1·1	2·3	2·8	1·3	—	17·8
Block 4	0·5	0·8	0·8	0·7	0·5	0·5	0·8	0·8	1·2	—	6·7
Learning for Work	0·2	0·4	0·2	0·4	0·2	0·2	0·3	0·5	0·3	—	2·6
TEC Challenge	1·2	0·0	0·3	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	—	1·5
Skills Choice	0·4	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	—	0·4
Open Learning Credits	0·0	0·2	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	—	0·2

	AZTEC	*CENTEC*	*CILNTEC*	*LETEC*	*NLTEC*	*NWLTEC*	*SOLOTEC*	*STTEC*	*WLTEC*	*RORUNEA*	*Region*
Out of school childcare	0·1	0·0	0·0	0·1	0·1	0·0	0·0	0·1	0·0	—	0·3
Block 5	1·3	2·7	2·2	3·3	2·0	1·3	2·2	3·2	1·9	—	20·1
TOTAL	13·6	23·9	22·6	36·7	17·7	11·4	20·4	35·8	18·9	—	201·0

1. The following TECs became operational during the financial year 1991-92 and for these TECs the relevant part-year figures are given:

Operational From:
South Thames TEC—27 May 1991
West London TEC—19 August 1991
Central London TEC—16 September 1991
North London TEC—16 September 1991
North West London TEC—16 September 1991
City and Inner London North TEC—14 October 1991

2. Block 1 of the tables includes youth training including youth credits, WRFE, education business partnerships, careers libraries, careers partnerships, teacher placement services and Compacts.

3. Block 2, for 1991-92 and 1992-93 includes employment training, employment action and higher technology national training. In 1993-94 these programmes were merged into a new programme called training for work.

4. In 1991-92 the London regional office of the Employment Department ran employment action for two TEC areas—North-West London and West London.

5. Block 3 relates to business enterprise support.

6. In 1991-92 and 1992-93 block 4 included the local initiative fund and national development projects. In 1993-94 block 4 includes the local initiative fund, gateway to learning and access to assessment. Gateway to learning and access to assessment were previously run as national development projects.

7. Block 5 relates to the management fee paid to TECs. The spend data are not available for.

8. All spend data are taken from the TEC invoice.

9. Budget data are taken from TEC planning tables. For 1993-94, budget data include additions and virements made up to 24 January 1994. They are therefore likely to be marginally different than the original budgets agreed with TECs at the beginning of the contract year.

Key to Table 1:
Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs)
AZTEC—TEC for Kingston, Merton and Wandsworth
CENTEC—Central London TEC
CILNTEC—City and Inner London North TEC
LETEC—London East TEC
NLTEC—North London TEC
NWLTEC—North West London TEC
SOLOTEC—South London TEC
STTEC—South Thames TEC
WLTEC—West London TEC
RO Run EA—Employment Department London regional office run employment action—see footnote 4.

Youth Employment

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs are at present available for youth employment in *(a)* the Houghton and Washington constituency and *(b)* the city of Sunderland; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Department does not carry a breakdown of vacancy figures by their suitability for different age groups. Listed in the table are the total number of unfilled vacancies in the jobcentres of Houghton, Washington and Sunderland for December 1993. Nationally, jobcentre vacancies account for about a third of all vacancies in the economy as a whole.

Jobcentre	*Vacancy*
Houghton-le-Spring	52
Washington	149
Sunderland	284

PRIME MINISTER

Charterline Pilot Scheme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against the Charterline pilot scheme.

The Prime Minister: I have received numerous representations on charter issues.

Advisory Panel on Environmental Policy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what criteria he used in choosing the members of his advisory panel on environmental policy announced on 25 January.

The Prime Minister: The members of the panel have been chosen for their wide-ranging knowledge and practical experience in matters relevant to protection of the environment and economic development.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with his Cabinet colleagues prior to drafting his foreword to the report on the sustainable development strategy for the United Kingdom regarding the content of the report.

The Prime Minister: I have had full discussions with my ministerial colleagues about the content of the United Kingdom strategy for sustainable development.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister how many visits the Prime Minister has made to Scotland since he took office; and if he will list the dates of these visits and locations visited.

The Prime Minister: Since I took office I have made 13 visits to various locations in Scotland.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity Supplies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy on the proposal for a reduction in voltage of electricity supplies; and what powers he has to stop it being introduced in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: All EC countries are changing their low voltage supply systems to a nominal voltage of 230/400 volts to provide voltage harmonisation throughout the EC. My policy is to endorse this standardisation following extensive consultation.

This will remove a perceived barrier to trade and so further the objectives of the single market. Consumers will have greater choice and flexibility in the purchase and use of electrical applicances. The Secretary of State will be using his powers under the Electricity Act 1989 to amend the Electricity Supply Regulations 1988 in order to effect this standardisation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what savings will be made on consumer costs of electricity supply from France when the agreed reduction in voltage comes into effect.

Mr. Eggar: The change in voltage to a standardised nominal low voltage of 230/400 volts throughout the EC has no relevance to the cost of electricity supplies to or from France over the sub-sea cables. The electricity exchanged with France is done at extremely high voltage direct current and the costs associated with those arrangements are not a function of consumer voltages and will not be affected by the proposed standardisation.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultation took place with *(a)* industry, *(b)* domestic users and *(c)* the electricity supply industry before the reduction in voltage was accepted.

Mr. Eggar: Consultations took place with 36 different organisations representing the United Kingdom electricity companies, equipment manufacturers and consumers.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what increased costs will attend consumer costs of electricity supplies from the United Kingdom and France when the agreed reduction in voltage comes into effect.

Mr. Eggar: I do not expect that consumers of electricity will face any increases in the cost of their electricity as a result of standardisation.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what compensation will be paid to industrial users of electricity who have purchased heating equipment appropriate to their factory size and are now required to buy extra equipment to heat the same space after the reduction in voltage.

Mr. Eggar: It is not intended to pay compensation to industrial users of electricity in respect of the purchasing of additional heating equipment. The performance of some electrical appliances will be reduced in making the change to 230 volts from 240, but the effect will be minimal and will be offset by the wider benefits to consumers of standardisation.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the reduction in voltage in electricity supplies agreed with the European Community comes into effect.

Mr. Eggar: The change from a nominal supply voltage of 240 to 230 volts will come into effect on 1 January 1995. An amendment to the Electricity Supply Regulations 1988 will be needed to take effect from the same date.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what reasons underlay his decision to agree to reduce the voltage on electricity supplies from 400 volts to 280 volts and from 240 volts to 230 volts for domestic purposes.

Mr. Eggar: In 1988, the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation proposed the harmonisation of the existing low voltage supplies in the EC countries. In Great Britain the majority of the manufacturers consulted were strongly in favour of a move to 230 volts in order to avoid confusion within the Community, while providing the considerable advantages of single product ranges and certifying procedures for the Community as a whole.

This move is seen as a means of optimising designs leading to simpler production procedures, and uniformity of safety standards as well as reducing barriers to trade.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimates he has made of the increase in hypothermia consequent on the reduced output of heating equipment because of the reduction in voltage.

Mr. Eggar: The effect on output of electrical heating equipment in making the change to a nominal voltage of 230 volts in accordance with the time scales and tolerances required for EC voltage harmonisation will be insignificant and is therefore not a relevant consideration in the incidence of hypothermia.

Insurance Market

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made as to the solvency of the Lloyd's insurance market; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The solvency of the Lloyd's insurance market remains as described in my answer to my hon. Friend on 9 December, *Official Report*, column *346*.

Coal Industry

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the amount of financial subsidy he will make available to British Coal to settle extra sales of coal on top of the main contracts with the generators in the current financial year as outlined in "Prospects for Coal"; how many tonnes of extra sales this involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The amount of subsidy paid will depend on how successful British Coal and the private sector are at securing additional sales. Details of the total amount of subsidy paid will be made available to Parliament in the normal way.

Dr. Hampson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the proposed timetable for the sale of Coal Products Ltd. by British Coal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The future of Coal Products Ltd. is a matter for British Coal.

Shipbuilding Intervention Fund

Mr. Coe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy on the level of shipbuilding intervention funding during 1994.

Mr. Sainsbury: Following a decision of the European Commission, notified to member states on 21 December 1993, I have decided that the United Kingdom's maximum level of support for large ships from 1 January 1994 should continue to be 9 per cent. This is inclusive of shipbuilder's relief at 2 per cent.

I have similarly decided that maximum support for small ships from 1 January 1994 should continue to be 4·5 per cent, inclusive of the shipbuilder's relief of 2 per cent.

These levels are at the maximum permitted by the EC shipbuilding regime. They are subject to review in the light of the outcome of the current OECD negotiations on an agreement on shipbuilding subsidies.

Structural Funds

Mr. Streeter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he is yet able to inform the House of the final outcome of the negotiations with the European Communities on the designation under the structural funds of objective 2 and 5(b) areas.

Mr. Sainsbury *[pursuant to his reply, 13 January 1994, Official Report, columns 252-54]:* The Commission has now announced that it has decided to make no changes to the initial list of areas it announced on 21 December. I have placed a copy of the final list, which includes details where appropriate at ward level, in the Library of the House. It will appear in the *Official Journal* in due course.

The Commission has also announced that the indicative allocation to the United Kingdom for objective 2 for the period 1994-1996 is 2,142 million ecu.

I hope to be able to provide the final objective 5(b) list in the near future when it has been finally decided by the Commission.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Eel Fisheries

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the location of each eel fishery in Northern Ireland together with the rateable value of each and the body to which the rates are paid.

Mr. Tim Smith: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Rate Collection Agency under its chief executive, Mr. D. W. Gallagher. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. W. Gallagher to Mr. William Ross, dated 26 January 1994:

You recently asked a Parliamentary Question about the locations and rateable values of eel fisheries in Northern Ireland. As I am responsible for the Rate Collection Agency (RCA), the body to which the rates are paid, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply.

There are three entries in the Valuation List relating to eel fisheries, all of which refer to Toome Eel Fishery (NI) Ltd., but which fall into three separate districts.

Under Article 17 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, Eel and Salmon Fisheries are currently derated by 60 per cent. which in effect means that rates are chargeable on only 40 per cent. of the Net Annual Value. This is outlined in the table below—

Address	*Net annual value* £	*RV on which rates are chargeable* £	*District council area*
Toome Eel Fishery (NI) Ltd. Toome Eel Fishery (PT) Portna & Movanagher	4,800	1,920	Ballymoney
Toome Eel Fishery (NI) Ltd. Toome Eel Fishery (PT) Portna & Toome	12,500	5,000	Magherafelt
Toome Eel Fishery (NI) Ltd. Toome Eel Fishery (PT) Movanagher	500	200	Coleraine

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Upland Areas (Assistance)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the total value of all assistance to agriculture in the upland areas of England in each year since 1987, including environmental assistance, capital grants and sheep and livestock subsidies.

Mr. Jack: The information is set out in the table. For the purposes of this exercise "upland areas" are defined as less-favoured areas.

Assistance paid to farmers in upland areas of England (Uplands defined as less-favoured areas)

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Environmentally sensitive areas[6]	1,146	2,470	2,615	2,653	2,716	4,120	8,194
Capital grants[4]	9,900	9,500	11,100	10,900	10,700	8,500	4,100
Hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme (HLCAs)	28,439	29,007	30,045	32,503	37,237	38,374	[2]33,126
Sheep annual premium scheme (SAPs)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	57,491	92,724	92,049
Farm woodland scheme[1]	n/a	n/a	14	20	32	38	45
Farm woodland premium scheme[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	34
Five year set aside[5]	n/a	n/a	255	350	600	700	460
Pilot beef and sheep extensification scheme[5]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	100	100	100
Beef special premium scheme[8]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Beef variable premium scheme[8]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Suckler cow premium scheme[7]	n/a	n/a	n/a	12,040	14,487	15,612	n/a
Sheep variable premium scheme[8]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

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[1] Farm woodland premium scheme succeeded farm woodland scheme on 1 April 1992.

[2] January to October.

[3] Under the sheep annual premium scheme, SAPs, premium is payable to farmers in both uplands and lowlands areas. It is not possible to ascertain how much of the premium expenditure for years prior to 1991 went to farmers in upland areas, as the less-favoured area—LFA supplement was not introduced until the 1991 scheme. The figures for the sheep annual premium scheme relate to payments for that year's scheme. Payments are staged and extend into the following year.

[4] The various schemes under which grant has been paid are: agriculture and horticulture development scheme, farm and horticulture development scheme, agriculture and horticulture development scheme, agriculture improvement scheme, farm diversification scheme, farm and conservation grant scheme.

[5] Estimated expenditure

[6] Includes, Pennine Dales, Clun, North Peak, Exmoor, Lake District, Southwest Peak, West Penwith ESAs. Payments relate to the cost of agreements made on the basis of applications submitted in the year shown.

[7] For 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1993 assistance given to upland areas is not separately identifiable.

[8] No differentiation is made under these schemes between upland/lowland producers.

n/a = Not available.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on which occasions since 1979 her Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if she will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Jack: The annual costs of external consultants employed by the Department—excluding agencies—since 1984-85 are set out. The precise number of contracts, details of the purposes for which they were employed and data for earlier years can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Financial year	*Expenditure (£)*
1984-85	[1]27,110
1985-86	[1]174,724
1986-87	[1]135,279
1987-88	[1]44,015
1988-89	1,174,114
1989-90	2,972,150
1990-91	4,495,793
1991-92	5,374,284
1992-93	7,010,814

[1] Excludes computer consultants.

Wool Marketing Scheme

Sir David Steel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on the future of the British wool marketing scheme.

Mr. Jack: The Government believe that the British wool marketing scheme continues to operate in the interests of producers, consumers and the industry and consequently are not planning to abolish it. The British Wool Marketing Board is currently considering amendments to the operation of scheme following the ending of the wool guarantee. These amendments will have to be approved by producers before the Government can arrange for their enactment in secondary legislation.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the numbers of applications and the area applied for under the arable area payments scheme in England in 1993; how the total area applied for compares with the regional base area; and whether there are any plans for changes in the regional base area for 1994.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Over 46,000 applications covering over 3·5 million hectares were received. Details of the applications and a comparison with the base area are set out.

We are asking the Commission to establish a separate base area for maize, excluding sweetcorn, in England in 1994. This would mean that arable producers would not be penalised by the recent and continuing expansion in production of forage maize for silage by livestock producers. Should maize production exceed the base area, maize producers would be subject to an in-year reduction in arable area payments and additional uncompensated set-aside the following year, if they wished to continue to claim under the main scheme.

The changes to the rules on base area I negotiated at the December Agriculture Council mean that maize producers would be penalised only if both the regional maize base area and the total of the regional base areas for both maize and for other crops were exceeded.

Arable area payments are, of course intended to compensate farmers for the reductions in cereal prices agreed as part of common agricultural policy reform. Producers of forage maize for silage have not suffered from the reductions. Indeed, as livestock producers, they have benefited as cereals are a major input into feed. Many will also be in receipt of livestock subsidies.

Further changes to the base area will need to include linseed, which comes fully into the arable area payments scheme in 1994, and to exclude vining peas, which are no longer eligible for aid. The expected base area figures are shown in the table:

	Number
Numbers of applications	
Main scheme	27,248
Simplified scheme	19,006
TOTAL	46,254
Area applied for—ha	
MAIN SCHEME:	3,361,589
Cereals and sweetcorn	2,173,529
of which: maize	34,804
Oilseeds	316,170
Proteins	220,853
of which: vining peas	29,782
Linseed	152,990
Set-aside	498,046
of which: growing non-food crops	49,870
SIMPLIFIED SCHEME:	225,857
Cereals	220,565
of which: maize	19,553
Oilseeds	1,844
Proteins	3,449
of which: Vining peas	214

	Number
GRAND TOTAL	3,587,446

Comparison with Base Area (ha)

	Number
Area applied for under Arable Area Payments Scheme (excluding vining peas and linseed)	3,404,460
Area in five-year set-aside	106,897
Eligible crops claimed as forage area	91,159
of which: maize	15,026
TOTAL	3,602,516
Base area	3,742,422
Base area less total	139,906

Proposed Revised Base Area (hectares)
(Subject to Commission approval)

	Number
Maize	33,226
Other crops	3,761,366
TOTAL	3,794,592

Flash Floods

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice her department gives to farmers to avoid soil erosion in flash floods.

Mrs. Shephard: My Department published the code of good agricultural practice for the protection of soil in December last year.

The code provides practical guidance to help farmers and growers avoid causing long-term damage to the soil and specifically deals with techniques to combat soil erosion caused by water.

Copies of the soil code have been placed in the Library of the House.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Technology Foresight

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many technology foresight panels he expects to appoint; what industrial or technological sectors they will cover; what their timetable is for reporting to the technology foresight steering group; and when he expects their final report to be published.

Mr. Waldegrave: The foresight steering group, chaired by the chief scientific adviser, is meeting on 11 February to decide its advice to me on these issues. I will make an announcement soon after that about how the technology foresight programme will be taken forward during 1994.

Research and Development

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the timetable for the completion and publication of the 1994 forward look and annual review of Government-funded research and development.

Mr. Waldegrave: The 1994 forward look of Government-funded science and technology will be published in April. Statistical tables previously produced in the annual review of Government-funded research and development will continue to be published in the form of a statistical supplement to the new forward look.

EDUCATION

Education Support and Training Grants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what total amount of funding has been made available over the last year under the grants for education support and training.

Mr. Forth: The 1993-94 grants for education support and training GEST programme supports local education authority expenditure of £320·2 million. Central Government grant is in most cases paid at the rate of 60 per cent. of this expenditure.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of grants for education support and training, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Voluntary-aided Schools (Capital Grants)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what amount and percentage of underspending or overspending has occurred on capital grants to voluntary-aided schools for building work in each of the last three completed financial years; whether his Department has reviewed the reasons for any marked or persistent underspending; and whether there are reasons to expect either underspending or overspending to be reported for 1993-94;

(2) what amount and percentage of underspending or overspending has occurred on capital grants to voluntary-aided schools for repair work in each of the last three completed financial years; whether his Department has reviewed the reasons for any marked or persistent underspending; and whether there are reasons to expect either underspending or overspending to be reported for 1993-94.

Mr. Forth: Details of aided school capital and repair grant estimates, final outturn and percentage under-overspend from 1990-91 to 1992-93 are as follows:

Year	Estimate £ million	Outturn £ million	Percentage under/ overspend
Repairs			
1990-91	35·0	41·8	19 overspend
1991-92	47·5	49·1	3 overspend
1992-93	55·0	36·8	33 underspend
	Capital		
1990-91	71·0	64·0	10 underspend
1991-92	84·2	63·9	24 underspend
1992-93	96·6	81·3	16 underspend

The overall outturn for both programmes for 1990-91 and the two previous years was broadly in balance with the estimate. The main reasons for the recent underspend on the capital programme appear to be attributable to the economic recession, in particular the inability of some governing bodies to fund their 15 per cent. contribution, lower than estimated tender costs and delays caused by contractor liquidations.

The Department is revising its approval, monitoring and in-year reallocation procedures. Expenditure in 1993-94 so far suggests a small overspend on the capital progamme balanced by a corresponding underspend on repairs. However, the predictive value of expenditure so far is limited because a very high proportion of claims are usually submitted in the last two months of the financial year.

School Transport (Accidents)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what measures he intends to bring forward to help prevent or mitigate accidents involving school transport.

Mr. Forth: Advice on this matter is available in the 1991 report from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, endorsed by this Department and distributed to all local education authorities and schools. We are keeping relevant issues under review, in close collaboration with the Department of Transport, which also has relevant responsibilities, but have no immediate proposals for further action.

Further Education Funding Council

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, columns *545-48*, if he will publish further details of the preparatory costs incurred in the establishment of the Further Education Funding Council.

Mr. Boswell: The information is follows:

	£ million
Running costs	4·0
Consultancies	1·8
Payments to assist colleges' preparation for independence	18·6
Total	24·4

HEALTH

Junior Doctors

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to provide guidelines for accommodation for junior doctors.

Dr. Mawhinney: Advice on living conditions for junior doctors was issued as part of the new deal guidance in June 1991, copies of which are available in the Library. I have asked the national health service to treat improvements in this area as a priority. We have no plans to issue further guidance.

Health Service Employees

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what disciplinary measures are available against health service employees responsible for making unauthorised payments.

Dr. Mawhinney: Disciplinary procedures for health service staff employed on national terms and conditions of service are governed by section 40 of the General Whitley Council handbook, a copy of which is available in the Library. This provides a framework within which employing authorities determine local disciplinary procedures. Under the 1990 National Health Service and Community Care Act, NHS trusts have the freedom to establish their own disciplinary procedures.

The question of whether or not to take disciplinary action, and its severity, is entirely a matter for each health employer.

Departmental Cars

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines are applied to the use of official cars for personal purposes by Department of Health staff or Ministers; and who originate these guidelines;

(2) what arrangements exist within her Department for reimbursement by Ministers of the cost of private use of official cars.

Mr. Sackville: Official cars may not be used for personal purposes except during the working week when the effect is a saving of time for use on official duties or for security reasons.

Mental Health

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many districts have a 24-hour, seven-day crisis intervention service provided by experienced mental health workers.

Mr. Bowis: All district health authorities are required to have psychiatrists approved under section 12 of the Mental Health Act 1983 available and similarly all local authorities are required to have approved social workers. Dedicated crisis intervention services are in place where assessed needs suggest this is a cost-effective way of providing services.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of staff in mental health units are trained to provide *(a)* case management, *(b)* community crisis intervention, *(c)* home-based care and *(d)* normalised day care.

Mr. Bowis: Mental health staff are expected to be able to work in a variety of service settings and to provide a range of services to patients. It is a matter for local health authorities to decide on training strategies.

Hospital Hostel Beds

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many districts have hospital hostel beds.

Mr. Bowis: We encourage the provision of hospital hostels where they are appropriate for local needs but we do not record their provision centrally.

Respite Beds

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many districts provide crisis diversion and respite beds in the community or in the hospital.

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities do not usually earmark beds. It is more efficient to use them in a flexible way.

NHS Private Beds

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to collect and publish data on private beds in the NHS in the years after 1990-91;

(2) how many individual NHS/pay bed units there were in each region including special health authorities in each of the last five years; and how many pay beds there were in these units in each of those regions in each of the last five years;

(3) how many authorised pay beds there were in 1991-92 in *(a)* special health authorities, *(b)* in each region and *(c)* in England as a whole.

Mr. Sackville: Trusts do not "authorise" pay beds and therefore we no longer collect authorised pay bed numbers. Private patient income is recorded in the summarised accounts of health authorities and trusts. This information is used to monitor the extent of private patient activity.

GP Fundholders

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the time scale for producing finally audited figures on fundholding expenditure for 1992-93.

Dr. Mawhinney: Arrangements for audit are made locally. It is for family health services authorities and the Audit Commission to agree the timetable for completing the audit of general practitioner fundholder accounts.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many non-fund-holding practices operating in the area covered by the Macclesfield constituency have declared an interest in becoming fundholding;

(2) how many *(a)* fundholding and *(b)* non-fundholding general practitioner practices operate in the area covered by the Macclesfield parliamentary constituency.

Dr. Mawhinney: Regional health authorities are responsible for managing the general practitioner fundholding scheme in their areas. Nationally, 25 per cent. of the population is covered by GP fundholders. In Mersey region, this is 35 per cent. Information by constituency is not available and could be determined only at disproportionate cost.

Child Minding

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set up an investigation into the adequacy of current child minding regulations and the competence of Surrey county council's social services department following the verdict in the case of Thomas Harrison *v.* Surrey county council and Mrs. Christine Walton; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The events in this case took place in 1989, and the Children Act 1989, which came into force in October 1991, contains updated and effective provisions which enable local authorities to regulate childminders, so that children are protected from harm. I understand that Surrey county council has now reorganised its registration service, and has asked the area child protection committee to conduct a multi-agency review into all the circumstances surrounding the case to ensure that all the lessons have been learned. The Department's social services inspectorate is monitoring this.

Hospitals

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals there were in England in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993.

Mr. Sackville: The available information is shown in the table. Prior to April 1991, a count of the number of individual units supplying activity data provided an estimate of the number of hospitals. The creation of trusts and directly managed units means that from 1991-92 this information is no longer held centrally.

Number of providers submitting data for 1991-92 and 1992-93

	1991-92	*1992-93*
Directly managed units	389	278
NHS trusts	53	141
Special health authorities	8	8
Total	450	427

Note: The count includes all providers who submitted data for wards open day and night, 24 hours, and/or wards open in the day only.

Birth Defects

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information is currently available about the environmental pollution or other causes which might provide an explanation of the incidence of babies being born with deformed or missing hands;

(2) what resources she has made available to local health authorities or to the Medical Research Council, or both, in their examination of babies born with deformed or missing hands;

(3) if she will order a full Government investigation into the incidence of babies being born with deformed or missing hands in coastal areas; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Limb deformities which have occurred in babies born in coastal areas have been the subject of preliminary local investigation. Local inquiries of this kind form part of the public health functions of the health authorities concerned, which are funded as a matter of course. There is no evidence to suggest that the incidence of limb defects in these places is any higher than might occur by chance. Nor is there any information to suggest that environmental pollution might be the cause. Clinicians in Hampshire have been in touch informally with officers of the Medical Research Council's epidemiology unit at Southampton. Any further developments will be monitored closely.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will institute an investigation into the problem of children being born with one hand only; if she will institute an investigation into the problems of children with any other generalised deformities of the body; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: A national system for monitoring and detecting any increase in the prevalence of congenital malformations co-ordinated by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has been in place for the last 30 years. We are aware of particular local investigations which are taking place into the reasons for limb deformities. It would be inappropriate to speculate further until these have been completed.

Form AG3

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to simplify form AG3, with regard to sight tests, glasses and contact lenses; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The style and content of form AG3 are kept under review and changes to improve effectiveness and clarity are made whenever it is feasible to do so.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who are the members currently appointed to the Pharmacists Review Body.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Pharmacists Review Panel is chaired by Mr. J. Keir QC, a former joint secretary of Unilever plc. Its members are Mr. W. G. K. Carter CBE, partner, Price Waterhouse and Co.; Mr. J. F. H. Pease-Watkin, former personnel director, Bowater Corporation; and Mr. J. R. Sargent CBE, former group economic adviser, Midland bank.

Vicky Rimmer

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information has been sought by officials of her Department from doctors treating Vicky Rimmer at the Walton hospital in Liverpool.

Mr. Sackville: It is not our practice to make such inquiries. The treatment of individual patients is a matter for their clinicians.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what scientific research is being funded by her Department into possible links between Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and bovine spongiform encephalopathy;

(2) whether she will establish an independent inquiry into possible links between Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and BSE.

Mr. Sackville: Doctors are asked to report every suspected case of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, (CJD), to the national Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease surveillance unit in Edinburgh, funded jointly by the Department and the Scottish Office. The unit is headed by Dr. Robert Will, consultant neurologist at Edinburgh's Western general hospital. The circumstances of each case are recorded fully and in particular all cases are examined for possible sources of transmission and any occupational factor. The unit was established in 1990 and provided reports in 1992 and 1993, copies of which are readily available to the medical and scientific community and are available in the Library.

The Government are already advised by the independent spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee, chaired by Dr. David Tyrrell FRS, which considers issues relating to spongiform encephalopathies—including CJD and bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

In the circumstances that every case of the very rare disease, CJD, is being fully monitored, that the medical and scientific community is alert to the need to learn more about the causes of CJD, and that the Government have in place an expert committee to give advice, it is not easy to see what would be added by holding an inquiry.

In response to recent media reports, the Chief Medical Officer stated:

> "I am concerned about the recent spate of irresponsible scare stories in the press suggesting that people are at risk of contracting the fatal Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease from eating beef. These sensational and alarmist reports must inevitably frighten large numbers of ordinary people—and for no good reason.
>
> The facts are clear. Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease is extremely rare —only one person in a million gets it—and those unfortunate people who do get it have contracted it for a variety of reasons. There is no evidence at all that eating infected meat is one of them.
>
> Newspaper reports have been commenting on the sad case of one 16-year-old girl—yet no one knows what illness she is suffering from.
>
> We do not ignore any suggestions about the causes of diseases of this seriousness, and the Government have invested considerable resources on the research issues in recent years looking at:
>
> the incidence of CJD;
> the causes of each individual case;
> any possible links with BSE.
>
> On the basis of the work done so far, there is no evidence whatever that BSE causes CJD and, similarly, not the slightest evidence that eating beef or hamburgers causes CJD.
>
> My position as the Government's Chief Medical Officer means that I must provide the best advice to the public, whatever the consequences. If there was any evidence that suggested a link, then I would regard it as my responsibility to bring it to public attention."

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with Ministers at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food regarding the possibility of a link between BSE and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Mr. Sackville: Ministers and officials in both departments are in regular contact on these and other matters of mutual interest.

NHS Hospitals (Private Medical Companies)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department has issued to NHS hospitals about leasing or selling part of their premises to house the facilities of private medical companies.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospitals have leased or sold part of their premises to house the facilities of private medical companies by region.

Mr. Sackville: This is a local matter for national health service trusts and health authorities.

TRANSPORT

Driving Offences

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he is proposing to the present arrangements for disciplining drivers of large goods and passenger-carrying vehicles who commit offences.

Mr. Key: The traffic commissioners are responsible for deciding whether drivers are fit persons to hold an entitlement to drive large goods and passenger carrying vehicles.

It must remain the responsibility of the traffic commissioners to deal with each case which comes to their notice on its merits. I am, however, recommending to the traffic commissioners that, in cases where no aggravating circumstances apply, they should follow the guidelines set out:

(i) a first-time disqualification of 12 months or less should normally be dealt with by a warning letter, with no further disqualification of the driver's LGV or PCV entitlement;

(ii) a disqualification of longer than 12 months should result in the driver appearing before a traffic commissioner and a period of one to three months' further suspension of the LGV/PCV entitlement should be considered to give the driver an opportunity to regain his or her driving skills and road sense in an ordinary car before starting to drive LGVs or PCVs again;

(iii) where two or more disqualifications of more than eight weeks have been imposed within the last five years, and the combined total exceeds 12 months, the driver should normally be required to attend a hearing. A period of three to six months' further suspension of the LGV/PCV entitlement should normally be applied;

(iv) Traffic commissioners should continue to deal on a case by case basis with drivers convicted of relevant non-endorsable offences—for example, drivers' hours —endorsable offences such as bad accidents and others which come to their notice and—in the case of PCV drivers—relevant criminal convictions; and

(v) for new applicants for LGV/PCV entitlement, if the applicant has nine or more penalty points, traffic commissioners should consider either issuing a warning or asking the applicant to resubmit his/her application when the penalty points had been reduced.

River Crossings (London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representation he has received about proposals for the construction of a rail tunnel from the existing electrified north London link line in the Silvertown-North Woolwich area to the London Bridge to Gravesend line south of the Thames at Woolwich; what estimate he has made of the approximate cost of (i) single and (ii) double bore tunnels; and what assessment he has made of the priority and value for money of (1) the proposed tunnel, (2) the projected east London river crossing and (3) the proposed Blackwall bridge;

(2) pursuant to his oral answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column 9, concerning studies of cross-Thames rail links in east London, what is the estimated cost of constructing a tunnel of about one mile between North Woolwich and Woolwich Arsenal *(a)* of one bore and *(b)* of two bores; and what is the approximate capacity of persons per hour in both directions that each would provide.

Mr. Norris; London Transport, the London Docklands development corporation and Network SouthEast have recently published a report of their joint study of the options for a rail tunnel between the royal docks and Woolwich. Provisional engineering feasibility work has established that the preferred option for the tunnel might be immersed tube, which could provide for a twin-track tunnel with a capacity of perhaps up to 24,000 passengers per hour in each direction. Depending upon the nature of the preferred scheme, capital costs, including rolling stock, are estimated at between £160 million and £250 million. A full study is to be undertaken during 1994.

This rail crossing, the east London river crossing, and Blackwall bridges are all at different stages of development and it is too soon to assess priorities; but each appears to justify further study.

Deregulation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether operators of passenger and goods vehicles will still be required to advertise in the local press when they wish to renew their licences under the proposals in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill.

Mr. Norris: Yes.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to introduce to ensure that regular maintenance checks are carried out of goods and public service vehicle operating centres following his proposals in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill.

Mr. Norris: There will be no change to the present system. Operators will still be required to satisfy the traffic commissioner that they have adequate maintenance arrangements for their vehicles.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether goods and public service operators will be able to increase their vehicle fleet size without the authority of the traffic commissioners under the proposals set out in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill.

Mr. Norris: No.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what measures he intends to introduce to ensure that the environmental safeguards currently provided under current goods vehicle operating licensing laws are protected following the introduction of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill;

(2) whether operators of passenger and goods vehicles will still be required to advertise in the local press when they wish to renew their licences under the proposals in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill.

Mr. Norris: Operators will no longer be required to renew their licences. Under the system of continuous licensing, an operator's licence would last for the lifetime of the holder, provided there was no breach of the conditions under which the licence was granted and payment of fees associated with the licence were paid. The system will allow for periodic checks to be made on operators, and an opportunity for goods vehicle operating centres to be reviewed at five-yearly intervals to ensure that they remain suitable.

DEFENCE

Pornography Magazines

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions his Department has purchased soft pornography magazines for distribution or sale to members of the armed forces in each year since 1980; how many magazines have been purchased; and what has been the cost to his Department.

Mr. Hanley: My Department is not aware that any public funds have been or are being used for the purchase of such magazines for distribution or sale to members of the armed forces.

Cyprus Bases

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Greek Cypriots and *(b)* Turkish Cypriots are employed at each of the two sovereign bases in Cyprus.

Mr. Hanley: A total of 2,327 Cypriots are employed in the sovereign bases in Cyprus. In the western sovereign base area, SBA, the MOD employs 1,414 Greek Cypriots. In the eastern sovereign base area there are 596 Greek Cypriot employees and 307 from the Turkish Cypriot community. In addition to those in the SBAs, we employ 93 Greek Cypriots and one Turkish Cypriot at other sites in the Republic of Cyprus.

Ministry of Defence Flights

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answers of 14 January, *Official Report*, columns *347-48*, and 20 January, *Official Report*, column *826*, what payments he has received from non-MOD sources for the use by non-MOD personnel of the weekly scheduled defence-specific flights to Washington, Belize and Decimomannu; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Further to my answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *826*, the payments received from the use of scheduled flights to Washington, Belize and Decimomannu by non-MOD staff over the last 12 months amounts to £232,000.

Anti-personnel Mines

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the dangers to civilians created by the placement of anti-personnel mines that have (i) self-destructing mechanisms, and (ii) self-neutralising mechanisms and (iii) that do not have self-destructing or self-neutralising mechanisms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Anti-personnel mines are inherently dangerous to civilians. However, they are legitimate defensive military weapons if used properly and in accordance with the laws of war, as our armed forces are trained to do. The extra controls provided by self-destructing or self-neutralising mechanisms help to ensure that mines with such capabilities are likely to be less dangerous to civilians than those without them.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the recent UN resolution calling for a moratorium on the export of anti-personnel land mines has had on the policies of his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The resolution has had no direct effect, since the United Kingdom has not produced or exported conventional anti-personnel land mines in the category covered by the resolution for over a decade.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect of the recent UN resolution calling for a moratorium on the export of anti-personnel land mines on the need for de-mining operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The UN resolution has no direct effect on the need for de-mining operations.

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect on service morale of his policy on the provision of telephone services for personnel deployed in Bosnia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: We are fully conscious of the importance to service morale of regular telephone contacts with relatives and friends. For this reason, we have set up arrangements in Bosnia whereby service personnel at all major locations can make personal calls using commercial networks or, where these are not available, the military operational network. All British troops serving in the forner Yugoslavia receive a telephone allowance of £13·50 per month.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements *(a)* existed prior to 11 January and *(b)* currently exist to enable British service personnel in Bosnia to make use of London-based operator services to place reverse charge calls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Where commercial telephone lines are not available, service personnel in Bosnia are permitted to make personal calls using the military network. Calls to the United Kingdom on the military network are routed via an operator in London and the costs within the United Kingdom are billed by means of reverse charges. Since this is an operational network, its use is however limited to times at the local commander's discretion depending upon the operational circumstances. Since 11 January, following the installation of six British Telecom cardphones at Vitez, access to the military network there for personal calls has been withdrawn. These BT telephones take United Kingdom phonecards which can be purchased at reduced rates in the local NAAFI or can be sent by relatives in the post. The call charge rate is cheaper than the normal BT rate for calls from the United Kingdom to Yugoslavia.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the policy of other Governments contributing troops to UNPROFOR in Bosnia concerning the retention or passing on of United Nations payments to their personnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: We have no such information.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what rate per day per soldier the United Nations pays the United Kingdom for stationing service personnel in Bosnia;

(2) what payments the British Government receive from the United Nations to cover salary costs of British service personnel in Bosnia;

(3) what payments the British Government receive from the United Nations for stationing their troops in Bosnia; and if he will give a detailed breakdown of those payments.

Mr. Hanley: The United Nations pays a standard troop cost of $988 per person per month irrespective of rank, plus a supplementary amount of $291 for a limited number of specialists as a contribution towards salary and allowances. The United Nations also pays $65 per person per month to cover personal clothing, and equipment and $5 per person per month for personal weapons and ammunition. Other claims for reimbursable items of expenditure—for example, vehicles, equipment—depend on the United Nations' ability to pay.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British service personnel are currently stationed in Bosnia; what is the total pay bill for those personnel; and what supplementary payments or allowances they receive, on top of normal salary *(a)* from the British Government and *(b)* from the United Nations.

Mr. Hanley: There are currently some 2,300 British service personnel stationed in Bosnia. The total pay bill varies with the rotation of personnel in theatre who are paid according to their rank, their personal circumstances and the location from which they were posted. In addition to their normal salary, and subject to eligibility, they receive from the British Government a separation allowance of £3·50 per day after 30 days and a proportion of local overseas allowance—70 per cent. for married personnel, 40 per cent. for single personnel. They also receive a telephone allowance of £13·50 per month. All service personnel serving under United Nations auspices in Bosnia receive a United Nations set allowance of $1·28 per day for incidental expenses an a lump sum of $73·50 to cover the first seven days of rest and recreation leave.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether payments received by the British Government from the United Nations for stationing service personnel in Bosnia are *(a)* retained entirely by the Ministry of Defence or *(b)* passed on in whole, or in part to United Kingdom soldiers.

Mr. Hanley: In accordance with an inter-departmental arrangement, the MOD recovers the cost of United Kingdom participation in peacekeeping operations from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. United Nations receipts to Her Majesty's Government are used by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to offest the overall cost of United Nations peacekeeping. All United Nations troops in Bosnia, irrespective of nationality, are entitled to receive the same United Nations allowances, which currently stand at $1·28 a day each and a lump sum of $73·50 per person to cover rest and recreation; all United Kingdom service personnel serving in the former Yugoslavia receive these United Nations allowances in full.

Training

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *824*, if he will provide details of the special United Nations training programme for personnel in Bosnia, including what personnel provide this training, where the training is carried out, what is the source of funding for it, how long is the training and any other relevant information.

Mr. Hanley: The training package for personnel warned off for deployment to the former Yugoslavia consists of a 12-day special-to-mission package. The training is carried out by specialist training advisory teams at the Army's combined arms training centre at Warminster and, for Germany-based units, at Sennelager. Overall training costs are borne mainly by the Defence budget apart from some minor incidental costs which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office cover.

Mercenaries

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he first became aware the Azeri Government were hiring British mercenaries; and what steps he took.

Mr. Hanley: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

HMS Valiant

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of HMS Valiant's most recent refit; when she was recommissioned; whether she remains operational; and when she is due to pay off.

Mr. Aitken: HMS Valiant's most recent refit was carried out in Rosyth and was completed in July 1989. The refit straddled the introduction of commercial management into the dockyards in April 1987 and that part of the refit which took place under commercial management cost around £77 million. There has also been a routine docking and essential defect period in 1992-93 at a cost of around £13 million although the final cost certificates have not yet been submitted. Refitting expenditure prior to the introduction of commercial management could only be identified at disproportionate cost. The vessel re-entered service on completion of the refit and currently remains in full time service with the Royal Navy; it is not our practice to discuss pay-off dates for individual vessels.

Vacant Dwellings

Dr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many vacant dwellings are owned by his Department in each parliamentary constituency in Avon, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire; and what the figures were for January 1992.

Mr. Hanley: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Young Offenders

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with whom he discussed the increased powers that he has granted to adjudicating governors within the

Prison Service to sentence young offenders from three days to seven days' cellular confinement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The maximum periods for the punishment of cellular confinement were increased for both adult prisoners and young offenders on 1 January this year. My right hon. and learned Friend has previously discussed the proposal with ministerial colleagues and with the Director General of the Prison Service and informed the House of his intention to make the change on 10 December last year in replying to a question from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), *Official Report*, column *419*.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons he agreed to increase from three days to seven days the punishment of cellular confinement that can be given by prison governors to young offenders and juveniles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Maximum periods for the punishment of cellular confinement were increased for both adult prisoners and young offenders on 1 January this year. The purpose was to strengthen the disciplinary powers of governors, which was particularly desirable in the light of increased offending in prison establishments.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Fire Services Examinations Board.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The members of the Fire Services Examinations Board are:

Chairman (appointed by Secretary of State)
Mr. B. T. A. Collins, OBE QFSM
(HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services for England and Wales)

Members
(appointed by Secretary of State)
Mr. G. P. Walker (Scottish Office)
Mr. B. L. Fuller, CBE QFSM
(Commandant, Chief Executive, Fire Service College)
Mr. D. Dick, OBE
Mr. M. J. Addison (Home Office)

Appointed by
The Association of County Councils
Mr. A. Till
Mr. T. Gorman
Mr. T. L. Glossop

Appointed by
The Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Mr. W. Dunlop
Mr. S. G. Bennett
Mr. G. Brewer

Appointed by
The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Mr. W. E. Axon
Mr. G. Bird
Mr. P. Donnolly

Appointed by
The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association
Mr. J. H. Windsor
Mr. J. G. Russel

Appointed by
The National Association of Fire Officers
Mr. G. Williams
Mr. R. Anderson

Appointed by
The Fire Brigades Union
Mr. K. Cameron
Mr. R. Scott
Mr. I. Brandling

Appointed by
The Institution of Fire Engineers
Dr. R. W. Docherty

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the misuse of drugs professional panel.

Mr. Maclean: A professional panel does not have a standing membership. It consists of a chairman and two other persons drawn from a pool of members of the respondent's own profession, nominated by the relevant professional bodies, and appointed by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Mr. Maclean: The current members of the board are:
Lord Carlisle of Bucklow, PC, QC
Mr. James Law, QC[1]
Mr. Charles Whitby, QC
Mr. Barry Chedlow, QC
Sir David Calcutt, QC
Miss Beryl Cooper, QC
Miss Shirley Ritchie, QC
Mr. Hugh Carlisle, QC
Mr. Colin Fawcett, QC
Mr. Michael Park, CBE[1]
Mr. John Crowley, QC
Sir Arthur Hoole
Mr. Donald Robertson, QC[1]
Mr. Michael Lewer, QC
Mr. Peter Weitzman, QC
Mr. Conrad Seagroatt, QC
Mr. John Archer, QC
Mr. Owen Thomas, QC
Mr. Leighton Williams, QC
Mr. Graeme Hamilton, QC
Sir Derek Bradbeer, OBE
Mr. Crawford Lindsay, QC
Lord Macaulay of Bragar, QC[1]
Miss Diane Cotton, QC
Mr. Donald Mackay, QC[1]
Mr. Evan Stone, QC
Mr. Daniel Brennan, QC
Mr. Timothy Preston, QC
Mr. John Cherry, QC
Mr. Kevin Drummond, QC[1]
Mr. Edward Gee
Mr. David Barker, QC
His Honour James Kingham
His Honour Sir David West-Russell
His Honour John da Cunha
Mr. Michael Churchouse
Mr. James M. McGhie[1]
Sir Richard Gaskell
Mr. Norman Miscampbell, QC
Mr. Michael Lewis, QC
Mr. Harold Gooddard, QC
His Honour Sir Jonathan Clarke

[1] Member appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Animal Procedures Committee.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to a question from the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 14 January, column *337*.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Police Promotion Examinations Board.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The chairman of the Police Promotion Examinations Board is Professor J. A. Andrews, whose current appointment runs until August 1996. The members of the board are appointed by the bodies which they represent: these include the police staff associations, the local authority associations, the Home Office, Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary, the chief examiner and the local government management board, which administers the examinations.

The current membership of the board is as follows:

Professor J. A. Andrews—Chairman
Mrs. P. G. W. Catto—Home Office
Mr. W. Lawrie—Secretary
Mrs. E. M. Eyers—Assistant Secretary
Mr. J. Dunn—Assistant Secretary
Miss S. Hubbard—HMIC
Mr. P. Rabbeth—Police Federation
Mr. D. Hayward—Police Federation
Mr. B. Pallant—Police Federation
Mr. H. Lowe—ACC
Mr. V. Petrie—ACC
Commander B. Aitchison—Metropolitan Police
Mr. A. Dyer—ACPO (Moderator)
Ch. Supt. B. MacKenzie—Superintendents Association
Mrs. C. Webb—LGMB
Mr. B. Whyte—CPTU Chief Examiner

(Not including "Non-members likely to attend")

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Misuse of Drugs Tribunal.

Mr. Maclean: The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 specifies that a tribunal should consist of five members. The chairman, who is currently Mrs. H. Sarkany, must be a barrister, advocate or solicitor and is appointed by the Lord Chancellor.

The other four persons are drawn from a pool of members of the respondent's own profession, nominated by the relevant professional bodies, and are appointed by the Secretary of State for particular cases.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Poisons Board.

Mr. Maclean: The role of the Poisons Board is under review as part of a general review of poisons legislation. It has not been necessary to convene the board since 1990 and it has no appointed members at present.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs.

Mr. Maclean: The current membership of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs is as follows:

Professor D. G. Grahame-Smith Chairman
Mrs. J. Barlow Female Dependency Projects Manager, Stirling
Mr. R. Bartle Metropolitan Stipendiary Magistrate, London
Dr. W. B. Clee General Medical Practitioner, Cardiff
Mr. D. S. Coleman—Unit Leader, Office of the Health Service Commission for England, London
Dr. M. Donmall—Director, Drug Research Unit and Lecturer in Public Health, Manchester
Dr. A. J. Duxbury—Dentist, Manchester
Professor G. Edwards—Consultant Psychiatrist, London
Mrs. J. Faugier—Senior Research Fellow in Nursing, Manchester
Dr. J. Greenwood—Consultant Psychiatrist, Edinburgh
Ms K. Hager—Co-ordinator, SWRHA Drugs Services Project, Exeter
Mr. P. Hayes—Probation Service, London
Ms L. Hewitt—Project Manager, the Stockwell Project, London
Mr. M. G. Hindson—Probation Service, Manchester
Professor R. S. Jones—Professor of Veterinary Anaesthesia, Liverpool
Ms R. Joyce—Health Education Co-ordinator, Cambridgeshire
Mr. J. L. Kay—Managing Director Healthwise Ltd., Liverpool
Dr. M. R. Keen—Consultant Psychiatrist, Cardiff
Dr. D. H. Kennedy—Consultant Physician, Glasgow
Professor M. H. Lader—Professor of Psychopharmacology, London
Mr. A. D. Massaum—Pharmaceutical Industry, London
Mr. M. Narayn Singh—Public Education Officer, Manchester
Professor W. D. Ollis—Professor of Organic Chemistry, Birmingham
Mr. D. Owen—Chief Constable, North Wales
Mr. K. Patel—Deputy Director, the Bridge Project, Bradford
Dr. D. Patterson—Consultant Psychiatrist, Northern Ireland
Mr. A. W. Ramsay—Regional Adviser in Health Education, Strathclyde
Dr. S. Ruben—Consultant Psychiatrist, Liverpool
Viscountess Runciman—Outreach Adviser, London
Mr. I. Sherwood—Senior Specialist Nurse, Bristol
Professor G. V. Stimson—Director of the Centre for Research on Drugs and Health Behaviour, London
Dr. J. S. Strang—Consultant Psychiatrist, London
Dr. D. J. Temple—Director of Post Graduate Pharmaceutical Studies for NHS in Wales
Mr. D. Turner—Director, SCODA, London
Mr. E. Unsworth—Deputy Director, Social Services, Cambridgeshire
Mr. P. Walker—Headteacher, Kent
Dr. T. Waller—General Medical Practitioner, Suffolk

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Misuse of Drugs Advisory Board.

Mr. Maclean: The Misuse of Drugs Act specifies that an advisory body should consist of three members. The chairman, who is currently Miss J. Southworth, must be a QC and is appointed by the Lord Chancellor.

One of the other two members is drawn from a pool of members of the respondent's own profession, nominated by the relevant professional bodies, and the other is a member of the respondent's own profession who is an officer of a department of Government. They are appointed by the Secretary of State for particular cases.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who are the members currently appointed to the Police Staff College, board of governors.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Current membership of the board of governors is as follows:

Sir Clive Whitmore, GCB, CVO *(Chairman)*
Mr. I. M. Burns *(Deputy Chairman)*
Mr. T. A. Morris—Home Office
Mr. C. Scoble—Home Office
Mrs. P. G. W. Catto—Home Office
Mr. J. P. Ryan—National Director of Police Training

Mr. A. Dyer—Association of Chief Police Officers
Mr. J. C. Hoddinott—Association of Chief Police Officers
Mr. B. H. Skitt—Association of Chief Police Officers
Mr. B. H. Weight—Association of Chief Police Officers

Mr. P. Condon—Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis

Mr. B. Mackenzie—Superintendents' Association
Mr. G. Wilson—Superintendents' Association

Mr. R. B. Coyles—Police Federation
Mr. D. Hayward—Police Federation

Mr. B. H. Drake—Association of County Councils
Mr. H. Lowe—Association of County Councils
Mr. C. P. Winterton—Association of County Councils

Mr. G. Gill—Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Mr. W. Smith—Association of Metropolitan Authorities

Professor J. P. Martin—Academic Adviser

Mr. P. Dawson—Staff College Directing Staff Advisers
Mrs. C. Montague—Staff College Directing Staff Advisers

Mr. G. A. Widdecombe—Secretary to the Board

Miss E. B. M. Rak—Assistant Secretary to the Board

Apart from the academic adviser, all members serve either in an ex officio capacity or are nominated by the organisations they represent.

Political Asylum Seekers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the penal establishments in England and Wales at which people seeking political asylum were being detained as of 20 January.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information shows that people seeking asylum were detained at the following Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 24 January 1994.

Armley
Beford
Birmingham
Blakenhurst
Blunderston
Brinsford
Bristol
Brixton
Bullingdon
Camp Hill
Canterbury
Cardiff
Chelmsford
Dorchester
Dover
Durham
Elmley
Exeter
Feltham
Glen Parva
Gloucester
Haslar
Highdown
Holloway
Hatfield
Leeds
Lewes
Moorland
Norwich
Pentonville
Risley
Rochester
Walton
Wandsworth
Winchester
Winson Green
Wormwood Scrubs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are being held in custody in England and Wales and are seeking political asylum into the United Kingdom as of 20 January.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information shows that on 24 January a total of 557 male and 44 female asylum seekers were being held in detention in England and Wales.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on the bail hostel expansion programme which was announced in February 1992; and to what extent the programme has been revised as a consequence of the latest public expenditure survey.

Mr. Maclean: When the February 1992 announcement was made there were 2,400 approved hostel places. At the end of this financial year there should be 2,730 places. Our current spending plans provide for 2,680 places in April 1996.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the projected bail hostel population in England and Wales for each of the next five years.

Mr. Maclean: On the basis of 83 per cent. planned occupancy, as set out in the Home Office annual report 1993, the average number of approved probation-bail hostel residents will be as follows:

	Number
1994-95	2,067
1995-96	2,150
1996-97	2,249
1997-98	2,249
1998-99	2,249

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the projected average bail population for each of the next five years in England and Wales.

Mr. Maclean: No such projections are made.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the projected remand population for England and Wales for each of the next five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Projections of long-term trends in the prison population covering the next five years were published in the Home Office statistical bulletin 6/93 on 30 March 1993 on the basis of the legislation then in force. These projections have been revised on an interim basis, reflecting the changes expected to result from the Criminal Justice Act 1993. A revised remand projection was not prepared. The interim projection is subject to a considerable margin of uncertainty. The revised figures for the total population were given in a reply to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) on 18 October 1993, *Official Report,* column *118-19.*

Right to Silence

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications for the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill relating to the defendant's right to silence of the ruling by the European Commission of Human Rights on 18 January in the case of John Murray; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: This was not a decision on the merits of the case. The Commission has simply concluded, as a preliminary matter, that the application is not "manifestly ill-founded", an abuse of the right of petition, or otherwise incompatible with the European convention on human rights. The Government have made it clear in their observations to the Commission that they believe that the Northern Ireland legislation is fully in conformity with the provisions of the convention. The Government believe that the same is true of the similar legislation for England and Wales which is now included in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill.

Probation Service

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what cuts as a result of the public expenditure survey will be made to the probation service budget which was originally published in the three-year plan for the probation service 1994 to 1997; and what the effect will be on staffing levels and service delivery.

Mr. Maclean: The Government's spending plans for the probation service as set out in the three-year planning document for the service 1994-97 are as shown below. The spending plans set out in the 1993-96 planning document published after the 1992 public expenditure survey are shown in parentheses. It will be for area probation committees and management to decide how best to provide services and what staff to employ from within the total resources available.

	£ million
1994-95	374·3 (382·0)
1995-96	378·0 (402·0)
1996-97	389·7

Visas

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the European Commission's proposals to determine the list of countries whose national must be in possession of a visa when crossing the external frontiers of member states will be formally received.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on 24 January 1994, *Official Report,* column *42.*

Police Resources

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what changes his Department has made in the last five years in the method of calculating the resource needs of police authorities in England and Wales;

(2) what changes his Department has made in the last five years in the designation of areas as urban or rural in the assessment of their needs in terms of police resources and in the differential that results in terms of resource allocation.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In response to the recommendations of a joint Home Office and Treasury study, a formula was introduced in 1989 to inform the professional assessment by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary of applications for increases in police free establishments. This formula compared the existing position of forces across a range of relevant indicators. One of these indicators takes account of the concentration of population in particular areas.

Work is now in hand on the preparation of a new formula for the allocation of police grant to forces as from 1995-96.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the precise value of each of the 25 awards of over £10,000 for fatal injury under the criminal injuries compensation scheme in 1991-92.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* The case sampling survey undertaken to establish "tariff" rates examined 238 of the fatal cases resolved in 1991-92. These 238 cases gave rise to 162 awards, of which 16 exceeded £10,000. The awards made in the 162 cases were then grossed up to produce equivalent figures for the 252 fatal awards which it was estimated had been made in total in the 1991-92 financial year. Applying a similar grossing up factor to the 16 awards exceeding £10,000 produced the estimated figure of 25 such awards in total. The 16 awards actually identified—each of which included an element for funeral expenses—were for sums of £12,000: £12,671: £13,665: £14,539: £15,000: £20,000: £21,490: £22,169: £28,451: £31,704: £33,187: £41,995: £57,072: £88,230: £100,600: £260,178.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the survey of criminal injuries compensation board awards used in drawing up his proposed tariff of compensation for victims of violent crime.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* No. The survey data contain information which would make it possible to identify individual recipients of awards. Publication of such data would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1988 and to the board's policy of confidentiality.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what staff and other resources, expressed in full-time equivalents and in cash value, were devoted to the review of standard spending assessments in 1993; and what levels of resources he expects to use to review standard spending assessments in 1994.

Mr. Gummer: In the financial year 1993-94 my Department will have devoted about 10 man years' work to the review of standard spending assessments. This represents a pay cost of about £300,000. It is difficult to assess precisely the value of the other resources devoted to the review, but the non-pay running costs involved are in the region of £45,000 in 1993-94. Officials in other Government Departments were also involved in the review.

In the financial year 1994-95, my Department plans to devote six man years to development work on the standard spending assessments system.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many authorities have made *(a)* written responses to and *(b)* requests for a meeting with Ministers about his proposals for local government finance for 1994-95;

(2) if he will list those authorities which have made oral representations to Ministers as part of the consultation on his proposals for local government finance for 1994-95, showing in each case the Minister seen by the authority, the duration of the meeting and the main topics raised;

(3) if he will place in the Library his Department's notes of each of the delegations received by Ministers as part of the consultation on his proposals for local government finance for 1994-95.

Mr. Gummer: During the consultation period on my proposals for the local government finance settlement for

1994-95, which ended on 10 January, we received representations from 143 local authorities and authority groupings, and 60 requests for meetings.

The table shows the meetings held by each Minister. Also shown are four meetings which it was not possible for a Minister to attend, and at which delegations made oral representations to officials. No records are kept of the duration of meetings.

Such meetings are private, having been requested by individual authorities, and it is not my Department's custom to publish details of what was discussed at them.

Local authorities seen during the consultation period

Seen by the Secretary of State

Birmingham City Council

Seen by the Minister for Local Government and Planning

ADC major cities group
Bournemouth borough council
Burnley borough council
Coventry city council
Cumbria county council
Derbyshire county council
Dorset county council
Hereford and Worcester county council
Lancashire county council
Liverpool city council
London borough of Brent
London borough of Lambeth
London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
London borough of Merton
London borough of Hounslow
London borough of Haringey
London borough of Hackney
London borough of Greenwich
London borough of Lewisham
Manchester city council
Norfolk county council
Northamptonshire county council
Nottinghamshire county council
Rotherham metropolitan borough council
Sheffield city council
Shropshire county council
Somerset county council
Wear Valley district council

Seen by the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction

Kirklees metropolitan borough council
West Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority
Thanet district council
Devon county council
Northampton borough council
Slough borough council
South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority

Seen by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment

Avon county council
Blackburn borough council
Blackpool borough council
Gedling borough council
Harlow district council
Havant borough council
Ipswich borough council
Isle of Wight county council
Knowsley metropolitan borough council
Leicester city council
London borough of Newham
Luton borough council
North Yorkshire county council
Pendle borough council
Salford city council
Sefton metropolitan borough council
Solihull metropolitan borough council
York city council

Seen by officials

West Yorkshire police authority
Cornwall county council
Bradford city council
Merseyside fire and civil defence authority

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which issues arising from the responses to his proposals for local government finance for 1994-95 will be discussed with the local authority associations as possible changes to the system of local government finance for 1995-96; and if he will make a statement on the continuing review of standard spending assessments.

Mr. Gummer: We are willing to discuss any issues which the local authority associations may wish to raise arising from the proposals for local government finance for 1994-95. As part of the usual round of discussions on standard spending assessments, we will wish to consider the treatment of the police element in the light of the changes in financial arrangements to take place for 1995-96. The associations will, no doubt, wish to bring forward their own agenda for discussion.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest available figures of capital receipts, including receipts set aside to meet credit liabilities, for each local authority, and in total for England.

Mr. Gummer: Capital receipts information falls into two categories: receipts received during the financial year, and usable receipts held at a particular time, usually the end of the year. Receipts received during the year are divided into usable and reserved parts. The reserved parts are set aside as provision to meet credit liabilities and once set aside are no longer distinguishable from other amounts set aside, such as, for example, the statutory minimum amount set aside each year from the revenue account.

The latest forecast of gross receipts received in 1993-94, based on local authorities' first quarter returns, is £2·2 billion. Of this amount £1·8 billion is forecast to be usable and £400 million reserved.

The balance of usable receipts held at 31 March 1993 was £1 billion.

The latest estimate for the total amount held by local authorities as provision for credit liabilities is £6·1 billion as at 31 March 1993. As indicated, this figure will include, among other things, a notional amount of capital receipts which have been set aside but not yet used to redeem debt.

I am arranging for the latest available figures for each local authority to be placed in the Library of the House.

Environmental Information Regulations 1992

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what complaints he has received in regard to the failure or delay in reply by the appropriate authorities to requests for information disclosure under the Environmental Information Regulations 1992 since 1 January 1993.

Mr. Atkins: Two people have written to my right hon. Friend: the Campaign for Freedom of Information about a refusal by the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee to supply information about the thermal oxide reprocessing plant; and an environmental sciences student who was concerned at Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's delay in replying to her request.

Biodiversity Convention

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report,* column *566,* if he will make a statement on the nature of United Kingdom concerns about the financial provisions of the biodiversity convention and the safeguards which the United Kingdom is seeking.

Mr. Atkins: The United Kingdom is concerned to ensure that donor countries retain the right to determine their financial contribution under the biodiversity convention. We will continue to pursue safeguards to ensure this objective.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is not held centrally by my Department and is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report,* column *244,* on the Touche Ross report on THORP, whether his Department ever requested a copy of the report from Touche Ross or British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Mr. Atkins: No.

Local Authorities (Security)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities spent money on security under the provisions of section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not available centrally.

Water Charges

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the *(a)* average percentage increases in water and sewerage rates and *(b)* increases in the retail prices index used for upratings of income support, for each year since April 1988.

Mr. Atkins: The information requested is given in the tables:

(a) Increase in domestic water and sewerage average bills

Year	*Water* *Per cent.*	*Sewerage* *Per cent.*
1988-89 to 1989-90	14·8	9·8
1989-90 to 1990-91	15·4	10·7
1990-91 to 1991-92	16·4	15·0
1991-92 to 1992-93	9·1	10·1
1992-93 to 1993-94	8·2	9·0

Source: CRI statistics series—"Charges For Water Services".

(b) Increase in the Rossi index used to uprate income support

Year	*Per cent.*
1989	4·7
1990	5·2
1991	8·1
1992	7·0
1993	3·6
1994	3·5

Notes:

1. The Rossi index is based on the retail prices index, which takes account of the rise and fall in the price of individual commodities excluding most housing costs.

2. From the 1992 uprating the Rossi index was adjusted to include, water and sewerage charges, dwelling insurance, ground rent, repair and maintenance charges, do-it-yourself materials and for 1992-93 only, 20 per cent. of the community charge.

3. *Source:* Information supplied by the Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) of 6 December, *Official Report,* column *9,* whether water companies will be permitted to use council tax banding to calculate water charges.

Mr. Atkins: Subject to the non-discrimination requirements in its licence conditions and copyright and data protection requirements, a water company may use any legally obtained information as a basis for the calculation of water charges save that after 31 March 2000 it may not use rateable values. However, we stand by the assurances we have given in the past that local authorities should not be permitted to sell council tax valuation lists for use for other purposes.

Rents Statistics

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 1 December, *Official Report,* columns *551-52,* if he will now update the tables showing *(a)* average local authority unrebated rents, *(b)* mean housing association annual registered fair rents and *(c)* mean annual registered fair rents for private tenancies for each London borough, by providing figures and the index for 1993-94.

Sir George Young: I have today placed in the Library an updated table showing the average local authority weekly unrebated rent for each London borough for each financial year since 1988-89, including provisional figures for 1993-94. As in the earlier table, the rents are also expressed as an index with 1988-89 equal to 100.

Information for 1993-94 on average registered fair rents for housing association and private sector tenancies is not yet available. Information is, however, available for the first quarter of 1993-94 and can be found in the publication "Rent Officer Statistics", a copy of which is in the Library.

Solid Fuel

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce regulations to require high-sulphur solid fuel and fuel not authorised for use in smoke control areas to be clearly labelled as such.

Mr. Aitken: No.

Homelessness

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities or other bodies which made representations to him seeking restrictions on the rights of access of homeless persons to social housing, before October 1993.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he or his Department have received about the categories of people deemed to have priority need under the provision of part III of the Housing Act 1985.

Sir George Young: In the normal course of business —for example, meetings and presentations about housing investment programme submissions—Ministers and officials have talked to a range of people in local authorities of all political complexions; we have also talked to people in the housing association movement, and in the private rented sector. These encounters have been helpful to us in preparing the consultation paper "Access to Local Authority and Housing Association Tenancies".

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many single-parent families were classified as statutorily homeless in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* London for each year from 1979;

(2) how many single-parent families have been accommodated in *(a)* bed-and-breakfast accommodation, *(b)* temporary housing, *(c)* permanent local authority housing and *(d)* private sector housing since January 1991;

(3) how many single-parent homeless families have *(a)* one or more, *(b)* two or more or *(c)* three or more children under 16 years of age.

Sir George Young: Local authorities in England report details of the number of households for which they accept responsibility to secure permanent accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the housing acts in their quarterly P1(E) returns. These returns do not distinguish between one and two-parent households.

For information about other parts of the United Kingdom I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Tenancies

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will explain how local authorities can satisfy the proposed obligation in paragraph 18.2 (i) of his consultation paper on access to local authority and housing association accommodation and at the same time accommodate existing tenants seeking a transfer while following paragraph 20.4 of the consultation paper under which waiting lists may be restricted to people who are not currently tenants and who are seeking a tenancy.

Sir George Young: The consultation paper invites views, in paragraph 20.4, on whether the names of people seeking a transfer should appear on the housing waiting list along with the names of people seeking a tenancy for the first time. If, in the light of responses to the consultation exercise, we conclude that people seeking transfers should not be included on the waiting list, they will be the subject of separate provisions.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new arrangements he proposes to create for short-term tenancies within local authority housing stock.

Sir George Young: Paragraph 19.2 of the consultation paper "Access to Local Authority and Housing Association Tenancies" raises the possibility of giving local authorities greater flexibility in the types of tenancy they can offer. I would welcome views on the form that this flexibility might take.

Housing

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he or his Department have received about the implications of the House of Lords decision in the case of Din v. London borough of Wandsworth;

(2) what representations he or his Department have received about the operation of section 63 of the Housing Act 1985.

Sir George Young: The representations we receive about the operation of part III of the 1985 Act cover a range of issues.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what basis he considers that someone asked to leave accommodation by family or friends automatically qualifies for assistance under part III of the Housing Act 1985.

Sir George Young: Section 58 of the 1985 Act states that a person is homeless if, inter alia, there is no accommodation which he has a licence to occupy. Being asked to leave by relatives or friends would amount to the revocation of a licence.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the additional housing benefit costs which will be incurred in consequence of the implementation of the proposals in his consultation paper on changes to arrangements for access to local authority and housing association accommodation.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 27·1 of the consultation paper.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Social Security and the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the additional housing benefit costs likely to arise from the proposals in the consultation paper on proposed changes to access to local authority and housing association accommodation.

Sir George Young: The proposals in the consultation paper represent the views of the Government.

Power Station Emissions

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each power station in Britain the most recent emissions data submitted to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Atkins: The emissions data for power stations in England and Wales, not Scotland authorised by HMIP are placed on the public register in HMIP offices in Bedford, Bristol and Leeds as appropriate. The national plan emissions inventory is also placed on the public registers and I have placed a copy of the inventory for 1993, which has recently been received, in the Library of the House.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what basis and frequency power stations are obliged to submit emissions data to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Atkins: For all power stations in England and Wales operated by National Power and PowerGen and authorised by HMIP, the operator is required to send to the chief inspector, within 28 days of the end of the reporting period to which the results refer, the mass releases into the air from the authorised process of sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen for that reporting period together with the operational data from which the releases have been calculated.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each power station in Britain the reporting period stipulated in the authorisation for purposes of submitting emissions data to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Atkins: For all power stations in England and Wales operated by National Power and PowerGen and authorised by HMIP, the reporting period is each of the 12 periods of either four or five weeks which correspond approximately to calender months in any year for which reports are compiled.

Public Bodies

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who are the members currently appointed to the Office of Water Services national customer council.

Mr. Atkins: The OFWAT national customer council's members are the 10 chairpersons of OFWAT's 10 customer service committees and the Director General of Water Services.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who are the members currently appointed to each of the customer service committees of OFWAT.

Mr. Atkins: The members of OFWAT's 10 customer service committees as at 31 March 1993 are listed in appendix one to the director general's annual report 1992, a copy of which is in the Library. New members and reappointments are announced in OFWAT news releases from time to time.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to involve the Minister for Local Government when considering the Government's response to the final recommendations of the Local Government Commission on Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 29 November 1993, *Official Report,* column *325.*

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the occasions when either he or Ministers in his Department have publicly advocated specific changes in the local government map of England when the Local Government Commission was in the process of reviewing that area.

Mr. Curry: It is the policy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and Ministers in this Department who will be involved in decisions on changes to local government structure, not to comment on specific changes in an area which the Local Government Commission is in the process of reviewing. I am not aware of any breaches of this policy.

National Rivers Authority (Laboratories)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which laboratories of the National Rivers Authority are scheduled for *(a)* market testing and *(b)* closure.

Mr. Atkins: The market testing and closure of its laboratories is primarily a management matter for the National Rivers Authority, which advises me that:

(a) all NRA's 11 chemical laboratories were subject to an internal review of cost-effectiveness and efficiency; and

(b) as a result, the NRA laboratories at Caernarfon Carlisle, Peterborough, Warrington and Washington have been closed and the work transferred to the NRA laboratories at Exeter, Leeds, Llanelli, Nottingham, Reading and Waterlooville.

Water Industry (Regulatory Bodies)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual cost to public funds of the activities of the Audit Commission and the regulatory bodies, in relation to the water industry.

Mr. Atkins: The Audit Commission has no responsibilities in connection with the water industry, and the costs of the Office of Water Services are fully recoverable from licence fees. Costs of other water industry regulators, attributable to public funds, for 1992-93, were £56·71 million distributed as follows:

Drinking water inspectorate	£1·35 million.
National Rivers Authority	£55 million.
Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution	£360,000.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress made in implementing a strategy for sustainable development by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: The Government published on 25 January 1994 the United Kingdom strategy for sustainable development, together with the United Kingdom's climate change programme, biodiversity action plan and forestry programme, as announced on 20 January, *Official Report,* column *844.* Copies have been laid before the House.

Radioactive Clinical Waste (Hillingdon Hospital)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call for a report from Her Majesty's inspector of pollution in respect of the hospitals whose radioactive clinical waste is being incinerated at Hillingdon hospital incineration plant; and what estimate he has made as to the hazard to health resulting from the incineration of such waste.

Mr. Atkins: HMIP has authorised the transfer and the incineration of very low-level radioactive waste at the clinical energy incinerator at Hillingdon hospital from the following hospitals:

The Hillingdon hospital
Mount Vernon hospital
Harefield hospital

In addition, it is authorised to receive low-level radioactive waste from Brunel university.

In setting the discharge limits, HMIP is satisfied that any effect is environmentally acceptable and that no national or international dose limits applicable to members of the public would be exceeded.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many district authorities have been granted provisional increases in their standard spending assessments of more than 10 per cent. in 1994-95; and how that was provided for in his Budget statement that the growth in total standard spending in England for local authorities will be limited to 2·3 per cent. next year.

Mr. Baldry: There were 99 district authorities with provisional increases of more than 10 per cent. in their standard spending assessments for 1994-95. After excluding the additional resources provided for community care and making adjustments for changes in function the overall increase in total standard spending between 1993-94 and 1994-95 will be 2·3 per cent. and the equivalent increase in the total of SSAs will be 2·2 per cent. The review of SSAs and the introduction of information from the 1991 census has led to a number of authorities having large increases between 1993-94 and 1994-95, while other authorities have had decreases.

Small Properties

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what directives he has given to local authorities regarding the treatment of small shops, and other small properties which are used for both business and domestic purposes, as single units for taxation purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Properties are liable for council tax only where the occupier works from home, but the part of the premises used for business reverts to domestic use at the end of the day. Composite properties are treated as two units for local taxation purposes. The domestic part is liable for council tax, the business premises are liable for non-domestic rates. The domestic part will attract council tax transitional relief, where applicable, in the ordinary way. Composite properties have been afforded greater transitional protection than other properties from any adverse impact of the 1990 rating changes, and it is proposed that no such property should face a real rate increase in 1994-95. Government guidelines to local authorities on hardship relief for ratepayers draw attention to the special circumstances of composite properties, but it is for authorities to decide whether to grant any relief.

Curtain Walling Contract

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in his Department's inquiry into the exclusion of United Kingdom firms from the shortlist for the curtain walling contract at the Ministry of Defence procurement headquarters in Bristol.

Mr. Baldry: My officials have met with the MoD, the main contractor and the supply company which made the original complaint. I am satisfied that the choice of curtain wall contractor was a matter for the main contractor, and not the Ministry of Defence.

We are reviewing with the industry what lessons can be learnt from this experience.

Groundwork Trusts

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds are made available to the groundwork trusts; what consideration he has given to making these available equally to existing environmental trusts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Groundwork Foundation's grant in aid for 1993-94 is £5·5 million, which enables the foundation to support the existing network of 32 groundwork trusts and provide for the establishment of new trusts. Groundwork trusts bring together in partnership local authorities, private companies, voluntary organisations and local people to tackle environmental problems in the community. There is a wide range of grants available from this Department to support the environmental activities of local voluntary groups.

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the local authorities using bed-and-breakfast accommodation, and numbers in that accommodation, at the end of September.

Sir George Young: The numbers of households reported by local authorities in bed-and-breakfast accommodation at the end of September appear in the supplementary table of the information bulletin "Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act: England. Statistics for the third quarter of 1993", a copy of which is in the Library.

Vacant Properties

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the locations of the empty properties he wishes to return to the affordable rented housing sector;

(2) how many of the empty properties he wishes to return to the affordable rented housing sector he estimates would have *(a)* bed-sitter accommodation, *(b)* one bedroom, *(c)* two bedrooms or *(d)* three or more bedrooms;

(3) how many *(a)* flats, *(b)* terraced houses, *(c)* semi-detached houses and *(d)* detached houses are among the empty properties he wishes to return to the affordable rented sector.

Sir George Young: The HIP returns submitted by local authorities show that they estimate that there are 765,000 vacant private sector properties as at 1 April 1993. These estimates are not broken down into the categories requested. The Government aim to create the conditions which will encourage landlords to make their empty properties available for sale or rent. I have no specific targets, but even if only a proportion could be returned to use that would be a valuable contribution to meeting housing need.

Waste Disposal, Yorkshire

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will give details of rate support grant for waste disposal purposes in west Yorkshire for each of the last 10 years;

(2) if he will give details of rate support grant for waste disposal purposes in south Yorkshire for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on Thursday 27 January.

Climate Change Convention

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *579*, what was the voting record of the other member states on the European Community ratification of the climate change convention.

Mr. Atkins: The Council decision was adopted unopposed, with the United Kingdom abstaining on the grounds that it did not support the choice of legal base.

Fair Rents

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the findings of his Department's consultation exercise on fair rents; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I announced on 15 July last year that following careful consideration of the representations received in response to our consultation paper on fair rents, we did not consider it would be desirable to make any changes to the existing legislation. To provide further legislative controls over rents would hinder efforts to promote the revival of the private rented sector.

We are keen, however, to encourage greater exchange of information and views between rent officers and rent assessment panels. The educational trust of the Institute of Rent Officers has established a working party, made up of rent officers and rent assessment panel members, to look into how this might be achieved. The group aims to publish its report in the spring.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Gummer: None.

Severence Schemes

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will publish details of the severance schemes available to employees which were in operation immediately prior to the privatisation of the Thames water authority, including details of facilities to make early payment of pensions to staff under such schemes.

Mr. Atkins: The severance scheme used was the water industry security and severance scheme as adapted by the Thames water authority. I have no plans to publish the scheme but the text is available from the National Rivers Authority. The early payment of pension benefits was subject to the provisions of the Local Government Superannuation Scheme Regulations 1986, as amended.

Air Quality

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the report on air quality undertaken for him by Professor Roy Harrison.

Mr. Atkins *[pursuant to his reply, 20 January 1994, c. 837]:* I am pleased to announce the publication earlier today of the second report of the quality of urban air review group "Diesel Vehicle Emissions and Urban Air Quality".

Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and are available free of charge from the QUARG secretariat, Institute of Public and Environmental Health, university of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which his Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested.

Elderly People

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's estimate of the number of people who will be aged *(a)* 65 years and over and *(b)* 80 years and over for each year to 2010.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

thousands

Year	*Total aged 65 and over*	*Total aged 80 and over*
1992	8,933	2,174
1993	8,961	2,227
1994	8,992	2,280
1995	9,030	2,327
1996	9,069	2,352
1997	9,095	2,354
1998	9,105	2,328
1999	9,115	2,312
2000	9,139	2,417
2001	9,172	2,449
2002	9,212	2,560
2003	9,263	2,601
2004	9,317	2,637
2005	9,365	2,669
2006	9,383	2,702
2007	9,442	2,729
2008	9,552	2,751
2009	9,692	2,776
2010	9,825	2,806

Source: OPCS and Government Actuaries Department; based on mid-1992 GB population projections.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. Hague: None.

Families (Income Levels)

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the answer given to the then right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham, *Official Report*, 29 November 1991, columns *667-70*, showing the numbers of working and out-of-work families with children at different levels of income, according to family size, distinguishing between one-parent families and two-parent families and showing the benefits on which the out-of-work families depended.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables.

Some of the estimates in the tables are based on small sample sizes and are therefore subject to a wide margin of error.

The figures are based on estimates taken from 1990 and 1991 family expenditure surveys, using the income reported in the survey year. They are not adjusted to a common price base and therefore should not be used for comparison over time.

Table 1

Number of working families with children at various income levels: Great Britain 1990-91

(Thousands)

Gross weekly income excluding state benefits £	*Total*	*One parent family*	*Two parent family*	*One wage family*	*Two wage family*	*Number of dependent children*			
						One	*Two*	*Three*	*Four or more*
Under 80	140	20	130	130	10	50	70	20	10
80-99	50	10	40	40	10	20	20	10	[1]—
100-119	60	10	50	50	10	30	20	[1]—	[1]—
120-139	80	20	60	70	10	50	20	[1]—	[1]—
140-159	130	20	100	110	20	60	50	10	[1]—
160-179	160	30	130	120	40	60	70	20	[1]—
180-199	150	20	130	110	40	70	50	30	10
200-219	190	20	170	130	60	80	80	20	10
220-239	220	20	200	130	90	90	100	20	10
240-259	240	20	220	120	120	100	110	20	10
260-279	280	20	260	140	140	110	110	40	10
280-299	240	20	230	100	140	100	90	40	10
300-349	570	20	550	180	390	210	290	60	20
350-399	550	20	530	180	370	210	270	60	20
400-449	440	[1]—	430	110	330	190	180	50	20
450-499	390	[1]—	350	100	250	170	130	50	10
500 and over	1,240	10	1,230	290	950	510	550	150	30
Total	5,100	290	4,810	2,080	2,980	2,110	2,220	610	160

[1] Denotes less than 5 thousand.

Notes:

1. The figures are estimates derived from the 1990 and 1991 family expenditure surveys combined. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000 and because of this rows and columns may not exactly sum to totals. All estimates are subject to sampling error.
2. Gross weekly income is the income reported in the year of the survey, either 1990 or 1991, with no adjustment for inflation.
3. A "working family" is one where at least one parent/partner is in full-time employment or self-employment and working 30 hours or more.
4. A "two wage family" is where the second wage exceeds £5 per week.
5. The figures include only families in private households.

Table 2

Number of non-working families of working age with children at various income levels: Great Britain 1990-91

(Thousands)

Gross weekly income including state benefits £	*Under 50*	*50-69*	*70-89*	*90-109*	*110-129*	*130-149*	*150-169*	*170-189*	*190-209*	*210-229*	*230-249*	*250 and over*	*Total*
Total	40	80	190	330	280	190	160	100	70	40	30	160	1,660
One-parent family	20	70	150	270	170	90	80	40	30	20	10	30	970
Two-parent family	20	10	40	60	100	100	80	60	50	20	20	120	690
Number of dependent children													
One	20	60	140	210	110	50	40	30	20	10	10	70	770
Two	10	10	40	100	100	80	50	30	20	10	10	60	530
Three	[1]—	[2]—	10	20	60	50	40	20	10	[1]—	[1]—	20	250
Four or more	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	20	20	20	10	10	10	10	110
Contributory benefits being received													
None[3]	40	20	30	30	20	20	30	20	30	20	10	110	370
None[2]	[1]—	50	140	270	210	140	100	60	20	10	10	20	1,040
UB[3]	[2]—	[1]—	10	10	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	[2]—	—	10	50
UB[4]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	20
SB/SSP[3]	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	10	30

Gross weekly income including state benefits £	*Under 50*	*50-69*	*70-89*	*90-109*	*110-129*	*130-149*	*150-169*	*170-189*	*190-209*	*210-229*	*230-249*	*250 and over*	*Total*
SB/SSP[4]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	20
IVB[3]	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	10	10	10	10	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	60
IVB[4]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	20
Other[3]	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	10	30
Other[4]	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	—	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	10

[1] Denotes less than 5,000.

[2] Denotes zero.

[3] Denotes without income support.

[4] Denotes with income support.

Notes :

1. The figures are estimates derived from the 1990 and 1991 family expenditure surveys combined. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000 and because of this rows and columns may not exactly sum to totals. All estimates are subject to sampling error.
2. Gross weekly income is the income reported in the year of the survey, either 1990 or 1991, with no adjustment for inflation.
3. A "non-working family" is one where neither parent/partner is in full-time employment or self-employment.
4. The figures include only families in private households.
5. Other contributory benefits include widows benefit, maternity allowance and statutory maternity pay.
6. It is known that receipt of income support is under-reported in the family expenditure surveys.

Children (Statistics)

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the latest figures showing *(a)* the number of children living in families with an unemployed head and *(b)* the number of children living in families with a long-term unemployed head of household.

Mr. Burt: The labour force survey estimates that 1,133,000 dependent children live in families with an unemployed[1] head and that 452,000 dependent children[2] live in families with a long-term[3] unemployed head.

[1] Unemployment defined by the International Labour Organisation.

[2] Children defined as being under 16-years-old and 16 to 19 years on full-time education.

[3] Long-term unemployed defined as 12 months or more.

Source: Labour force survey for Great Britain, spring 1993.

Income Support

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give figures for the Durham area showing how many *(a)* families with children are living on income support and *(b)* how many children are living on income support; and what were the figures in 1979.

Mr. Burt: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the numbers of people receiving supplementary benefit in Wales for each year since 1979.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the table. Income support replaced supplementary benefit in April 1988.

Year	*Recipents in Wales (000s)*
1979	172
1980	186
1981	221
1982	253
1983	260
1984	275
1986	291
1987	287
1988	259
1989	246
1990	248
1991	257
1992	287
1993	309

Notes:

1. *Sources:* Supplementary benefit statistics annual inquiries 1979 to 1987
   Income support statistics annual inquiries, May 1988 to May 1992
   Income support statistics quarterly inquiry, February 1993
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Information for 1985 is not available.

Child Support Act 1991

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reduced benefit directives have been issued to lone parents since the Child Support Act 1991 came into operation.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) on 27 January at column *363.*

Compensation Recovery Unit

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money the compensation recovery unit recovered in the financial year 1992-93 by recoupment of benefits from awards of damages in personal injury claims; and how much money the compensation recovery unit estimated in the same year it would recover by recoupment of benefit.

Mr. Hague: The administration of the compensation recovery unit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from M. Bichard to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 27 January 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about the performance of the Compensation Recovery Unit.

In the 1992-93 financial year the Compensation Recovery Unit recovered over £51 million from awards of damages in personal injury claims. The estimated recovery for the same period was almost £49 million.

I hope you will find my reply helpful.

Benefit Overpayments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when instructions were first issued to local offices of his Department regarding the right to recover overpayments of benefits under common law in cases not covered by statutory provisions for recovery of overpayments.

Mr. Burt: The administration of benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from M. Bichard to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 27 January 1994.

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about the instructions issued to the Department's Local Offices about the recovery of overpayments under common law.

The Benefits Agency (BA) seeks recovery under Section 71 and Section 74 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. Under Section 71 the recovery is sought if the overpayment has been the result of "misrepresentation" or "failure to disclose" a material fact by the beneficiary. Section 74 applies where there has been a duplicaiton of Income Support and another benefit.

Recoveries under Sections 71 and 74 are dependant on determinations made by the independent adjudicating authorities. Under Section 71 they decide whether benefit is overpaid and the amount. For Section 74 they decide the amount that is recoverable.

There may be occasions where neither Section 71 nor Section 74 applies but benefit has been paid incorrectly and on the facts of the particular case the beneficiary ought to have realised that too much benefit was being paid. As there has been no misrepresentation or failure to disclose a material fact, and other considerations of Section 74 do not apply, there is no basis for the adjudication officer to decide on the overpayment. Nevertheless the BA is entitled to seek repayment of the money overpaid in such circumstances under the established principle of common law that where a person has received money to which he is not entitled, then he should repay it. This arrangement has existed for many years and has always been contained in instructions issued to Local Offices. No recent changes in instructions have therefore been necessary.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

WALES

Smoking

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he has taken and what further action he plans to discourage smoking among *(a)* children of school age and *(b)* adults; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Particular campaigns aimed at children of school age include the highly successful life education centres and the anti-smoking club Smokebusters Wales. A number of new projects aimed specifically at children are also being planned.

In relation to other groups, Health Promotion Wales' future plans include action to reduce the incidence of smoking by teenage girls, a pilot project to help smokers aged 15 to 19 to give up, and the development of materials for use in youth settings. These initiatives are the direct result of needs identified through research activity. In addition, the Welsh Office continues to support local health promotion units; each of which are carrying out their own local smoking cessation projects.

The Government have set and are determined to meet the challenging targets set out in Health Promotion Wales' document "Plans for Action 3—The Agenda for 1992-94".

National Curriculum (Changes)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish guidelines for education authorities in Wales regarding changes to the national curriculum in primary schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I announced on 5 January that the national curriculum in Wales would be slimmed down to allow schools more time to use at their discretion. Proposals for national curriculum orders, setting out the new requirements, will be issued for consultation around Easter. Schools and local education authorities in Wales will receive details of the revised national curriculum requirements at each key stage during the spring term in 1995. The revised curriculum will come into force for the 1995-96 school year.

Modern Apprenticeships Scheme

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his objectives for the modern apprenticeships scheme in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The aim of modern apprenticeships in Wales is to increase our economic competitiveness by increasing the number of young people qualifying to the key technician and supervisor levels. The main emphasis in 1994-95 will be on manufacturing engineering in order to support Wales' growing reputation as a manufacturing centre. Modern apprenticeships will be extended to other sectors in 1995-96.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give *(a)* the maximum, *(b)* the minimum and *(c)* the average amount paid out under the arable area payments scheme in Wales in the latest available year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Amounts paid under the 1992-93 scheme are in the order of:

	£
Maximum payment	34,300·00
Minimum payment	70·00
Average payment	1,700·00

These figures do not include payments for oilseeds because the final instalment is not due to be paid until early 1994.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Insurance Premium Tax

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a full breakdown of the 35p weekly increase in tax for the average family which will result from the introduction of the insurance premium tax which he identified in his autumn Budget; and if he will outline the assumptions on which it was based.

Sir John Cope: The 35p figure can be broken down as follows:

	Pence per week
Motor	20
Building	10
Contents	5
Total	35

These figures are based on the 1991 family expenditure survey, uprated to 1994-95. The figures cover expenditure by those households which have some insurance in each of the three main types of insurance.

Interest Charges

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he proposes to relieve small businesses and farms from paying interest charges considerably in excess of base rates.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have reduced base rates by 6·5 per cent. over the last 16 months and are committed to maintaining a competitive market for lending. The particular rates paid by individual borrowers is a matter for negotiation between them and their lenders.

Land

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many landowners and estates in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland have made unsuccessful applications to benefit under the tax procedures by which tax liability is reduced on condition that there is an undertaking to manage and protect the land from development and allow reasonable public access.

Mr. Dorrell: Information is not available in the form requested. Under 5 per cent. of applications for conditional exemption from inheritance tax or capital transfer tax are wholly rejected or withdrawn. Applications may relate to a number of properties and some of the applications which have been accepted will have been accepted only in part.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many landowners and estates in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland have benefited under the tax procedures by which tax liability is reduced on condition that there is an undertaking to manage and protect the land from development and allow reasonable public access.

Mr. Dorrell: There have been 126 designations of land for conditional exemption from inheritance tax or capital transfer tax in England; five designations in Wales; and 26 designations in Scotland. In addition, there have been 106 designations of historic buildings in England; five designations in Wales; and 39 designations in Scotland. Some of the designations of historic buildings will have extended to surrounding land. Some designations of historic buildings have been for the purposes of the tax exemptions for maintenance funds rather than for exemption of the buildings themselves.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the approximate value of the tax forgone in each year since 1976 in the cases where landowners and estates have benefited under the tax procedures by which tax liability is reduced on condition that there is an undertaking to manage and protect the land from development and allow reasonable public access.

Mr. Dorrell: The annual average cost of inheritance tax conditional exemption for land and buildings is estimated to have been between £5 million and £10 million over the period 1983-84 to 1992-93. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Works of Art

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that estates claiming exemption from inheritance tax make available to the public details of the works of art to which they have a right of access.

Mr. Dorrell: Public access to works of art granted exemption from inheritance tax may be provided in a number of ways. The publicity arrangements will differ depending on the way chosen.

The owner may arrange to exhibit the object in a house or room which is open to the public for an agreed number of days each year; appropriate publicity for the opening of the house would be required. The owner may lend the object to a public collection for display on a long-term basis; publicity would then be the responsibility of the curator of this collection.

Alternatively, the owner may arrange viewing by appointment provided he is also willing to lend the object on request to a public collection. All objects which can be viewed by appointment are publicised by means of an entry in the computerised register of conditionally exempt property held by the national art library in the Victoria and Albert museum in London. Copies of the register are also available for consultation in the national library of Scotland in Edinburgh, the national museum of Wales in Cardiff and the Ulster museum in Belfast. Copies of the register on computer disc can be purchased from the capital taxes office at a price of £10 each. The register is updated quarterly and the Inland Revenue issues quarterly press releases giving details of recent additions to the register.

Unicorn Heritage

Mr. Enright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what total tax relief was given to investors in Unicorn Heritage plc under Treasury business expansion schemes when that company went bankrupt; and under what guidelines it was given.

Mr. Dorrell: For reasons of taxpayer confidentiality, details of tax relief, if any, given to individuals in any particular instance are not disclosed.

Income Tax

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update table 2.3 of Inland Revenue Statistics 1993 with data for 1994-95 on the basis of his budget proposals for income tax.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* The information is given in the table. Estimates for 1992-93 onwards are based on a projection of the 1991-92 survey of personal incomes.

Shares of total income tax liability[1] (percentages)

Quantile groups of taxpayers	*1978-79*	*1981-82*	*1986-87*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*
Top 1 per cent.	11	11	14	15	16	17	17	17
Top 5 per cent.	24	25	29	32	33	33	34	34
Top 10 per cent.	35	35	39	42	43	45	45	45
Next 40 per cent.	47	46	43	43	42	42	42	42
Lower 50 per cent.	18	19	16	15	15	13	13	13
All taxpayers (=100 per cent.) (£ billion)	20·3	30·5	42·8	60·2	63·4	63·1	64·9	70·6

[1] Independent taxation was introduced from 6 April 1990. For years up to and including 1986-87, married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. For 1990-91 onwards, husbands and wives are counted separately.

SCOTLAND

Teacher Training Costs

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has of the total cost involved in training *(a)* a secondary and *(b)* a primary school teacher in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information set out in the table is based upon returns from teacher training institutions, other than the university of Stirling, detailing course costs in 1991-92. The figures include also an estimate of student support costs, assuming entitlement to full maintenance grant and loan at the "home" rates.

Course	*Estimated cost per student 1991-92 £*
BEd primary four-year course	26,200
PGCE Primary one-year postgraduate course	7,220
BEd Secondary four-year course	26,390
PGCE Secondary one-year postgraduate course	7,290

Procurators Fiscal

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases were reported to each procurator fiscal by the police in each year since 1990.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Procurators fiscal receive reports from over 50 reporting agencies including the police. The total numbers of such reports for each year since 1990 are given in the table. Separate statistics are not kept of the number of reports submitted by the police, but their reports will account for approximately 90 per cent. of the totals given.

1990

	CRIM reports
Aberdeen	14,740
Airdrie	9,254
Alloa	3,341
Arbroath	3,104
Ayr	11,059
Banff	1,311
Campbeltown	665
Cupar	2,800
Dingwall	1,931
Dornoch	546
Dumbarton	9,198
Dumfries	7,928
Dundee	15,016
Dunfermline	7,623
Dunoon	1,444
Duns	1,854
Edinburgh	37,028
Elgin	4,931
Falkirk	10,057
Forfar	3,624
Fort William	1,515
Glasgow	79,538
Greenock	7,080
Haddington	3,974
Hamilton	26,757
Inverness	6,946
Jedburgh	1,887
Kilmarnock	12,903
Kirkcaldy	8,130
Kirkcudbright	1,606
Kirkwall	616
Lanark	4,767
Lerwick	1,140
Linlithgow	9,566
Lochmaddy	199
Oban	1,141
Paisley	10,476
Peebles	1,029
Perth	11,392
Peterhead	2,959
Portree	574
Rothesay	289
Selkirk	2,411
Stirling	6,788
Stonehaven	3,637
Stornoway	1,030
Stranraer	2,124
Tain	1,542
Wick	1,426
Totals	360,896

1991

	CRIM reports
Aberdeen	16,556
Airdrie	9,334
Alloa	3,526
Arbroath	3,151
Ayr	11,285
Banff	1,719
Campbeltown	875

	CRIM reports
Cupar	2,602
Dingwall	1,873
Dornoch	535
Dumbarton	9,757
Dumfries	8,620
Dundee	14,202
Dunfermline	8,058
Dunoon	1,433
Duns	1,963
Edinburgh	33,805
Elgin	5,261
Falkirk	10,897
Forfar	4,003
Fort William	1,562
Glasgow	81,564
Greenock	6,984
Haddington	3,595
Hamilton	25,519
Inverness	7,836
Jedburgh	2,255
Kilmarnock	12,650
Kirkcaldy	8,502
Kirkcudbright	1,826
Kirkwall	593
Lanark	6,539
Lerwick	950
Linlithgow	8,741
Lochmaddy	211
Oban	1,105
Paisley	11,799
Peebles	1,093
Perth	10,475
Peterhead	3,126
Portree	789
Rothesay	339
Selkirk	2,302
Stirling	7,218
Stonehaven	4,777
Stornoway	1,078
Stranraer	3,365
Tain	1,520
Wick	1,206
Totals	368,974

1992

	CRIM reports
Aberdeen	15,846
Airdrie	8,907
Alloa	3,650
Arbroath	3,693
Ayr	10,552
Banff	1,542
Campbeltown	786
Cupar	3,020
Dingwall	1,827
Dornoch	542
Dumbarton	8,759
Dumfries	9,430
Dundee	13,225
Dunfermline	8,404
Dunoon	1,381
Duns	2,134
Edinburgh	34,487
Elgin	4,568
Falkirk	10,983
Forfar	3,800
Fort William	1,693
Glasgow	81,977
Greenock	7,129
Haddington	4,338
Hamilton	24,548
Inverness	8,059
Jedburgh	2,311
Kilmarnock	12,149
Kirkcaldy	8,915
Kirkcudbright	1,946
Kirkwall	627
Lanark	6,531
Lerwick	807
Linlithgow	8,655
Lochmaddy	236
Oban	1,113
Paisley	14,266
Peebles	1,423
Perth	9,833
Peterhead	3,188
Portree	494
Rothesay	307
Selkirk	2,043
Stirling	6,786
Stonehaven	3,346
Stornoway	785
Stranraer	3,196
Tain	1,500
Wick	1,326
Totals	367,063

1993

	CRIM reports
Aberdeen	13,371
Airdrie	7,141
Alloa	2,933
Arbroath	2,879
Ayr	8,093
Banff	1,205
Campbeltown	652
Cupar	2,109
Dingwall	1,375
Dornoch	493
Dumbarton	7,573
Dumfries	6,411
Dundee	10,520
Dunfermline	6,508
Dunoon	1,068
Duns	1,211
Edinburgh	29,977
Elgin	3,669
Falkirk	7,832
Forfar	2,387
Fort William	1,556
Glasgow	72,638
Greenock	5,170
Haddington	3,766
Hamilton	17,296
Inverness	7,190
Jedburgh	1,727
Kilmarnock	9,811
Kirkcaldy	6,881
Kirkcudbright	1,155
Kirkwall	616
Lanark	4,716
Lerwick	789
Linlithgow	7,236
Lochmaddy	234
Oban	1,042
Paisley	11,734
Peebles	868
Perth	7,759
Peterhead	2,691
Portree	429
Rothesay	232
Selkirk	1,526
Stirling	5,202
Stonehaven	2,163

	CRIM reports
Stornoway	761
Stranraer	2,129
Tain	1,252
Wick	1,065
Totals	297,041

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what procedures are in operation to monitor the way in which procurators fiscal deal with cases reported to them by the police; and what account is taken of the results of such monitoring in the rewarding or career patterns of procurators fiscal and in the allocation of financial resources.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Procurators fiscal prepare monthly reports of workload and performance. The information is analysed centrally in Crown Office for senior management. The work of local offices is monitored regularly by regional procurators fiscal and by the management services group in the Crown Office, which is engaged in a continuing programme of review. Procurators fiscal are subject to the directions of my noble and learned Friend, the Lord Advocate and must report serious cases for the instructions of his Deputes.

Financial resources are allocated on the basis of the workload of each office and the allocation takes account of the demands made by different types of case. A procurator fiscal is a civil servant. His competence is systematically appraised each year and he has the opportunity to earn performance pay. His performance is not measured in terms of results in court or by the number of convictions he obtains. The development of a procurate fiscal's career depends on how well he carries out a wide range of duties, and to advance he must be successful at promotion boards, which form part of the service's rigorous selection process.

Nurses

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nurses were employed in national health service hospitals in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what are the figures for nurses employed in the community alongside family doctors.

Mr. Stewart: The numbers of qualified nursing staff employed in hospitals and directly employed by GP practices are shown in the table. This also gives data for qualified staff working in the community who are employed by health boards and NHS trusts; these include those who work closely with GPs, like health visitors and district nurses, and others who may not, such as clinic or school nurses.

Numbers of qualified nurses, WTE, working in the NHS in Scotland.[1]

	Hospital Staff	*Community Staff*[2]	*Staff employed in GP practices*
1989	29,412·0	5,210·7	295·3
1990	29,478·0	5,261·1	583·5
1991	29,731·6	[3]5,525·7	646·8
1992	29,714·6	5,432·8	695·3
1993	[4]29,510·4	[4]5,392·9	735·5

[1] Includes midwives and only staff who are registered or enrolled. Bank nurses, staff in training or staff who are unqualified such as auxiliaries or nursery nurses are not included. Data for hospital and community staff are at 30 September and for GP practice staff at 1 April.

[2] Includes both staff who work closely with GPs and those who may not.

[3] The increase in community staff between 1990 and 1991 is the result of a reclassification of staff previously classified as hospital staff.

[4] Provisional.

Scottish Power (Fraud)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Serious Fraud Squad has concluded its investigation into alleged complaints of fraud in the supply of coal to Scottish Power, and with what results.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The investigation by Fife constabulary is not yet concluded.

Scottish Legal Aid Board

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total cost incurred by the Scottish Legal Aid Board in connection with market testing of its operations; if these costs have been met from the board's current budget; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In common with other non-departmental public bodies, the Scottish Legal Aid Board is undertaking a programme of market testing of certain of its activities. Separately identifiable costs to date amount to £30,000. These have been met from within the board's adminstrative budget of £7·862 million for 1993-94.

Director of Information

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the salary grading and scale attaching to the post of director of information at the Scottish Office; what are the duties and responsibilities of the office; and to whom the office holder is responsible.

Mr. Lang: The post of director of the Scottish Office information directorate is graded at unified grade 5 within the civil service grading structure. At present the national rate of pay for the grade is within the range £36,019-£53,740 progression being dependent on performance.

The director is responsible for the provision of advice to Ministers and all departments of the Scottish Office on the public presentation, through press, radio and television, of Government policy and the work of the Ministers and the departments of the Scottish Office.

The post also carries responsibility for paid publicity, including advertising and publications, media arrangements for royal visits to Scotland, organising programmes and providing escorts for Foreign and Commonwealth Office-sponsored VIP visitors to Scotland, and the provision of news and radio tapes for overseas markets on behalf of the Central Office of Information.

The director is directly responsible to Ministers as regards the professional advice provided by the information directorate. Management oversight of the directorate is exercised by the deputy secretary in charge of central services within the Scottish Office.

Forestry

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to publish a strategy for woodlands and forestry to implement his policy objectives.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* We published on Tuesday 25 January "Sustainable Forestry: The UK Programme" which explains how the forest principles will be implemented in the United Kingdom under our existing forestry policy.

NHS (Non-executive Directors)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of attendances, and the maximum possible of attendances, of non-executive directors at (1) national health service trust board meetings, and (2) health boards, in the latest 12 months or part thereof for which information is available.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* The information requested is not recorded centrally.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to ensure that non-executive members of national health service boards *(a)* visit a representative sample of the units under their control to observe service delivery in action, *(b)* take part in joint training and development with executive members and *(c)* receive training in how the national health service is financed.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* All members of health boards and national health service trusts are invited on appointment to attend national conferences to develop their understanding of the strategy, structure and finance of the national health service in Scotland. Boards are also strongly encouraged to provide induction programmes covering all local issues, including site visits to a range of facilities. The management development group also actively promotes joint training and development locally for non-executive and executive members, and they are given the opportunity to participate in a range of training programmes, including corporate management and financial responsibility.

Paediatric Care

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make it his policy to increase the number and availability of paediatric intensive care unit beds;

(2) if he will order a review in each health board area of the provision of children's intensive care; and if he will consider designating sites as area paediatric intensive care units;

(3) what is his policy on the ratio of paediatric intensive care unit beds to the population of children aged under 14 years;

(4) if he will require purchasers and providers to meet agreed standards for the provision of paediatric intensive care beds.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* It is a matter for health boards to purchase paediatric intensive care based on their assessment of local needs.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the extent of the shortfall of paediatric intensive care unit beds.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 10 December 1993, *Official Report*, column *353.*

Council Housing

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much from *(a)* grants, *(b)* consent to borrow and *(c)* capital receipts was spent in 1991-92 and 1992-93 on (i) council housing stock, (ii) owner-occupied stock, (iii) housing associations' stock and (iv) Scottish Homes stock; and how much of these sums, in each category of financial contribution and type of stock, was devoted to eradication of dampness and condensation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* Information in the form requested is not held centrally. Decisions on whether particular expenditure is financed from grants, borrowing, capital receipts or from other revenue is a matter for individual housing authorities. Similarly housing resource allocations are not generally earmarked for specific purposes and it is up to individual housing authorities to decide on the balance of investment in specific areas, including tackling dampness and condensation. Local authorities and Scottish Homes have, however, been asked to give priority to eliminating dampness and condensation in preparing their capital programmes for future years.

Development Corporations (Rent Increases)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the rent increases announced by Irvine development corporation.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* The house rent increases announced by Irvine development corporation, which will come into effect on 28 March, provide for a rise in management and maintenance costs above the rate of inflation and are expected to be broadly in line with the average set by other private sector landlords.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what rent increases have been announced by Irvine, Cumbernauld, Livingston, East Kilbride and Glenrothes development corporations; and what guidelines the Scottish Office issued to the development corporations prior to a decision being taken on the level of rent increase.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* Irvine, Livingston and East Kilbride development corporations have each announced a 5 per cent. increase in house rents from the beginning of 1994-95. Glenrothes and Cumbernauld have yet to announce the level of rent increase which will apply. These increases are in line with my right hon. Friend's advice to corporations that present house rents should, on average, be increased by between 5 per cent. and 7 per cent. from the beginning of the new financial year.

Inquiry Line

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the cost of setting up the Scottish Office inquiry line and the cost to date, the cost of administering the service, the number of staff employed and the salary of the head of the Scottish Office inquiry line.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* The set-up costs for the Scottish Office inquiry line amount to

£176,871. This includes initial publicity costs of £150,000 necessarily incurred to make the new arrangements known to the public. The estimated annual cost of operating the information line is £28,500; the costs to date are approximately £7,125.

The Scottish Office central inquiry unit has responsibility for the new information line and the unit was augmented by one to handle the new initiative. The unit is currently headed by a senior librarian whose annual salary is in the range of £19,215 to £24,780.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of calls received from each region between 1 October and 13 December 1993 to the Scottish Office inquiry line.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* Statistics on the number of Scottish callers to the inquiry line are divided into three catchment areas plus a fourth covering England and Wales.

The number of calls received for the period 1 October to 13 December 1993 were:

	Number
Aberdeen	297
Edinburgh	579
Glasgow	864
England and Wales—various locations	98

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of calls received between 1 October and 13 December 1993 to the Scottish Office inquiry line.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* The Scottish Office inquiry line received 1,838 calls between 1 October and 13 December 1993.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the subject matter of calls received by the Scottish Office inquiry line; and which of his departments has been involved in each case.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* No specific record is kept of the subject matter of each call received through the Scottish Office inquiry line but topics of inquiry have included trust hospitals, the opting out of schools, road building programmes, social services provision, planning and environmental issues.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Yugoslavia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has regarding the country of manufacture of guns obtained by Serbian forces since July 1992 which have been used against *(a)* British service men and *(b)* Bosnian civilians in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Serbia has an extensive arms manufacturing capability. Most weapons held by Serb forces are produced domestically, although it is possible that they may have procured guns from other countries since July 1992.

We have no information that Serb forces have used foreign-manufactured weapons either against British service men or Bosnian civilians.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* financial help and *(b)* technical and professional help his Department is contributing to the United Nations Human Rights Commission investigation into alleged war crimes in former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom provides financial assistance to the United Nations commission of experts through its contributions to the United Nations regular budget. We have also submitted to the commission three batches of substantiated evidence on war crimes, including a requested report on rape, collated by the Ministry of Defence's defence debriefing team.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department passed on to the United Nations Human Rights Commission all the testimonies of witnesses to and victims of alleged war crimes in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Ministry of Defence's debriefing team has inteviewed over 4,000 entrants to the United Kingdom from the former Yugoslavia since the conflict began. This material has been collated and substantiated evidence submitted to the commission of experts in three separate batches. We will continue to submit such evidence as it becomes available.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how his Department is co-operating with the UN Human Rights Commission investigation into alleged war crimes in former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom co-sponsored Security Council resolution 780 of 6 October 1992 which established the UN commission of experts. Since its establishment we have submitted to the commission three batches of substantiated evidence, including a requested report on rape. Later this year we will submit further evidence following a request from the commission for information on specific regions.

Arms Exports

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding arms exports to Israel.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 1 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *534.*

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding arms exports to Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We apply the following criteria in considering applications for the export of licensable goods to Iran:

(i) With two exceptions we should not approve licences for any goods or technology on the military or atomic energy lists—schedule 1, part 3, group 1 and 2—of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992, as amended. The exceptions are:

(a) goods essential for the safety of civil aircraft and air traffic control systems;

(b) radioactive material in the form of sources for medical equipment and deuterium labelled compounds for medical use.

(ii) We should not approve licences for any equipment—including the exceptions to the complete ban mentioned above—where there was knowledge or reason to suspect that it would go to a military end-user or be used for military purposes.

Existing export licenses, approved under the old guidelines, will remain valid. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Trade announced in his written reply to the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford) on 18 January 1994, *Official Report*, column 509, an exception has been made in one case to date. We shall support efforts among supplier countries, in particular the G7 and our European partners, to promote a harmonised approach to effective controls on the export of dual use goods to countries of particular concern.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding arms exports to Syria.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We do not sell arms to Syria.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding arms exports to Kuwait.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We consider applications for the export of arms to Kuwait on a case by case basis. We refuse applications for exports which in our view would not be consistent with our established criteria, including the common criteria for arms transfers agreed with European Union partners at Luxembourg in 1991 and at Lisbon in 1992, the guidelines agreed by the Permanent Five in London in 1991 and the principles governing conventional arms transfers adopted by the forum for security co-operation of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe in November 1993.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding arms exports to Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We consider applications for the export of arms to Saudi Arabia on a case-by-case basis. We refuse applications for exports which in our view would not be consistent with our established criteria, including the common criteria for arms transfers agreed with European Union partners at Luxembourg in 1991 and at Lisbon in 1992, the guidelines agreed by the permanent five in London in 1991 and the principles governing conventional arms transfers adopted by the forum for security co-operation of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe in November 1993.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding arms exports to Jordan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We consider applications for the export of arms to Jordan on a case by case basis. We refuse applications for exports which in our view would not be consistent with our established criteria, including the common criteria for arms transfers agreed with European Union partners at Luxembourg in 1991 and at Lisbon in 1992, the guidelines agreed by the permanent five in London in 1991 and the principles governing conventional arms transfers adopted by the forum for security co-operation of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe in November 1993.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding arms exports to Egypt.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We consider applications for the export of arms to Egypt on a case by case basis. We refuse applications for exports which in our view would not be consistent with our established criteria, including the common criteria for arms transfers agreed with European Union partners at Luxembourg in 1991 and at Lisbon in 1992, the guidelines agreed by the Permanent five in London in 1991 and the principles governing conventional arms transfers adopted by the forum for security co-operation of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe in November 1993.

Iran

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government will take to persuade the Government of Iran to investigate the disappearance of the General Secretary of the Iranian Assemblies of God, the Reverend Haik Hovsepian Mehr.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are concerned at Reverend Hovsepian's disappearance. According to the local press, the Iranian authorities are investigating. The EU presidency are seeking clarification in Iran on behalf of European partners.

North Korea

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing the nuclear safeguards inspections at facilities in North Korea; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the safeguards measures list drawn up by the International Atomic Energy Agency for North Korea, pursuant to a decision of the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: North Korea is still refusing to agree to International Atomic Energy Agency inspection of the two undeclared sites which led to its referral to the United Nations Security Council last April. The IAEA is currently discussing with North Korea arrangements for the next routine inspections of its declared sites. Details of specific measures required to ensure compliance with safeguards are not released by the IAEA. However, a copy of North Korea's safeguards agreement with the IAEA —INFCIRC 403—to which such measures are pursuant, has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Bosnia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Bosnia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs visited Bosnia on 21 and 22 January to see at first hand the contribution British troops and civilian aid workers are making to the international aid effort. He was enormously impressed by their professionalism and dedication. His visit will inform our consideration, with fellow troop contributors and other allies, of the future of UNPROFOR.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the second preparatory committee meeting for the review and renewal conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty held in New York from 17 January; and if he will place in the Library copies of those documents circulated at the preparatory committee meeting making reference to the United Kingdom policy on the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The second meeting of the preparatory committee for the 1995 non-proliferation treaty extension and review conference was largely concerned with organisational issues and the committee made good progress towards its task of preparing for the conference. The leader of the United Kingdom delegation also delivered a short statement in which he reaffirmed our commitment to our treaty obligations and our aim of securing the treaty's unconditional and indefinite extension in 1995. A copy of this statement has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Defence Sales

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was *(a)* the gross national product of, *(b)* the amount of United Kingdom Government aid to and *(c)* the aggregate value of United Kingdom defence sales to (i) Jordan, (ii) Pakistan and (iii) India in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The latest available gross national product and United Kingdom bilateral aid figures for Jordan, Pakistan and India are set out in the table. It is not Government policy to publish defence sales figures of the nature requested, which are commercially confidential between the suppliers and the customer Government. I refer the hon. Gentleman to table 1.11 of "UK Defence Statistics 1993" for defence sales information. A copy of this is available in the House of Commons Library.

Jordan

Year	*GNP Dinars million*	*United Kingdom gross bilateral aid (£'000s)*
1979	924·9	13,618
1980	1,183·6	4,682
1981	1,484·2	7,086
1982	1,702·5	3,308
1983	1,815·0	2,747
1984	1,905·0	6,105
1985	1,935·8	2,332
1986	2,097·3	5,641
1987	2,112·5	4,809
1988	2,129·9	4,495
1989	2,206·4	2,822
1990	2,375·9	5,105
1991	2,559·1	10,925
1992	3,158·6	3,122
1993	—	14,717

Notes:

(1) GNP: years ending 31 December.

(2) Aid: years ending 31 December up to and including 1987; thereafter years ending 31 March.

(3) Source for GNP figures:

Pakistan

Year	*GNP PRs billion*	*United Kingdom gross bilateral aid (£'000s)*
1979	209·45	21,810
1980	252·46	22,245
1981	300·89	24,613
1982	349·51	18,738
1983	403·78	16,612
1984	459·40	18,016
1985	510·47	16,569
1986	555·89	20,715
1987	608·86	22,475
1988	704·48	22,599
1989	797·75	28,183
1990	894·71	30,478
1991	1,053·09	43,476
1992	1,225·39	37,239
1993	—	34,483

Notes:

(1) GNP: Years ending 30 June.

(2) Aid: years ending 31 December up to and including 1987; thereafter years ending 31 March.

(3) Source for GNP figures:

IMF International Financial Statistics, January 1984.

India

Year	*GNP IRs billion*	*United Kingdom gross bilateral aid (£'000s)*
1979	1,145·1	153,314
1980	1,363·6	86,080
1981	1,598·0	168,550
1982	1,775·0	54,204
1983	2,066·5	127,600
1984	2,299·2	146,537
1985	2,608·1	106,466
1986	2,911·4	143,481
1987	3,305·8	78,464
1988	3,921·0	99,097
1989	4,482·6	84,647
1990	5,240·3	87,652
1991	6,026·7	100,815
1992	—	136,386
1993	—	115,370

Notes:

(1) GNP: Years beginning 1 April.

(2) Aid: Years ending 31 December up to and including 1987; thereafter years ending 31 March.

(3) Source for GNP figures: IMF international financial statistics, January 1994.

Mercenaries

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he first became aware that the Azeri Government were hiring British mercenaries; and what steps he took.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I first became aware of the allegations published in *The Independent* on 24 January. We have as yet no evidence to support these allegations, but my officials are looking into them. It would be a serious matter if a British company were found to be breaking the conference on security and co-operation in Europe arms embargo against parties to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 31 January 1994

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January, *Official Report,* column *849.*

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Mills: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 26 January to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Meriden for answer on 29 November, if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in supplying his answer.

Mr. Waldegrave: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the inordinate delay in answering his question, and for the inconvenience this caused to him. This delay was a result of the question having been overlooked when it was first tabled.

Duchy Benevolent Fund

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the membership of the board of the Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund, their dates of appointment; and what criteria were used in selecting appointees.

Mr. Waldegrave: The trustees of the Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund are:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster: The right hon. William Waldegrave, MP
The Duchy Attorney General: Mr. Timothy Lloyd, Q.C.
The Duchy Receiver General: Major Sir Shane Blewitt, KCVO
The Vice Chancellor of the County Palatine: The hon. Justice Morritt
Sir Michael Bunbury, Bt
Sir Simon Towneley, KCVO, JP
Professor Christopher Howes, CB
Mr. John Sclater
Clerk of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster: Mr. Michael Ridley, CVO

All were appointed on 1 October 1993 when the benevolent fund was made a charitable trust. All trustees are members of the Duchy Council and are distinguished in various fields relating to Duchy matters. For example, Sir Simon Towneley is the Lord-Lieutenant of Lancashire.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the advisers within the County Palatine who advise the Duchy's benevolent fund on applications it receives for financial assistance.

Mr. Waldegrave: The principal advisers are the Lords-Lieutenant of Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside. The secretary of the fund also keeps in contact with organisations which advise on charitable giving, for example the charities advice and information service of the community council of Lancashire, and makes use of his own extensive contacts in the County Palatine to evaluate applications for assistance.

Civil Servants

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which of the provisions in sections 4.1, 4.1 annex A, 4.2 and 4.3 annex A of the civil service management categories of civil servant are exempt.

Mr. Waldegrave: These provisions apply to all civil servants. Exceptionally, special advisers are not covered by the rules on the acceptance of outside appointments —annex A to section 4.3—as the rules themselves make clear.

Public Appointments (Women)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what targets have been set for an increased percentage of women in public appointments for all Departments as following the 1989 Cabinet Office review of the public appointments process; and what is the current progress towards them.

Mr. David Davis: Departmental plans and goals for the increased representation of women on public bodies were published on 16 November 1992. A summary of these is in the Library of the House. The percentage of public appointments held by women has risen from 23 per cent. in 1991 to 26 per cent. in 1992 and 28 per cent. in 1993. Further details are available in the 1993 edition of "Public Bodies", a copy of which is also available in the Library of the House.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. David Davis: The number of staff covered by statutory sick pay in the Cabinet Office and the Office of Public Service and Science is 1,340.

ENVIRONMENT

Agencies

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters addressed to Ministers in his Department in the last 12 months by *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* others have been forwarded for reply to each agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Some 295 letters from hon. Members addressed to Ministers in my Department have been replied to directly, by the Planning Inspectorate agency, during 1993. No other agencies in my Department have replied to such letters. Information about letters from other correspondents is not available.

Urban Deprivation Index

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will produce the newly revised indicators of poverty to be used in the new urban deprivation index; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We hope to finalise the indicators to be used in the census-based index of local conditions shortly.

Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I have no such plans.

Environmental Approach (Launch Meeting)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which hon. and right hon. Members who are not Ministers were invited to attend the meeting in the Banqueting House to launch the Government's environmental approach.

Mr. Atkins: Members of the House were not invited to attend the meeting in the Banqueting House, which was a press conference in the presence of people who had been associated with preparation of the documents, but all four reports are Command papers which were presented to Parliament in the usual way.

Water Supply (Lead Levels)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to identify the areas most at risk from lead levels in water supply; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: A direction has been made requiring water supply companies annually to provide information on the risk that drinking water might breach the standard for lead. This information for 1989 and 1990 was published in the report "Nitrate, Pesticides and Lead" issued by the drinking water inspectorate in 1992. A report for 1991 and 1992 will be published in due course.

CCT Evaluation Reports

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department's compulsory competitive tendering evaluation reports will be published.

Mr. Baldry: In July 1993 my Department published two reports of research on the results of CCT carried out by the University of Birmingham Institute of Local Government Studies, following publication of preliminary research in 1991. This independent research showed that CCT had led to an average cost reduction of 6·5 per cent., and up to 20 per cent. for certain services; higher standards and more systematic monitoring of delivery; and better management and improved staff morale. Copies of the two reports were placed in the Library of the House. The Department is now carrying out further research to evaluate the private sector's experience of CCT, reports on which we expect to publish later this year.

Administration Expenditure

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of city challenge, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed;

(2) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of housing action trusts, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed;

(3) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of inner-city task forces, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed;

(4) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of estate action, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed;

(5) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the Urban Regeneration Agency, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed;

(6) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the urban programmes, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last 15 years and *(b)* since the scheme was developed;

(7) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the city action teams, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed;

(8) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the urban development corporations, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Mr. Baldry: Detailed information on my Department's administration expenditure is not readily available in the form requested. But a breakdown of departmental staff effort by function is available in the DOE's annual published MINIS return.

Deregulation Task Forces

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his response to paragraphs 190 to 319 of the recommendations of the proposals for reform of the deregulation task forces, as they affect his Department's policy.

Mr. Gummer: The substantial deregulation action that my Department is taking to reduce unnecessary controls on business while safeguarding environmental and public safety is fully set out at pages 36 to 44 of the DTI publication "Deregulation—Cutting Red Tape" that was issued on 19 January together with the complete list of the task force's proposals for reform.

Fire and Civil Defence Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the expenditure and standard spending assessment for fire and civil defence purposes in each fire authority area as expenditure of standard spending assessment per 1,000 population served for *(a)* 1991-92, *(b)* 1992-93 and, so far as standard spending assessment is concerned, for 1993-94.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is given in the table.

Fire and civil defence net revenue expenditure and standard spending assessment in each fire authority area per 1,000 population for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 (SSA only)

Local authority	*1991-92* Expenditure (£)	*1991-92* SSA (£)	*1992-93* Expenditure (£)	*1992-93* SSA (£)	*1993-94* SSA (£)
Greater Manchester Fire and Civil Defence Authority	22,757	24,140	25,026	25,957	27,634
Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority	28,830	28,797	31,708	31,103	32,699
South Yorkshire Fire and Civil Defence Authority	21,307	19,054	23,083	21,069	21,742
Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority	25,395	26,044	28,208	29,216	30,606
West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority	21,275	23,507	23,842	25,325	25,778
West Yorkshire Fire and Civil Defence Authority	23,262	21,035	24,237	22,891	23,719
Isles of Scilly	48,148	31,169	45,662	33,919	26,136
London Fire and Civil Defence Authority	32,473	32,966	34,489	35,055	35,664
Avon	20,392	19,401	21,301	20,487	21,281
Bedfordshire	19,472	18,856	21,148	20,377	20,725
Berkshire	17,929	19,696	19,614	21,755	22,061
Buckinghamshire	15,263	17,338	17,881	19,017	19,307
Cambridgeshire	17,136	15,973	17,802	17,262	17,972
Cheshire	19,514	18,143	20,883	19,893	20,798
Cleveland	32,111	31,362	[illegible]4,869	33,813	34,912
Cornwall	18,966	14,809	20,352	15,573	15,176
Cumbria	20,859	16,241	23,739	17,023	17,875
Derbyshire	17,567	16,133	18,794	17,962	18,156
Devon	18,420	17,354	20,346	18,525	18,804
Dorset	17,557	16,637	18,309	17,847	18,195
Durham	20,265	18,924	21,866	20,841	21,466
East Sussex	20,298	18,941	22,205	20,120	20,796
Essex	19,602	18,501	21,019	20,285	20,309
Gloucestershire	16,942	15,860	17,402	17,051	17,827
Hampshire	16,254	18,289	16,759	19,699	20,038
Hereford and Worcester	17,096	15,981	18,025	17,496	17,661
Hertfordshire	17,312	18,774	18,623	20,575	20,502
Humberside	24,555	21,451	26,276	23,532	24,384
Isle of Wight	22,223	16,252	25,141	17,576	17,610
Kent	20,558	18,478	21,670	19,881	20,143
Lancashire	21,350	20,540	22,331	21,710	22,918
Leicestershire	14,892	17,128	16,266	18,435	18,998
Lincolnshire	16,256	14,705	16,780	15,741	16,173
Norfolk	16,732	15,408	18,173	16,517	17,133
Northamptonshire	17,106	17,491	18,431	18,798	19,179
Northumberland	27,819	17,237	28,143	18,698	18,959
North Yorkshire	18,210	15,085	19,552	16,115	16,653
Nottinghamshire	18,857	18,555	19,178	20,149	20,771
Oxfordshire	15,905	17,080	18,817	18,493	19,467
Shropshire	18,678	16,615	19,889	18,824	19,001
Somerset	17,082	14,801	18,914	15,736	16,390
Staffordshire	17,412	16,613	16,809	17,909	18,470
Suffolk	17,392	15,624	18,178	16,607	16,655
Surrey	21,967	19,062	23,599	21,739	21,413
Warwickshire	21,258	16,200	22,682	17,857	18,359
West Sussex	18,607	18,969	19,750	20,474	20,732
Wiltshire	16,014	16,076	17,362	17,033	17,413

Expenditure: 1991-92 figures are final outturn, 1992-93 are revised estimates, both are at outturn prices.

Programme Funding

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of funding made available over the last year by *(a)* estate action, *(b)* housing action trusts, *(c)* city challenge, *(d)* the urban programme, *(e)* the Urban Regeneration Agency, *(f)* urban development corporations, *(g)* inner-city task forces and *(h)* city action teams.

Mr. Baldry: The total amount of funding provided by my Department under each of these programmes for the financial year ending March 1994 is forecast to be:

	1993-94 Forecast Outturn £ million
(a) Estate Action	356·0
(b) Housing Action Trusts	86·8
(c) City Challenge	223·2
(d) Urban Programme	173·0

	1993-94 Forecast Outturn £ million
(e) Urban Regeneration Agency (URA)	[1]58·0
(f) Urban Development Corporations	380·8
(g) Inner City Task Forces	18·0
(h) City Action Teams	3·4

[1] Includes city grant provision up to 10 November 1993 when responsibility transferred to English Partnerships (the URA).

Stray Dogs

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the most recent estimate for the number of stray dogs recovered by local authorities for each year since 1991.

Mr. Atkins: The National Dog Wardens Association estimates that the number of dogs picked up by or taken to local authorities in Great Britain was 90,000 in 1991 and 140,000 in 1992. A figure for 1993 is not yet available. These figures do not reflect the total number of stray dogs as some may be returned directly to their owners or be taken to the police or to animal charities.

Correspondence

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will reply to the letter of 22 December 1993 from the hon. Member for Leicester, East.

Mr. Baldry: I replied to the hon. Member on 27 January.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment as to the number of district authorities which would be granted a provisional increase in their standard spending assessments of more than 10 per cent. in 1994-95 was made in reaching his determination, expressed in his Budget statement, that the growth in spending in England in 1994-95 would be limited to 2·3 per cent.

Mr. Baldry: The figure for total standard spending for 1994-95 represents the Government's view of an appropriate level of net revenue expenditure by local authorities taking account of the pressures on local authorities and general economic conditions. The distribution of the total of standard spending assessments will be determined according to the formulae set out in the local government finance report laid before the House on 27 January. As a result of the extensive review of the method of calculating SSAs for 1994-95 some authorities will find their SSAs increasing between years while others will face a reduction.

Leeds Development Corporation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, by financial year, each contract worth more than £100,000 entered into by Leeds development corporation for the purchase or sale of land and buildings.

Mr. Baldry: All details of commercial contracts entered into between a vendor and a purchaser are commercial in confidence and releasing such information would require the agreement of both of the parties concerned. Development corporations are required to obtain independent valuations before entering into contracts for the sale or purchase of land or buildings to ensure that the proper market valuation is paid.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out for each financial year since its inception *(a)* the amount of money spent on acquiring land and buildings and *(b)* the amount of money received for the sale of land and buildings by Leeds development corporation.

Mr. Baldry: Expenditure and receipts in respect of the acquisition and sale of land and buildings by Leeds development corporation from inception until 31 March 1993 are as follows:

	Expenditure (£000)	*Receipts (£000)*
1988-89	935	0
1989-90	5,671	0
1990-91	7,542	7
1991-92	3,377	1,861
1992-93	6,393	4,041

Parish Councils

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to celebrate the centenary of the Local Government Act 1894 and to mark the social contribution made by parish councils to their communities.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend is considering what actions to take to celebrate the centenary of the Local Government Act 1894. We greatly value the contribution parish and town councils have made to their local communities.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Gummer: The number of staff in the Department and its agencies covered by statutory sick pay at 31 December 1993 was 7,421.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *674*, what are the additional costs, net of any reduction in employer's national insurance contributions, to his departmental budget for the financial year 1994-95 of the changes in statutory sick pay provision.

Mr. Gummer: There should be no net costs to my departmental budget.

Sea Bathing

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the final report into the health effects of sea bathing will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Water Research Centre is today publishing the final report of the four-year programme of research into the health effects of sea bathing. The research was jointly funded by my own Department, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Health, and the National Rivers Authority.

I welcome the report. The Government have funded this independent research because of concerns expressed about the possibility of contracting illnesses from swimming at our holiday beaches. It will provide reassurance for the many people who enjoy sea bathing.

The work has demonstrated for the first time that sea water itself has effects on sea bathers, causing an increase in reported symptoms such as eye irritations, sore ears and skin rashes. It has also confirmed the relationship which was already known between the level of particular micro-organisms in sea water and the reporting of gastro-intestinal symptoms and diarrhoea. However, the report concludes that the current mandatory EC standards give adequate health protection.

I and colleagues in the other Departments agree with this assessment and believe that any additional benefit to be gained by tightening EC standards is likely to be insignificant.

The Government are committed to securing improvements in our bathing waters. A £2 billion programme is in hand to bring virtually all United Kingdom bathing waters up to the mandatory standards of the EC bathing water directive by the end of 1995. Already 80 per cent. of our 458 bathing waters meet or exceed these standards. The forthcoming very large expenditures to implement the urban waste water treatment directive will improve further the quality of our coastal water.

Copies of the full report have been placed in the Library of the House.

Right-to-repair Scheme

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the final details of the new right-to-repair scheme for council tenants.

Sir George Young: I have today laid before the House the Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994—SI 1994/133—which will introduce an improved right-to-repair scheme for council tenants from 1 April 1994. Copies of the regulations and an explanatory circular are being sent to all housing authorities in England.

This citizens charter initiative will give council tenants the right to have certain urgent repairs carried out at no cost to themselves, and will provide a simple and reliable way of getting the work done when the council fails to complete a qualifying repair within a specified period.

The improved right-to-repair scheme will be far more effective in ensuring that councils get repairs done quickly at no cost to the tenant. Where the scheme fails to work, tenants will be compensated for the inconvenience caused to them.

The regulations set out which small urgent repairs, costing up to £250, are included in the scheme, and how long councils will have to complete them. If a repair is not carried out within the specified period the tenant will be able to ask the council to instruct a second contractor to complete the repair, with the cost being met by the council.

If the second contractor fails to complete the repair within a second specified period the tenant will be entitled to compensation of £10, plus £2 per day for every day that the repair remains outstanding, up to a maximum payment of £50.

The repair times in the regulations will apply to all new contracts let after 1 April 1994. Transitional arrangements will apply for councils whose existing contract have longer repair times. However, all councils must comply with the repair times in the regulations by 1 April 1996.

Irish Sea Science

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made by the Irish sea science co-ordinator in reviewing Irish sea science since his appointment was announced on 11 March 1992.

Mr. Atkins: The co-ordinator prepared an inventory of "Research and Monitoring on the Irish Sea" with the assistance of organisations on both sides of the Irish sea. The inventory was submitted to the United Kingdom and Irish Governments as the "First Report of the Irish Sea Science Co-ordinator". I am placing copies in the Library of the House today. The co-ordinator is now undertaking a review based on the inventory to identify possible gaps and overlaps in current programmes. A further report will be made available to the House once the review has been completed.

Car Hire

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of hiring private cars in 1992-93; and for what purposes they were hired.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 24 January 1994]*: The total cost to the Department, including Property Holdings and the Property Services Agency, of vehicle hire in 1992-93 was some £1·16 million. This figure includes some expenditure on the Government car service.

The major use of private cars is for site inspections or visits by staff. Private vehicles are also used for regional visits.

Vehicles are also hired on an ad hoc basis for travelling to conferences or meetings, for collecting equipment from suppliers and for journeys connected with the maintenance and installation of security systems.

Landfill Pricing

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will take action on the report published in 1993 on "Landfill Pricing: Correcting Possible Market Distortions"; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to introduce a tax on waste to landfill; and if he will make a statement;

Mr. Atkins: The Government are examining the idea of introducing a landfill levy. To inform our decisions, we published reports in 1993 on "Landfill Pricing: Correcting Possible Market Distortions" and "Externalities from Landfill and Incineration". We invited comments on both reports. The deadline for comments on the second report was 7 January 1994. We are now considering the reports and comments received on them and will announce our decisions in due course.

Waste Recycling

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what further initiatives he intends to introduce to increase the recycling of waste; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what recycling initiatives he has introduced to reduce waste to landfill.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Full details of the Government's recycling initiatives are given in the annual reports on the White Paper "This Common Inheritance"; copies are in the Library. Initiatives involving my Department in the past year include: the development of producer responsibility schemes under which industries contributing to major waste streams have been asked to develop plans for the recovery of significantly higher levels of their waste; the allocation of some £15 million in supplementary credit approvals to encourage the development of recycling initiatives by local authorities; and changing the basis of payment for recycling credits from 50 per cent. of the long-run marginal cost of disposal to 100 per cent. with effect from 1 April 1994. We keep our recycling policies under review and will introduce further initiatives where appropriate.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the results of his industry waste recovery plan.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Under our producer responsibility initiative we are asking industry to take responsibility for ensuring that a significantly higher proportion of the wastes it produces is recovered for beneficial uses. In July 1993 we challenged the packaging industry to devise a plan to secure the recovery of between 50 per cent. and 75 per cent. of all packaging waste by the year 2000, compared with 34 per cent. currently being achieved; we also asked it to take immediate steps to safeguard the United Kingdom recycling infrastructure for waste paper and board and plastics. In November, the producer responsibility group presented an interim report which committed the industry to providing support for these sectors until its full plan is implemented. PRG submitted a draft of its full plan for official consideration before Christmas. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment expects to receive a final version of the plan shortly.

The producer responsibility concept embraces industries responsible for a wide range of waste streams. In addition to the packaging industry, the Government have asked the newspaper, tyre, battery, electronic equipment and motor vehicle industries to devise plans.

Tyne and Wear Development Corporation

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* jobs and *(b)* jobs for youth have been created by the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation;

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Up to the end of December 1993, Tyne and Wear development corporation created 12,230 gross jobs. The corporation does not keep information which would enable "jobs for youth" to be separately identified.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of inward investment has been attracted by the Tyne and Wear urban development corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* The total private sector investment attracted by the corporation into the urban development area, to the end of December 1993, is almost £600 million. Expenditure by companies moving into the UDA from elsewhere in the United Kingdom or overseas is estimated at £65 million.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Relations

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with which countries the United Kingdom has no diplomatic relations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The following are the states recognised by Her Majesty's Government with which the Government do not currently have diplomatic relations:

Bhutan
Iraq
Korea (North)
Libya

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries of the former USSR to which the United Kingdom has not appointed ambassadors.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom has appointed ambassadors to all the countries of the former Soviet Union, some resident and some non-resident. Our ambassador in Moscow is at present accredited to Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan as well as Russia. He will shortly be giving up his responsibilities for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, to which our ambassadors in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan respectively will be cross-accredited. We also have resident ambassadors in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he has made in appointing a person, under section 10(3AA) of the Asylum and Immigration Appeal Act 1993, to monitor refusals of entry clearance where there is no right of appeal by virtue of section 10(3A) of the Act; and in what manner the person appointed will discharge his or her functions.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have appointed Elizabeth Anson to be the first independent monitor. Lady Anson has been appointed for a period of three years; she took up her duties with effect from 1 December and will make her first report before 30 November 1994, which I will lay before Parliament.

The monitor will look at a random sample of refusals of entry clearance where there is no statutory right of appeal as a result of the 1993 Act. She will consider whether the standards required by legislation or administrative practice, by which decisions are reached, are being applied correctly and fairly. During the early part of each year, she will visit a number of posts to assist her understanding of practice and procedure at overseas posts.

The review will be undertaken in London and will encompass all entry clearance posts. The sample will be drawn randomly and posts will not know in advance which cases have been chosen for review.

It is not intended that the review should become an alternative appeals system; nor will it be a procedure for applicants or sponsors to seek to have their decisions reviewed in individual cases. The monitor will have no powers to overturn decisions. It will be a further check on the standards which are being applied to decisions in entry clearance posts.

World Community

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussion he has had with his French, German and American counterparts to improve the cohesion and effectiveness of the world community.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend is in frequent contact with his French, German and American counterparts on issues which could contribute to this cohesion and effectiveness. One of the most important is the Uruguay round trade negotiations, the successful conclusions of which will make a major contribution to economic growth in developing and developed countries alike.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the methods by which NATO intends to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and what is the definition of weapons of mass destruction agreed in this strategy.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The alliance's approach to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction does not seek to duplicate traditional preventive non-proliferation policies to which the United Kingdom Government remain committed. It will review what steps are necessary for the alliance to protect against and deter any threat to it from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which in this context, include chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policy proposals the United Kingdom plans to put to the resumed negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty within the framework of the United Nations committee on disarmament, beginning in Geneva on 24 January; what is the composition of the United Kingdom delegation; and what is the timetable for the negotiations.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A detailed statement of our approach to the negotiations was made by Sir Michael Weston, the head of the United Kingdom delegation to the conference on disarmament, on 25 January. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House. Our aim will be to make good speed towards the conclusion of an effective treaty.

The conference on disarmament proceeds by consensus, and the timetable for negotiations will therefore depend on the speed with which agreement can be reached on the key elements of the treaty. But we continue to doubt that fixing a firm deadline for the achievement of a treaty will promote the chances of a successful outcome to the negotiations. Our delegation will be supported as necessary by officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, and staff from the Atomic Weapons Establishment.

Mehdi Dibaj

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with the Iranian ambassador the decision of the Iranian Government to execute Mehdi Dibaj for converting to Christianity; and if he will strongly urge the Iranian Government to reverse this decision.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European Union, with our full support, has raised the case of Rev. Mehdi Dibaj with the Iranian authorities in Tehran and Geneva. We have also made clear to the Iranian embassy in London our concern at the death sentence passed on him. We understand that Rev. Dibaj has been released on bail but that his case is still before the Iranian supreme court. The European Union will continue to follow his case closely.

Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: None. On behalf of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Council regularly organises and supports exhibitions of British photography. It has 16 such exhibitions already scheduled for this year and another five under preparation. It has also bought a large number of photographs for the British Council collection.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Goodlad: The rooms of the Secretary of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office comprise his own office, his private offices and a waiting room. There are 45 paintings or prints and 21 photographs on the walls of these rooms.

Visitor's Passport

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which members of the European Union accept the British visitor's passport as a travel document for entry into their country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All members of the European Union currently accept the British visitor's passport for entry into their countries, except Ireland which forms part of a common travel area with the United Kingdom.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the kingdom of Spain about the future acceptance of the British visitor's passport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British embassy in Madrid expressed concern to the Spanish authorities at the time they announced their intention to withdraw recognition of the British visitor's passport. Further representations will shortly be made by Her Majesty's ambassador. I shall write to the right hon. Member when the outcome of these representations is known.

Malaysia

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the protocol signed with the Government of Malaysia in March 1988 which included references to aid and defence equipment sales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: It is established practice that confidential documents exchanged between Governments on such matters as defence sales should not be published. The Government will co-operate fully with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs in the inquiry which it announced on 26 January.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government began discussions with the Government of Malaysia about the construction of a military base at Mersing in Malaysia; whether such discussions took place concurrently with talks about his Department's funding for the Pergau dam project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Discussions between the two Governments about a military base at Mersing first took place in July 1987.

The application from the British consortium for support from the aid and trade provision for the Pergau hydro-electric project was received in November 1988.

Discussions of the two issues were entirely independent of each other and have remained so.

Azerbaijan

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he has taken to ensure that military equipment or assistance is not supplied by British-registered companies to Azerbaijan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe's embargo on the supply of arms to the parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute still applies. We adhere to this fully and have not approved licences for the export of any military equipment to Azerbaijan or Armenia. Nor will we do so.

Mr. Tipping: To as[illegible]he Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth [illegible]airs what policies exist over the supplying of arms a[illegible] military equipment to Azerbaijan and Armenia; when such policies were implemented; whether there have been changes in policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since February 1992, a voluntary CSCE embargo has been in place on the supply of military equipment to the parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh. We have stood by the terms of this embargo and will continue to do so.

As I made clear in my answer to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 28 January, *Official Report*, column *468*, it would be a serious matter if a British company were found to be breaking this embargo.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with *(a)* United Kingdom companies and *(b)* persons acting as their representatives or consultants about the possible supply of arms and mercenaries to Azerbaijan; if he will name each such company or persons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am not aware of any discussions with United Kingdom companies, their representatives or consultants about the possible supply of arms and mercenaries to Azerbaijan.

Council of Europe

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) of 17 January, *Official Report,* columns *354-55,* if he will list for each Council of Europe convention and agreement mentioned the lead Department in the British Government.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* The table shows the lead Government Department for each of the conventions referred to in the question.

Department of the Environment
European outline convention on transfrontier co-operation between territorial communities or authorities (1980)
European charter of local self-government (1985)
Convention on civil liability for damage resulting from activities dangerous to the environment (1993)

Department for Education
European convention on the general equivalence of periods of university study (1990)

Department of Health
Agreement on the transfer of corpses (1973)
Arrangement for the application of the European agreement of 17 October 1980 concerning the provision of medical care to persons during temporary residence (1988)

Department of National Heritage
European convention on offences relating to cultural property (1985)

Department of Transport
European convention on compulsory insurance against civil liability in respect of motor vehicles (1959)
European convention on the international effects of deprivation of the right to drive a motor vehicle (1976)

Department of Trade and Industry
Agreement relating to application of the European convention on international commercial arbitration (1962)
European convention providing a uniform law of arbitration (1966)
European convention on establishment of companies (1966)
European convention on foreign money liabilities (1967)
European convention on the place of payment of money liabilities (1972)
European convention on civil liability for damage caused by motor vehicles (1973)
European convention on products liability in regard to personal injury and death (1977)
European convention on certain international aspects of bankruptcy (1990)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
European convention on consular functions (1967)

Home Office
European convention on the supervision of conditionally sentenced or conditionally released offenders (1964)
European convention on the punishment of road traffic offences (1964)
European convention on "au pair" placement (1969)

European convention on the international validity of criminal judgments (1970)

European convention on the repatriation of minors (1970)

European convention on the transfer of proceedings in criminal matters (1972)

European convention on the non-applicability of statutory limitation to crimes against humanity and war crimes (1974)

European Convention on the legal status of migrant workers (1977)

European convention on the control of the acquisition and possession of firearms by individuals (1978)

European convention for the protection of pet animals (1987)

European charter on regional or minority languages

Inland Revenue

Convention on mutual administration assistance in tax matters (1988)

Lord Chancellor's Department

European Convention on the calculation of time limits (1972)

European convention on the service abroad of documents relating to administrative matters (1977)

European convention on the obtaining abroad of information and evidence in administrative matters (1978)

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

European Convention for the protection of animals for slaughter (1979)

Department of Social Security

European convention on social security (1972)

Supplementary agreement to the European convention on social security (1972)

European code of social security (Revised) (1990)

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what plans he has for an embargo on military supplies to Nigeria;

(2) what action he has taken to express Her Majesty's Government's view about the continued military dictatorship in Nigeria; and what international action he is urging.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the written reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on 2 December, at column *680.*

The measures aimed at the Nigerian military announced then, in concert with our partners in the European Union, remain in force. We continue to consult closely with our partners and are keeping these measures under review.

Advertising

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost of advertising by his Department has been for each year since 1979 and for each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Goodlad: The cost of advertising in the United Kingdom by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for recruitment in 1992-93, the last financial year for which information is available, was:

	FCO Diplomatic Wing £	*FCO ODA Wing £*
1992-93	150,787	238,033

The corresponding figures for 1979-80 and 1985-86 are:

	FCO Diplomatic Wing £	*FCO ODA Wing £*
1979-80	100,266	214,739
1985-86	160,535	271,084

Costs for each of the last 12 months are:

	FCO Diplomatic Wing £	*FCO ODA Wing £*
1992		
December	521	0
1993		
January	3,560	15,668
February	35,656	9,546
March	11,870	26,647
April	1,704	37,152
May	2,938	32,196
June	1,455	9,783
July	0	2,250
August	0	18,142
September	1,192	10,587
October	613	30,680
November	0	3,987

The compilation of these figures for intervening years and of the cost of advertising overseas would incur disproportionate cost.

Outer Space

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the progress in the discussions in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, in relation to the benefit of all as set out in article 1 of the outer space treaty.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This topic is debated by the committee and its legal sub-committee during their annual meetings.

The most recent development is the production of a working paper by a number of member states on the consideration of the legal aspects related to the application of one of the principles in article 1 of the 1967 outer space treaty:

> "The exploration and use of outer space . . . shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries".

PRIME MINISTER

Lords-Lieutenant

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Lords-Lieutenant in England and their dates of appointment.

The Prime Minister: The following is a list of the Lords-Lieutenant of England and of when their appointments were announced.

Lord-Lieutenants of England

County	*Lord-Lieutenant*	*Announcement of appointment*
Avon	Sir John Wills, TD, FRICS, JP	April 1974
Bedfordshire	Samuel Whitbread, Esq., JP	January 1991
Berkshire	John Henderson, Esq., CVO, OBE	June 1989
Buckinghamshire	Commander the Hon. John Fremantle, RN (Retd.), JP	September 1984
Cambridgeshire	James Crowden, Esq., JP	May 1992
Cheshire	William Bromley Davenport, Esq., JP	June 1990
Cleveland	The Lord Gisborough, TD, JP	March 1981
Cornwall	The Viscount Falmouth	October 1977
Cumbria	Sir Charles Graham, Bt.	February 1983
Derbyshire	Colonel Sir Peter Hilton, KCVO, MC, JP	January 1978
Devon	The Earl of Morley, JP	May 1982
Dorset	The Lord Digby, JP	September 1984
Durham	David Grant, Esq., CBE, JP	April 1988
East Sussex	Admiral Sir Lindsay Bryson, KCB, FRSE, FEng.	May 1989
Essex	The Lord Braybrooke	March 1992
Gloucestershire	Henry Elwes, Esq., JP	December 1992
Greater London	Field Marshal The Lord Bramall, GCB, OBE, MC, JP	January 1986
Greater Manchester	Colonel John Timmins, OBE, TD, JP	December 1987
Hampshire	Mrs. Mary Fagan	January 1994
Hereford and Worcester	Captain Thomas Dunne, JP	July 1977
Hertfordshire	Simon Bowes Lyon, Esq., FCA, BA	January 1986
Humberside	Richard Bethell, Esq., JP	October 1983
Isle of Wight	The Lord Mottistone, CBE	August 1985
Kent	The Rt. Hon. The Lord Kingsdown, MA, FRSA, FBIM, JP	August 1982
Lancashire	Simon Towneley, Esq., DPhil, JP	March 1976
Leicestershire	Timothy Brooks, Esq., JP	January 1989
Lincolnshire	Sir Henry Nevile, KCVO, JP	November 1975
Merseyside	Alan Waterworth Esq., MA, JP	October 1993
Norfolk	Timothy Colman, Esq., JP	March 1978
Northamptonshire	John Lowther, Esq., CBE, JP	January 1984
Northumberland	The Viscount Ridley, KG, TD, JP	January 1984
North Yorkshire	Sir Marcus Worsley, Bt., JP	March 1987
Nottinghamshire	Sir Andrew Buchanan, Bt.	January 1991
Oxfordshire	Sir Ashley Ponsonby, Bt., KCVO, MC	January 1980
Shropshire	John Dugdale, Esq.	February 1975
Somerset	Lt. Col. Sir Walter Luttrell, KCVO, MC, JP	March 1978
South Yorkshire	Hugh Neill, Esq., CBE, TD, JP	May 1985
Staffordshire	James Hawley, Esq., TD, JP	August 1993

County	Lord-Lieutenant	Announcement of appointment
Suffolk	The Rt. Hon. The Lord Belstead, JP	December 1993
Surrey	Richard Thornton, Esq., OBE, JP	May 1986
Tyne and Wear	Sir Ralph Carr-Ellison, TD	July 1984
Warwickshire	The Viscount Daventry	February 1990
West Midlands	Robert Taylor, Esq., OBE	November 1993
West Sussex	His Grace The Duke of Richmond and Gordon	March 1990
West Yorkshire	John Lyles, Esq., CBE, Bsc.	August 1992
Wiltshire	Field Marshal Sir Roland Gibbs, GCB, CBE, DSO, MC	December 1989

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: None, currently.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

The Prime Minister: A considerable number.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister how many recommendations for public appointments by the Crown have been made by the Prime Minister since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 16 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *798,* if he will show any specific policy or departmental areas on which each of the special advisers listed has worked since December 1990 showing their qualifications, expertise or experience relevant to those areas.

The Prime Minister: It is not my practice to comment on the qualifications, expertise or experience of my special advisers.

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the criteria used to assess applications by private political parties' organisations for the use of 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), *Official Report,* 30 November 1993, column *420.*

Children

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he is taking to produce a co-ordinated strategy for children throughout all Government Departments; if he will publish his response to the letter of 24 January from the National Children's Home; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Our strategy includes regular consultation when considering new legislation or policy initiatives concerning children, between the originating Department and all other Departments with an interest. Several interdepartmental groups have been set up which meet regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern about children. I have no current plans to publish my response to the letter from National Children's Home Action for Children; that will be a matter for that organisation.

Lebanon

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Prime Minister when he will be able to report to the House on his recent conversations with the President of the Republic of Lebanon.

The Prime Minister *[Pursuant to his answer, 25 January, c.159]:* I would like to report on the recent visit by the Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafic Hariri, and on our discussions on 24 January.

Mr. Hariri visited Britain from 23-27 January. He was accompanied by a delegation which included his Minister for Defence, Minister of the Interior, Minister of State for Financial Affairs, Minister without Portfolio and the governor of the central bank.

Mr. Hariri and his team met a wide range of representatives of political, commercial and financial interests in the United Kingdom, to explore the role that the United Kingdom might play in Lebanon's programme of reconstruction.

This was a central theme in my discussions with Mr. Hariri. I am keen to see British companies playing an active role, in particular in the water, power and gas sectors. I informed him that we had decided to restore ECGD medium/long-term cover to a ceiling of £50 million. I also discussed with him the possibility of British companies helping to re-equip Lebanon's internal security forces and the Lebanese armed forces.

This was the first visit to Britain by a Lebanese Prime Minister for 20 years. It provided us with the opportunity to reaffirm the long-standing links between Britain and

Lebanon. Lebanon is now back on its feet and ready to do business. British companies are in an excellent position to exploit the opportunities that exist there.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which his Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Sir John Wheeler: The information will be placed in the Library.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The latest available information is for contracts awarded for the 1992-93 financial year. Details are shown in the table.

Purpose	*Occasions*
Privatisation	12
Information Technology	98
General Management	938
Next Steps Agencies	20
Capital Works Programme	149
Monitoring MMB (NI)'s commercial subsidiary (Dromona Quality Foods)	1
The Financial and Trading Position of Northern Ireland Meat Plants on behalf of the Beef and Sheep Meat Sectorial Working Party	1
Preparation of Environmental Impact Assessment of Watercourse Management scheme	1
Feasibility Studies into Watercourse Management schemes	2
The design and supervision of Watercourse Management schemes	48
Review of the Foyle Fisheries Commission	1
Evaluation of the Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme	1
Evaluating the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Land Use monitoring project	1
Audit of Credit Control Arrangements within the Forest Service in relation to Timber Sales	1
Assessment of the Financial Credibility of Potential Commercial Partners re the Flax Breeding Programme	1
Identification, Development, Installation and Commissioning of Plant at Enniskillen re the Production of Electricity from Biomass	1
Management consultancy on a Sportsturf/Playing Fields Project at Greenmount Agricultural College	1
Management consultancy on Market Testing	1
Staff training	36
Evaluation of the Agricultural Development Operations Programme	1
Strategic Plan for the Public Library Service	1
Review the structures and funding of the Arts in Northern Ireland	1
Development of Northern Ireland Education Service Strategic Planning process	1
Evaluation of the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux and the Forum for Community Work Education	1
Advice on the grading of staff in the Staff Commission for the Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards	1
Development of Information Systems Strategy for Northern Ireland Education Service	1
Evaluation of Local Area Network	1
Survey of Health and Safety at Sports Grounds	1
Design staff magazine	1
Re-design Northern Ireland Office headed stationery	1
Staff competence framework study	1
Year 1 of 3-year combined study into 'The Experience of People with Disabilities in Northern Ireland'	1
Legislating for Northern Ireland: Options for Reform	1
Law on Lethal Force: Options for Reform	1
School Effectiveness and Education in Northern Ireland: Practice, Policy and Research	1
Remands in Custody in Northern Ireland: A Critical Appraisal	1
Early Childhood Education/Services: A Review	1
Develop Library System	1
Advise on Questionnaire Development and subsequent analysis	1
Provide advice and produce reports on conservation at Hillsborough Castle	1
Energy Survey	3
Combined Meat and Power Survey	1
Construction of temporary laboratories	2
Identify site for a new permanent laboratory	1
Business implications of a transfer to Agency status	1
Glass fragment analysis	1
Overtime enquiry	1
Pensions	1
Financial Monitoring	1
Advice on asbestos removal	1
Development of total quality management	1

The total cost for external consultancy in 1992-93 is £16,399,560.

Electoral Register

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the electorate of the constituency of Belfast, East; and how many of them are resident in *(a)* the city of Belfast and *(b)* the borough of Castlereagh;

(2) what is the electorate of the constituency of Strangford, and how many of them are resident in the boroughs of *(a)* Ards and *(b)* Castlereagh.

Mr. Ancram: Anticipated, and therefore provisional, figures for the 1994-95 electoral register are given in the table. The register, based on the qualifying date of 15 September 1993, will come into force on 16 February. The hon. Gentleman will have received these figures by now from the chief electoral officer, who sent them to the main political parties on 20 January.

Constituency	*Anticipated electorate 1994-95*
Belfast East	53,057
City of Belfast	45,693
Local government district of Castlereagh	7,364
Strangford	71,683
Local government district of Ards	50,336
Local government district of Castlereagh	21,347

Prisoners (Christmas Leave)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria he uses when deciding which prisoners may be granted Christmas leave.

Sir John Wheeler: Under the terms of the 1993 Christmas home leave scheme applications were considered from the following prisoners, other than those in the top risk category:

(i) all prisoners who would have served at least 11 years of their sentence by 23 December 1993;

(ii) all indeterminate sentence prisoners whose cases were at consultation with the judiciary, or who had been given provisional release dates;

(iii) "star" class determinate sentence prisoners—that is those serving their first sentence or who are particularly well behaved—committed under sentence on or before 31 October 1993 and who were in the last year of their sentences at 31 December 1993;

(iv) "ordinary" class determinate sentence prisoners—that is, those on second or subsequent sentences—who were sentenced to 10 years or more and who were in the last year of their sentences at 31 December 1993;

(v) inmates in the young offenders centre in both "star" and "ordinary" class committed under sentence on or before 31 October 1993 and who were in the last year of their sentences at 31 December 1993.

A decision on each case was reached after consideration of the Governor's recommendation, the prisoner's/inmate's attitude and behaviour while in prison/YOC and relevant security issues.

Life Sentences

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what factors determine whether or not a prisoner's sentence is reviewed by the Life Sentence Review Board.

Sir John Wheeler: All life sentences are reviewed by the Life Sentence Review Board normally after 10 years in custody. Prisoners serving detention during the pleasure of the Secretary of State have their sentences reviewed at the eight-year stage. Thereafter cases are reviewed at intervals determined by the board.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners he expects to have their sentences reviewed by the Life Sentence Review Board in 1994.

Sir John Wheeler: Forty-five.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Sir John Wheeler: Approximately 30,000.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. Totterington-Jarvis

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Attorney-General what payments the Serious Fraud Office has made to the City of London police while they were on attachment since 1 September 1991 for information provided by Mr. Totterington-Jarvis.

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office has not made any such payments.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Pergau Hydro-electric Project

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish his instruction dated 4 July 1991 to Sir Tim Lankester in respect of the Pergau hydro-electric project.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Public Accounts Committee was informed that, in accordance with usual practice, this internal document would not be released. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will prepare a full memorandum in response to the request now expected from the Foreign Affairs Committee following its decision of 26 January.

Land Mines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all overseas aid projects which involve the clearing of land mines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since April 1991 the ODA has funded the following humanitarian mine clearing operations:

Country and project	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £	*1993-94* £
Afghanistan			
Mine clearance	—	188,900	290,631
Minefield surveying, planning and management; mine awareness; clearance and clearance training	—	1,000,000	500,000
Cambodia			
Mine clearance, training and awareness programme	60,000	199,886	255,770
Public awareness	—	6,451	—
Support of Cambodian mine clearance centre (through UNDP)	—	—	133,333
Mozambique			
Demining of roads in Zambezia province	—	—	710,418
North West Somalia			
Mine clearance training; clearance management; mine awareness	300,000	373,540	—
Total	360,000	1,768,777	1,890,152

Kashmir

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to increase aid to Kashmir.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are no plans to increase aid for Kashmir.

Aid (Developing Countries)

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how British aid can be used to help stimulate enterprise and trade in the developing countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: British aid is used to promote policies and an institutional and infrastructural environment in aid recipients conducive to the development of enterprise and trade. This may be done through assistance in support of economic reforms and through projects to promote the rehabilitation, development and effective management of transport and communications infrastructure and of public utilities. We also provide aid to prepare for and facilitate the privatisation of public enterprises and to develop the financial sector and financial markets.

British aid also helps enterprises in aid recipients more directly through know-how and technology transfer to help overcome their production and commercial problems and thus to become more competitive in external markets. The aid programme pays particular attention through research and technical assistance to solving production problems arising in the renewable natural resource sectors. It also has a growing number of projects to encourage the development of small enterprises.

The aid programme supports the Commonwealth Development Corporation, which provides equity investment and loan finance predominantly to private sector enterprises in developing countries. Many of its projects produce commodities for export.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigations he has made into acquiring a shuttle vessel for St. Helena; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Extensive international investigations into the possibilities of acquiring or chartering a suitable shuttle vessel for operation between St. Helena and Ascension island have been made since late 1989. Over 30 ships have been considered, but so far all have been found unsuitable on grounds of cost, technical unsuitability or economic non-viability. A further ship is being investigated currently.

Textile and Clothing Industries

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all bilateral and multilateral assistance given by the Overseas Development Administration to help the development of textile and clothing industries and the amounts given in the period since 1988.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* Bilateral aid for the development of textiles and clothing—and investment by the Commonwealth Development Corporation—is shown in a table which I have arranged to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. There is no centrally compiled source of data on aid for textiles and clothing provided by various multilateral agencies. Information on these agencies' support—and thus on ODA's share of this—could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Multi-fibre Arrangement Quotas

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all countries in receipt of United Kingdom aid against whom the European Union multi-fibre arrangement quotas operate and the extent of United Kingdom aid to each of those countries in the period since 1988.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* The countries which have European Union multi-fibre arrangement quotas and which also receive United Kingdom aid are shown in a table which I have arranged to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. This table also shows their receipts of bilateral aid from the ODA over the last six years.

TRANSPORT

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make arrangements for the Data Protection Registrar to inspect relevant contracts with suppliers of IT services that involve the use of personal data held by his Department in order to check whether all appropriate arrangements in relation to the Data Protetion Act 1984 have been made, and whether such contracts make provisions for the registrar to make random inspections in order to check the suppliers' compliance in with the eighth data protection principle.

Mr. Norris: The Data Protection Registrar has a wide range of powers, under the Data Protection Act 1984, to ensure that all individuals and organisations holding personal data on computer systems are registered and observe the data protection principles as required by the Act. When IT services are contracted out by the data user, the contractor and the user will be subject to the application of the data protection principles, and to the registrars powers to promote compliance with them, as provided for in the Act. It is for the registrar to decide how he will use his powers under the Act, and I do not consider that any further arrangements are necessary for him to discharge his duties effectively.

Consultancies

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* accountancy firms and *(b)* merchant banks to which his Department awarded private consultancy work in 1992 and 1993, together with a list of the consultancies concerned and the amount paid.

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

Private consultancy work awarded in 1992 and 1993

Year	*Consultants*	*Service required*	*Value £'000s*
(a) Accountancy firms			
1992	KPMG Peat Marwick	IS strategy support to Vehicle Inspectorate	90
1992	KPMG Peat Marwick	Rail privatisation: accountancy and taxation advice	1,702
1992	Price Waterhouse	Preparation of DVOIT Long Form Report	52
1992	Price Waterhouse	Advice on taxation and company cars	6
1992	Cooper and Lybrand	Temporary finance director	52

Year	Consultants	Service required	Value £'000s
1992	Ernst and Young	Departmental Payroll Costs Model	106
1992	Price Waterhouse	Senior Staff Review	72
1992	Ernst and Young	DVOIT privatisation	2
1992	Touche Ross	Management Information System: OR Preparation	40
1992	Capita	Financial reporting review	12
1992	Michael Page Finance	Accountancy services to Driving Standards Agency	16
1992	Cooper and Lybrand	Evaluation of telesales tenders	36
1992	KPMG	Network referencing	109
1992	KPMG	Project management software	172
1992	KPMG	Disc network policy	26
1992	Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Birmingham Northern Relief Road: financial advisers	300
1992	Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	Study of EC directive	450
1992	Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	National Motorway Communications System maintenance specifications	60
1992	Ernst and Young	Development of a decision framework for European standardisation	87
1992	Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	DVOIT privatisation strategy review	16
1993	Capita	Financial reporting review	109
1993	Ernst and Young	IS strategy support to Vehicle Inspectorate	39
1993	Capita	Financial advice	250
1993	KPMG Peat Marwick	Rail privatisation: accountancy and taxation advice	2,072
1993	Price Waterhouse	London Buses Ltd. privatisation	400
1993	Price Waterhouse	Review of DVOIT's 1992–93 accounts	30
1993	Price Waterhouse	Feasibility of privatising Vehicle Inspectorate's testing functions	72
1993	Price Waterhouse	Review of DVOIT Ltd. balance sheet	N/a
1993	KPMG Peat Marwick	Financial advice on DVOIT's privatisation	541
1993	KPMG Peat Marwick	Study on the privatisation of Transport Research Laboratory	42
1993	Cooper and Lybrand	Scottish Office Safety Review	18
1993	Michael Page Finance	Temporary accountant	12
1993	Price Waterhouse	Advice on the privatisation of Transport Research Laboratory	9
1993	Touche Ross	Management Information System	23
1993	Ernst and Young	OPRAF Consultancy	170
1993	Cooper and Lybrand	Training courses on tender evaluation	2
1993	Touche Ross	Market Testing in DVLA: customer/client role	139
1993	Capita	Market Testing in DVLA: in-house bid construction	34
1993	Cooper and Lybrand	Sale of anonymised data	25
1993	Cooper and Lybrand	Evaluation of vehicle relicensing tenders	25
1993	Capita	Financial Adviser	N/a
(b) Merchant banks			
1992	Samuel Montagu and Co.	Rail privatisation: merchant banking advice	351
1992	Samuel Montagu and Co.	Private sector involvement in Channel Tunnel Rail Link	223
1992	Lloyds	Corporate banking	450
1993	Samuel Montagu and Co.	Rail privatisation: merchant banking advice	1,776
1993	Hill Samuel Bank	Private sector involvement in Channel Tunnel Rail Link	366

N/a—Not available.

A1 and A1(M)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current position in respect of the A1 and A1(M) trunk road improvements.

Mr. Key: We are conducting a review of the trunk road programme in preparation for the launch in April of the Highways Agency. I shall write to the hon. Member when the outcome of that review is known.

Cycle Lanes

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated cost of a mile of cycle lane on the average road; and what the cost would be of instituting cycle lanes on all trunk roads in England.

Mr. Key: The cost of constructing a two-way 3 m wide cycle lane on one side of the road is in the order of £400,000 per mile. This cost will vary considerably depending on local conditions and excludes the cost of land acquisition.

There are approximately 10,000 miles of trunk roads including motorways. Because of varying local conditions it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the cost of installing cycle lanes on all these roads.

Diesel Fuel (Buses)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with representatives of bus operators the change in the amount of rebate received in respect of duty on diesel fuel following the Budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Following preliminary discussions with my officials, the Bus and Coach Council is preparing a paper on the effects of the recent changes in the payment of fuel duty rebate which I shall be happy to discuss with it in due course.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish details of the duty payable on diesel fuel used by local bus operators before and after the recent Budget, together with the corresponding proportions of duty as a percentage of overall cost of diesel fuel.

Mr. Freeman: The duty payable on diesel fuel before and after the recent Budget was 25·14p per litre and 27·70p per litre respectively. Duty as a percentage of typical retail pump prices was 50 per cent. before the Budget and about 53 per cent. afterwards. Before the Budget all duty paid by local bus operators was rebated. After the Budget, operators will continue to receive rebate at pre-Budget levels, which will mean that 2·56p per litre in duty will not be recoverable.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that local bus operators continue to receive rebate in full in respect of duties on diesel fuel.

Mr. Freeman: The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on 30 November that fuel duty rebate would be held at pre-Budget levels during the lifetime of this Parliament.

Birmingham Airport

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current position of negotiations with the United States Government regarding additional flights into Birmingham airport.

Mr. Norris: Liberalisation of routes from the United States to United Kingdom regional airports has been a consistent priority. In December the United Kingdom tabled a proposal which would give immediate open access to regional routes, including to Birmingham. We hope that the United States Government will consider our proposal seriously.

Driving Standards Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assistance has been provided to the Driving Standards Agency in-house bid team which is involved in the market test of the booking of driving tests and the proposing of test fees; and what has been the cost of such assistance.

Mr. Key: The in-house bid team has been offered assistance to develop its bid. To date, the in-house bid manager has been provided with training on bid formulation and with travel and subsistence costs to visit staff involved. The agency is now in the process of agreeing with the in-house bidders what further help they need, including from external management consultants, in line with the principles set out in "The Government's Guide to Market Testing". Costs are therefore not yet available.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) of 15 December, *Official Report*, column *713*, how many vehicle excise duty offences reports have been generated for the current financial year; and how many VED offences reports were received by the DVLA in the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. Key: The number of vehicles reported to DVLA for alleged VED offences in 1992-93 was 1·8 million. For this financial year to December the figure was 1·4 million.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff were employed on enforcement duties; and what amount was raised in enforcement revenue by the DVLA local office network in each year from 1979-80.

Mr. Key: The information requested, from 1981-82, is as follows:

Year	*Number of staff in local office network (man years)*	*Revenue raised £ million*
1981-82	800	6·5
1982-83	833	11·8
1983-84	843	15·6
1984-85	908	18·2
1985-86	908	21·0
1986-87	945	23·1
1987-88	952	23·6
1988-89	943	25·6
1989-90	947	25·9
1990-91	922	27·5
1991-92	909	34·3
1992-93	936	37·5
[1]1993-94	948	34·3

[1] Figures to end December 1993.

Driving Test Fees

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will happen to those staff in the Driving Standards Agency not affected by the market test of the booking of driving tests and the proposing of test fees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The aim of the market test is to improve value for money. The precise effects on staff not directly involved will not be known until bids have been evaluated, but the agency will aim to minimise the disruption to staff.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost in the financial year 1992-93 of the booking of driving tests and the receiving and processing of the driving test fees.

Mr. Key: The agency's 1993-94 business plan, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, gives details of the total estimated costs of the agency's regional offices, which include the functions to be market tested.

Goods Vehicle Licensing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how the Police Federation was consulted on the proposals to change the rules relating to passenger and goods vehicle operating licensing.

Mr. Norris: The Department did not send a copy of its consultation document to the Police Federation. Following normal practice, consultation with the police was through the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Minibus Permits

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what maintenance checks, other than the regular Ministry of Transport test, are carried out by his Department before a minibus permit is issued to an organisation.

Mr. Key: Before a minibus permit is issued by the Traffic Commissioner, the person authorised by the body applying for the permit must sign a declaration on behalf of its members that

> "the body will make proper arrangements so that any vehicle used under the permit will comply with the appropriate construction requirements and conditions of fitness, will be kept fit and serviceable and that regular maintenance inspections will be carried out".

In addition, the person must provide the name and address of the person(s) or garage who will maintain and service the vehicle and attach a written maintenance contract or letter of agreement from the person or garage doing the work and indicate how often safety checks will be made on the vehicle.

The issuing of permits by designated bodies and local authorities is their own responsibility.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what checks are carried out by his Department on the conduct and repute of applicants for minibus permits before such permits are issued.

Mr. Key: Minibus permits are not issued by the Department. They may be issued from three sources: bodies designated by the Secretary of State by statutory instrument, which are national voluntary bodies and may issue permits only to their own branches and affiliated organisations; local authorities which may issue permits to their own departments or schools under their control; and the Traffic Commissioners who may issue them to other eligible local bodies concerned with education, religion, recreation or social welfare.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many minibus permits issued by the traffic area office network were revoked for poor maintenance during the last three years.

Mr. Key: None.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many minibus permits were issued by traffic area offices in 1993.

Mr. Key: A total of 1,407.

Public Carriage Office

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has initiated and concluded, and what proposals he has made, concerning the transfer of the functions and staff of the public carriage office of the Metropolitan police to his Department; and if he will list those bodies and individuals from whom he has received support for this proposal.

Mr. Norris: This proposal is one of the matters covered by the consultation paper on the future of taxi and private hire services issued by my Department. About 4,500 copies were sent to organisations and individuals who have an interest in the subject. These include local authority associations and all individual county and district councils, local and national taxi and private hire vehicle organisations, the licensing officers organisation, the police, organisations concerned with people who have mobility problems and vulnerable members of society, consumer groups, transport interests, the press, car, taxi and taxi-meter manufacturers and those concerned with tourists. Copies were available in the Lobby of this House and in another place. The paper was also published in a trade newspaper. The consultation period last until 1 March 1994.

It is not our practice to identify those organisations or individuals who responded to consultation exercises.

M25

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review his decision on the widening of the M25; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The national road programme is under review as part of our preparations for the setting up of the Highways Agency. Subject to anything that emerges from that exercise I have no reason to reconsider the policy for the M25 announced by my right hon. Friend last July.

Christmas Cards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *601*, how many official Christmas cards were sent out in 1993 by Ministers in his Department; and how much these cards cost to buy.

Mr. Norris: Some 650 official Christmas cards were sent out in 1993 by Ministers of the Department of Transport, at a cost of £645. All were cards for which a proportion of the cost went to charity.

Signal Failures

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *807-808*, if he will tabulate the total number of reported signal failures on *(a)* the British Railways Board and *(b)* London Underground Ltd., together with the number of wrong side failures on (i) normal passenger lines and other lines, (ii) yards and (iii) sidings for each year since 1990.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available in this format. However, the Health and Safety Executive's HM railway inspectorate is informed by the railway operator of all wrong side failures annually. A breakdown of these figures is available in the "Annual Report on Railway Safety in Great Britain", copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

High-speed Rail Link

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column 29, concerning the financing of an international station at Stratford on the channel tunnel rail link, what is *(a)* the estimated cost of the rail route as presently planned from the River Lea to Maryland station and *(b)* the estimated cost of providing additional station facilities of at least four platform faces capable of dealing with intended tracks.

Mr. Freeman: The cost of the London section of the route is estimated to be £670 million—fourth quarter 1992 prices—that is, £645 million for the base route plus £25 million for a package of options including a short box at Stratford. Union Railways estimates that the additional capital cost, including station works, access roads, parking, land and property and management costs, of providing a combined international and domestic station at Stratford is £105 million, while an international only station would cost £93 million. Further information is available in Union Railways' October 1993 report, published on 24 January 1994.

Rail Freight and Coastal Shipping

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out his plans and targets for increasing the amount of *(a)* rail freight and *(b)* coastal shipping over the next five years.

Mr. Freeman: The choice of transport mode for moving freight is primarily a commercial matter. However, we encourage freight users to consider the merits of rail and water as an alternative to road where this is practical. As part of that commitment, we have announced measures, to be introduced shortly, which will assist rail—*Hansard,* 2 February 1993, columns *164-65*—and shipping—*Hansard,* 15 December 1993, columns *698-99*—and we will monitor their progress closely.

Trainload Freight

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will make available information to prospective purchasers prospectus details regarding the three successor trainload freight companies.

Mr. Freeman: The three successor trainload freight businesses will be vested as individual subsidiary companies of the British Railways Board in September 1994. The board will issue information to prospective purchasers of the new companies after a subsequent period of "shadow running". Further background information is available in the Department of Transport publication "Rail freight privatisation—the Government's proposals", published in May 1993.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what grounds he decided not to accept the proposal for a tunnel through the Boxley valley on the channel tunnel rail link route; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Government considered very carefully the representations received and an updated comparative assessment by Union Railways' environmental consultants. The long tunnel option through the Boxley valley has significant environmental advantages, but the Government decided that these did not justify spending an additional £65 million, plus a further cost risk of £50 million.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he has made to implement the purchasing policy for properties within the safeguarded corridor of the channel tunnel rail link; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Secretary of State for Transport will issue directions to safeguard the route of the rail link in around three weeks' time. This will trigger Union Railways' voluntary purchase scheme for homes within the safeguarded zone. The scheme will be backed by statutory blight compensation provisions.

Spofforth Bypass

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated cost of the construction of the bypass in the village of Spofforth in north Yorkshire.

Mr. Key: North Yorkshire county council estimates the cost of its Spofforth bypass proposal at £3·22 million.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to enforce the installation of the traffic alerts and collision avoidance systems in all British-based commercial airliners and all similar aircraft using United Kingdom airspace; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The traffic alert and collision avoidance system is a complex safety device, which is currently being evaluated for use in United Kingdom airspace by National Air Traffic Services, part of the Civil Aviation Authority, which is responsible for air traffic safety. This evaluation is being undertaken as part of a Europe-wide evaluation programme, which is ultimately under the aegis of the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

As this is primarily an air traffic management issue, I have passed the hon. Member's question to the chairman of the CAA and asked him to send a comprehensive response to the hon. Member.

Severn Tunnel (Accident)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Seymour inquiry report on the Severn tunnel accident was concluded; what is the reason for the delay in publishing the Seymour inquiry report on the Severn tunnel accident; and when the inspector who conducted the Seymour inquiry retired.

Mr. Freeman: I understand from the Health and Safety Executive's HM railway inspector that the inquiry into the Severn tunnel accident is now concluded and the report should be published by March.

Mr. Seymour held two separate public hearings. This was due to the amount of evidence given and the need to hear winesses that were not available for the first session. He was not able to complete his investigations because of the reluctance of a key witness to give evidence.

Mr. Seymour retired in February 1993. However, he agreed to complete his inquiry on a consultancy basis.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Norris: The total number of staff on the Department's payroll is at present 15,270; of that number, 14,370 are covered by SSP.

West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest position in discussions between the West Yorkshire PTE, his Department and the franchising director over the PTE leasing new rolling stock for the west Yorkshire electrification project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: It is for the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority to reach a decision on the leasing of new rolling stock for this project. My Department is assisting. For example, we are participating in discussions with the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising about the role which the franchising director might be able to play in giving assurances about the future use of the rolling stock.

Rail Franchises

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to clarify the procedures to be followed by management-employee buy-outs for rail franchises.

Mr. Freeman: The British Railways Board has already provided guidance to its staff on how they might develop management/employee buy-outs, and will be issuing supplementary guidance very soon.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing, separately for men and women and as an overall total, the number of incidents of *(a)* violent crime and *(b)* sexual assault on London Underground for 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Norris: The figures for violent crimes and sexual offences on London Underground, for the years 1992 and 1993, are set out in the table. Figures for violent crimes are not normally differentiated by gender; instead they are broken down into the two categories of robbery and assault. These are shown separately in the table.

	Violent crimes		*Sexual offences*		*Overall total*
Year	*Robbery*	*Assault*	*Male*	*Female*	
1992	479	607	11	251	1,348
1993	376	464	5	187	1,032

Source: British Transport police figures supplied to London Underground.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing, by standard region, separately for men and women and as an overall total, the number of incidents of *(a)* violent crime and *(b)* sexual assault at major bus and coach stations for 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Freeman: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Transport Safety

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of all organisations to which his Department sent, and from which it has received responses regarding the consultation paper on proposed railway drink and drugs legislation, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department initially issued copies of the consultation paper to 212 associations or individual organisations representing the aviation industry and users, environmental and related non-aviation bodies, local authorities, airports, aiport consultative committees; and individuals. At least 1,000 further copies were distributed on request. We received 188 responses from organisations and 387 from individuals.

Night Flights

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a full list of the names and addresses of all organisations to which his Department sent, and from which it has received, responses regarding the consultation paper on revised restrictions on night flights at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports, together with the addresses of each such organisation.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 18 January 1994]:* My Department initially issued copies of the consultation paper to a total of 284 local environmental and other groups, local authorities and local authority organisations, airports and other aviation bodies, airport consultative committees, airlines, airline organisations, airport users and other aviation interests and to about 1,500 individuals. Further copies were distributed on request. We have so far received 96 responses from organisations and 149 from individuals.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all (i) political consultants, (ii) public relations companies, (iii) management consultants, (iv) survey organisations and (v) other outside bodies or individuals currently employed by his Department together with the date on which the contract was awarded, the length of the contract and the total amount spent by his Department on each contract; whether the contract was based on a fixed-fee or fee-plus man-hours basis; what was the name of the individual or organisation to which the contract was awarded; what are the services which were required by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I am placing the information in the Library.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give a list of all contracts for which invitations to bid are planned to be issued by his Department from (i) political consultants, (ii) public relations companies, (iii) management consultants, (iv) survey organisations and (v) other outside bodies or individuals together with the date on which it is planned to issue invitations to bid, the length of the contract and the total amount allocated by his Department for each contract; whether the contract is based on a fixed-fee or fee-plus man-hours basis; what are the services which are required by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* The information is as follows:

Contracts or projects for which bidding is planned

	Planned date for bid invitation	*Length of contract Years*	*[1]Fee basis*	*Amount £ thousands*	*Service required*
(i) Political consultants	—	—	—	—	—
(ii) Public relations companies	—	—	—	—	—
(iii) Management consultants	February 1994	N/a	N/a	N/a	Support to the in-house team in the market testing of the driving test booking service
	February 1994	3	N/a	120	Professional adviser on working environment
	March 1994	N/a	N/a	N/a	User satisfaction survey
(iv) Survey organisations	—	—	—	—	—
(v) Other outside bodies	May 1994	3	N/a	N/a	Market testing of the driving test booking service
	February 1994	3	N/a	N/a	Space planning
	1994	N/a	N/a	N/a	Review of building regulations
	1994	N/a	N/a	N/a	Review of works advisers
	1994	3	N/a	75	Energy bureau services
	1994	N/a	N/a	N/a	Furniture quality assurance
	February 1994	N/a	N/a	N/a	Legal advice on the form/content of DBFO contracts
	February 1994	N/a	N/a	N/a	Motorway charging: Technical consultant
	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	Motorway consultant: Specialist advice

[1] Information could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give a list of all contracts for which bids are currently being considered by his Department from (i) political consultants, (ii) public relations companies, (iii) management consultants, (iv) survey organisations and (v) other outside bodies or individuals together with the date on which the invitations to bid for the contract were issued, the length of the contract and the total amount allocated by his Department for each contract; whether the contract is based on a fixed-fee or fee-plus man-hours basis; what are the services which are required by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 30 January 1994]:* The information is as follows:

Contracts or projects for which bids are currently being considered

	Date of bid invitation	*Length of contract*	*Allocated amount £ thousands*	*Fee basis*	*Service required*
(i) Political consultants	—	—	—	—	—
(ii) Public relations companies	—	—	—	—	—
(iii) Management consultants	20 September 1993	N/a	42	N/a	Specialist consultancy support for MSSD
	October 1993	6 months	N/a	Daily rates	Technical consultancy to inform VI's IT strategy
	October 1993	6 months	N/a	Fixed fee	User requirements for VI's IS strategy
	7 December 1993	N/a	140	N/a	Recruitment of a property consultant
	December 1993	N/a	N/a	N/a	Study into DBFO contracts
	February 1994	N/a	N/a	N/a	Market research into the accuracy of the DVLA database
(iv) Survey organisations	—	—	—	—	—
(v) Other outside bodies	23 December 1993	N/a	25	N/a	Arbitration on user charges at United States airports
	17 December 1993	N/a	120	N/a	Channel tunnel rail link: Reporting accountants
	21 December 1993	N/a	5	N/a	Accident/incident database
	30 November 1993	N/a	200	N/a	Channel tunnel rail link: Technical advisers
	23 November 1993	N/a	42	N/a	The effective sealing of cracks and fissures in pavements
	27 October 1993	N/a	20	N/a	National roads network assessment system: Software programs
	23 July 1993	N/a	760	N/a	Birmingham northern relief road: Appointment of financial and technical panels
	13 July 1993	N/a	110	N/a	Cycle training
	30 December 1993	N/a	90	N/a	LATS database: Appointment of marketing agents
	6 December 1993	N/a	128	N/a	Effects and elasticities of higher car fuel prices
	19 November 1993	N/a	200	N/a	Appointment of a consultant to update and survey the network using DOT's high speed road monitor
	26 November 1993	N/a	10	N/a	Insurance advice consultancy

	Date of bid invitation	*Length of contract*	*Allocated amount £ thousands*	*Fee basis*	*Service required*
	18 November 1993	N/a	17	N/a	Trial audit of free issue equipment
	29 September 1993	17 months	N/a	Rates	Design and supervision of installation of new national motorway communications system (M1 J24 to J30)
	30 November 1993	1 year	N/a	Rates	Site supervision of installation of new communications equipment (M1 J38 to J42)
	7 December 1993	N/a	N/a	Rates	Monitor and survey of lighting on trunk roads in London
	10 November 1993	3 years	N/a	Rates/ fixed fee	West London trunk roads: Maintenance and improvement
	10 November 1993	3 years	N/a	Rates/ fixed fee	South London trunk roads: Maintenance and improvement
	6 January 1994	N/a	393	N/a	Alternative fuel trials extension 1
	6 January 1994	N/a	26	N/a	Revision and maintenance of technical drawings for safety fences and barriers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give a list for each of the past five years and as a total over the same of all (i) political consultants, (ii) public relations companies, (iii) management consultants, (iv) survey organisations and (v) other outside bodies or individuals employed by his Department together with the date on which the contract was awarded, the length of the contract and the total amount spent by his Department on each contract; whether the contract was based on a fixed-fee or fee-plus man-hours basis; what was the name of the individual or organisation to which the contract was awarded; what are the services which were required by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I am placing the information in the Library.

Railway Lines

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the incident involving a contractor's vehicle which took place on 17 January, on railway lines in the area of Burton-on-Trent and Clay Mills.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* I understand from the Health and Safety Executive's Her Majesty's railway inspectorate that it has received a report of an incident involving a contractor's road-rail vehicle at Elford which occurred on 16 January 1994. British Rail is investigating the incident and the inspectorate is holding discussions with BR to seek means of preventing a recurrence.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made as to the adequacy of levels of training given to the employees of private contractors before they are allowed to operate vehicles on public railway lines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Primary responsibility rests with the railway operator. However, the Health and Safety Executive's Her Majesty's railway inspectorate monitors safety on the railways, and as part of its routine inspections programme undertakes random checks on contractors.

Deregulation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the environmental organisations consulted on the proposals to deregulate goods and passenger operator licensing.

Mr. Norris: The following environmental organisations were consulted during our consultation last year:

Council for the Protection of Rural England
The Environment Council
Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution
Rural Development Commission

Cones Hotline

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total number of staff employed on the cones hotline.

Mr. Key: No staff are engaged exclusively on the cones hotline. Two additional staff have been temporarily employed since December to assist the hotline but are not working solely on that activity. All follow-up work related to hotline inquiries has been undertaken within existing resources.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is *(a)* the current cost of operating the cones hotline and *(b)* how many calls have been made to it since its inception.

Mr. Key: The cost of operating the cones hotline has been met within existing budgets. Two additional staff have been temporarily employed since December to assist the hotline but are not working solely on that activity.

Since its introduction in June 1992 until 25 January 1994, 478 calls registered as formal inquiries have been received by the cones hotline. Until recently other calls received by the hotline have not been recorded, but they are currently running at two to three times the number of formal inquiries about specific schemes.

Dunstable Bypass

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now announce the date for the beginning of the public inquiry into the A5 north-south Dunstable bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The need for a public inquiry will depend on the weight and nature of objections to draft orders for the scheme which, subject to the present review of the trunk road programme, we hope to publish this autumn. An inquiry would not be held before 1995.

Road Deaths and Serious Injuries

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last published and next intends to publish a detailed report on the achievements towards the target of reducing the road deaths and serious injuries by a third by the year 2000; and whether he will reconsider the setting of the same targets for slight injuries.

Mr. Key: The road safety report 1990-91 was published in November 1991 and we intend to issue a new report towards the end of this year. The casualty statistics for the third quarter of 1993, published on 13 January, included a table showing the progress made towards achieving the road safety target. The basis for the target is widely understood and I would therefore be reluctant to change it.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing, by standard region, separately for men and women and as an overall total, the number of incidents of *(a)* violent crime and *(b)* sexual assault at British Rail stations for 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the following tables show, by BR business sectors, the recorded incidents of violent crime and sexual assault at British Rail stations for 1992 and 1993. A breakdown of figures, by gender, for violent crime could be provided only at disproportionate cost. For the purposes of the table, violent crime includes murder, manslaughter, grievous bodily harm, malicious wounding, firearms and explosives offences and robberies.

Violent crime	*1992*	*1993*
InterCity	276	341
Regional	611	496
Network SouthEast	1,311	1,447
Other Sectors	41	161
Total	2,239	2,466

All sexual assaults (against males in brackets)	*1992*		*1993*	
Intercity	57	(7)	37	(2)
Regional	63	(3)	63	(7)
Network SouthEast	151	(13)	161	(11)
Other Sectors	3	—	11	(1)
Total	274	(23)	272	(21)

The increase in violent crime in Network SouthEast is mainly attributable to robberies in south London, which is not unique to the railways. The British Transport police, working closely with the Metropolitan police, have targeted the problem, a policy which is starting to have an impact.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Royal Palaces

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what accommodation at the occupied royal palaces is designated for Prince Charles and Prince Edward; and what staff and ancillary accommodation each has.

Mr. Sproat: The information is as follows:

The Prince of Wales
- *(a)* His Royal Highness' apartment in St. James's palace which comprises three reception rooms, one principal bedroom and two staff bedrooms, together with ancillary accommodation.
- *(b)* Three flats for domestic staff at Kensington palace. Two have one bedroom and one reception room and one has one bedroom and two reception rooms.
- *(c)* One house at Kensington palace for a Private Secretary. It has four bedrooms, three reception rooms and ancillary rooms. There is no staff accommodation.

The Prince Edward
- *(a)* His Royal Highness has use of two bedrooms, one sitting room and one bathroom in Buckingham palace. These rooms do not form a self contained apartment.
- *(b)* one flat for a domestic employee in the Royal mews at Buckingham palace comprising one bedroom and one reception room.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report,* column *651,* regarding accommodation for members of the royal family in occupied royal palaces, how much staff and ancillary accommodation is provided in each case.

Mr. Sproat: The staff and ancillary accommodation, on which rent is paid, or which is taken into account in salary and wage levels, is as follows:

HRH Princess Margaret
- 8 bedrooms
- 4 bathrooms
- 2 reception rooms
- 2 kitchens
- 2 utility rooms
- 1 staff rest room

Duke and Duchess of Gloucester
- 8 bedrooms
- 4 bathrooms
- 3 reception rooms
- 3 kitchens
- 2 utility rooms
- 1 staff rest room

TRH Prince and Princess Michael of Kent
- 1 bedroom
- 2 bathrooms
- 1 reception room
- 1 kitchen
- 2 utility rooms

TRH The Duke and Duchess of Kent
- 4 bedrooms
- 2 bathrooms
- 3 kitchens
- 1 staff rest room

HRH Princess Alexandra
- No staff accommodation

Grace and Favour Accommodation

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many grace and favour apartments there are in Buckingham palace; and to whom they are allocated.

Mr. Sproat: There are no grace and favour apartments at Buckingham Palace. There are two service apartments. One is allocated to the chief housekeeper and one to the person who is responsible for the pages, footmen, craftsmen and porters located at Buckingham palace. The Princess Royal, the Duke of York and Prince Edward use rooms at Buckingham palace, but do not have self-contained apartments.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report,* column *652,* what offices were held at the time of their retirement by the military knights, pensioners, who occupy grace and favour accommodation at the occupied royal palaces.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* Of the 13 military knights, one was a major general—GOC midlands district—three were brigadiers—two from the Royal Signals (2) and one from the Royal Artillery—three were lieutenant colonels—17th/21st Lancers, King's Own Scottish Borderers and Queen's Lancashire Regiment—and six were majors—Life Guards, Royal Army Service Corps, Manchester Regiment, Royal Signals, Scots Guards and Coldstream Guards.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report,* column *652,* what positions were held prior to retirement by the remaining four pensioners granted accommodation in the past on a grace and favour basis who were neither employees nor widows of employees of the royal household.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* One pensioner is a former nanny to the Queen's children, the second is the retired principal of St. Catherine's house, the third is a cousin of the Queen and the fourth is an unmarried daughter of a former Chief of the General Staff whose widow was originally provided with grace and favour accommodation.

Deregulation

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if he will give the likely date of conclusion for his review of regulations relevant to tourism, as referred to in the Department of Trade and Industry's deregulation document as published with the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill; if he will also provide a cost-benefit estimate of the review, with a separate section for each item of legislation he has examined; and what consultations he or officials have held in the course of the review;

(2) if he will give the intended start date, finish date and cost-benefit estimate of his Department's review of the Tourism (Sleeping Accommodation Price) Order 1977 as outlined in the Department of Trade and Industry document on deregulation, published with the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill;

(3) if he will give the intended start date, finish date and a cost-benefit estimate for his Department's review of the Hotel Proprietors Act 1956, as outlined in the Department of Trade and Industry document on deregulation published with the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill.

Mr. Sproat: My Department's inquiry into regulations affecting tourism is designed to complement the

Government's wider deregulation initiative by examining in detail the burdens on tourism-related businesses. This separate examination is warranted because of the highly important contribution which the tourism and hospitality industry makes to the economy and to employment, and will continue as long as regulatory burdens remain a matter of concern to the industry. I announced the preliminary findings of my inquiry to the House on 27 July, 1993, *Official Report*, columns *768-71*, and a progress report will be issued in due course. The review has been conducted, at no additional cost, as part of the normal day-to-day work of my Department. During the course of the inquiry I have spoken to many individuals and organisations, both local and national, within the industry. I have received written representations from a great many more. My Department does not have primary responsibility for the regulations indentified during the inquiry, with the exception of the Hotel Proprietors Act 1956 and the Tourism (Sleeping Accommodation Price Display) Order 1977. These are currently being examined by officials. We intend to begin a public consultation exercise shortly and to complete it as quickly as possible.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will give a likely start date, finish date and his cost-benefit estimate for his Department's review into the scope for consolidating or simplifying the legislation on sports ground safety as outlined in the Department of Trade and Industry document on deregulation published with the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill.

Mr. Sproat: An informal consultation exercise in line with deregulation guidance will commence as soon as is practicable. I hope to consider the responses during the summer.

Cultural Services (VAT)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration he has given to EC directives on VAT giving exemptions to certain cultural services and goods.

Mr. Sproat: Discussions are continuing between my officials and those of Customs and Excise about the scope of such an exemption.

Public Libraries (Review)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is *(a)* the full cost of the review of public libraries and *(b)* the cost of the consultant to the review.

Mr. Sproat: The review of public libraries is expected to cost in the region of £100,000, exclusive of the DNH's own staffing costs. The bulk of this expenditure is likely to be accounted for by the cost of the consultants.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which consultant has been appointed to advise the review of public libraries.

Mr. Sproat: We expect to appoint a consultant very shortly.

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will take urgent action to secure the future of Battersea power station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that the building remains structurally sound. It was inspected by officers of English Heritage on 21 January.

I am aware from press reports that there is a dispute about girders inserted in the building which may result in legal action. Listed building consent would of course be required for any demolition or alteration of the building falling within section 7 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on which occasions since it was established his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Sproat: Since April 1992, my Department and its two agencies have let contracts to external consultants valued at approximately £6 million. Consultants have been used for advice, information and as a management resource in the following areas: to assist in the setting up of the Department, including advice on financial and personnel management, and project management for the new headquarters; to review the Arts Council and to examine local authority management of arts facilities; to undertake preparatory work for the national lottery; to study the activities of library authorities; to review the British library St. Pancras project; to advise on the BBC and the television licence fee; to undertake reviews relating to the British film industry; to review the effectiveness of press self-regulation; to report on sports sponsorship activities; to look at the economic effects of listing buildings of historic interest; to advise on royal estate management responsibilities; to inquire into fire safety at royal palaces; to provide statistical data on tourism; various tasks on behalf of the Historic Royal Palaces agency; and various tasks on behalf of the Royal Parks agency.

National Lottery

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the names and addresses of the consortia which have so far bid to run the national lottery.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* The names and addresses of those organisations which have publicly announced their intention to apply for the main licence to run the national lottery are as follows:

The Great British Lottery Company
3 Round Wood Avenue
Stockley Park
Uxbridge
Middlesex
081-561-3090

The UK Lottery Foundation
Jevington House
Knotty Green
Beaconsfield
Bucks
HP9 2TY
0494-673777

NM Rothschild and Sons Ltd.
New Court
St. Swithins Lane
London
EC4P 4DU

071-280-5000

Rainbow UK Ltd.
48 St. Martins Lane
London
WC2N 4EJ
071-836-2424

Camelot Group plc
Beaumont Burfield Road
Old Windsor
Windsor
Berkshire
SL4 2JP
0753-833971

Games for Good Causes plc
Compass House
Redan Place
London
W2 4SA
071-727-9695

The Director General of the National Lottery will publish a full list of all those who apply, after 14 February, which is the closing date for applications.

EDUCATION

Nursery Education

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many three and four-year-olds attended maintained nursery schools or nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each local education authority in January 1993.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 21 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *857-59*.

Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: I have no such plans.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the numbers and percentages of surplus places in each local education authority; if he will list in rank order the local authorities according to the proportion of surplus places in *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* special schools; and what estimate he has made of the percentage of surplus school places in grant-maintained schools in each of the local education authorities.

Mr. Forth: The tables show the number and percentage of surplus places in each local education authority in England, in primary and secondary schools respectively, as at January 1991, the latest date for which comprehensive information is available. No information is available centrally on surplus places in special schools.

The information set out in the tables was provided by LEAs in response to a survey by the Department and includes all primary and secondary schools which were LEA maintained at the survey date. Numbers of grant-maintained schools have increased significantly since that date and no estimate has been made of the current level of surplus school places in grant-maintained schools in each LEA. We intend, however, to make regulations under section 21 of the Education Act 1993 which will require both LEAs and the new Funding Agency for Schools to submit annual information on the numbers of surplus places in LEA-maintained and grant-maintained schools respectively, beginning this year. LEAs and the FAS will shortly be consulted about this requirement.

Capacity of maintained secondary schools in England—January 1991

	Surplus places	*Percentage surplus*
Hammersmith	3,251	41
Lambeth	3,852	39
Manchester	13,350	36
Wandsworth 1	3,908	36
Solihull	6,645	33
Southwark	3,837	33
Brent	4,480	33
Sandwell	7,722	31
Knowsley	3,925	31
Doncaster	8,550	30
Wolverhampton	5,740	30
Nottinghamshire	26,198	30
Liverpool	11,545	30
South Tyneside	3,528	29
Merton	2,544	27
Sheffield	8,730	27
Kensington and Chelsea	1,046	27
Durham	13,626	27
Wakefield	7,763	27
Cumbria	9,673	25
Salford	3,711	25
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	5,425	25
North Tyneside	4,942	25
Leeds	15,684	25
Dudley	5,134	25
Newham	3,899	24
Hillingdon	3,693	24
Birmingham	17,171	24
Wirral	6,580	24
Coventry	5,657	24
Lewisham	3,223	24
Ealing	3,533	24
Leicestershire	16,644	23
Avon	14,904	23
St.Helens	3,621	23
Cleveland	11,298	23
Oxfordshire	9,589	23
Kent	26,589	23
Trafford	2,955	22
Walsall	4,667	21
Calderdale	2,891	21
Humberside	14,891	21
Lancashire	20,135	21
Enfield	3,976	21
Warwickshire	5,796	21
Bexley	3,436	20
Kirklees	6,222	20
Waltham Forest	2,706	20
Sefton	4,519	20
Gateshead	2,941	20
Hertfordshire	15,153	20
Essex	24,319	20
Surrey	8,400	19
Hackney	1,780	19
Islington	1,715	19
Derbyshire	12,487	19
Greenwich	3,260	19
Rotherham	3,761	18
Befordshire	9,409	18
Shropshire	5,718	18
Barnsley	2,644	18
Wiltshire	9,682	18
Rochdale 2	2,525	18
Norfolk	7,682	17
Wigan	4,025	17

	Surplus places	*Percentage surplus*
Gloucestershire	5,756	17
East Sussex	6,350	17
Hounslow	2,598	17
Croydon	3,149	17
Hereford and Worcester	9,570	17
Havering	3,229	17
Berkshire	8,825	17
Buckinghamshire	5,564	16
Northamptonshire	8,058	16
Hampshire	13,601	16
Bradford	8,331	16
West Sussex	7,634	16
Lincolnshire	5,440	15
Suffolk	8,015	15
North Yorkshire	7,404	15
Cheshire	11,149	15
Kingston-upon-Thames	1,117	14
Tameside	1,854	14
Dorset	5,941	14
Devon	9,012	14
Stockport	2,732	14
Sunderland [2]	2,566	13
Northumberland	3,727	12
Bromley [1]	1,309	12
Somerset	3,793	12
Westminster	868	11
Tower Hamlets	1,051	10
Isle of Wight	1,101	10
Oldham	1,692	10
Cornwall	3,209	10
Staffordshire	7,783	10
Camden	1,148	10
Bolton	1,612	9
Bury	1,013	9
Barking	717	8
Richmond-upon-Thames	643	8
Sutton [1]	513	7
Harrow	466	6
Barnet	983	6
Cambridge	2,642	6
Redbridge	695	5

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[1] Figures for secondary schools in these LEAs are incomplete.

[2] Figures for secondary schools in these LEAs are calculated on a slightly different basis since directly comparable figures are not available.

Capacity of maintained primary schools in England—January 1991

	Surplus places	*Percentage surplus*
Wandsworth	9,096	39
Liverpool	19,481	32
Hammersmith	2,981	29
Gateshead	6,422	28
Brent	6,585	26
North Tyneside	3,802	24
Southwark	5,511	24
Doncaster	7,076	22
Wigan	7,811	22
Hertfordshire	20,503	22
Staffordshire	24,485	22
Wolverhampton	6,116	22
Knowsley	4,004	21
Oxfordshire	10,004	21
Lambeth	4,479	21
Northumberland	4,902	21
Bedfordshire	9,782	21
Berkshire	14,013	20
Hackney	3,019	19
Barnsley	4,220	19
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	4,515	19
Islington	2,958	19
Newham	4,587	18
Humberside	16,347	18
Wiltshire	9,682	18
Coventry	6,022	18
Durham	11,516	18
Sheffield	9,048	18
Nottinghamshire	17,253	18
Hillingdon	3,754	18
Hampshire	24,719	17
Rotherham	4,346	17
Suffolk	7,902	17
Leeds	8,335	17
Hereford and Worcester	9,296	17
Chechire	17,045	17
Salford	4,171	17
Buckinghamshire	11,252	17
Cleveland	10,391	16
Bradford	6,370	16
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,845	16
Calderdale	3,324	16
Shropshire	5,396	16
South Tyneside	2,619	16
Essex	22,611	16
Solihull	3,332	16
Kensington and Chelsea	1,090	16
Manchester	7,617	16
Bexley	2,914	15
Tower Hamlets	2,864	15
East Sussex	7,955	15
Wakefield	4,314	15
Sunderland	4,674	15
Norfolk	10,842	15
North Yorkshire	9,524	15
Walsall	3,823	14
Cambridge	9,401	14
Warwickshire	7,305	14
Devon	10,575	13
Sutton	1,619	13
Greenwich	2,718	13
Stockport	3,557	13
Surrey	11,084	13
Lincolnshire	7,236	13
Gloucestershire	5,506	12
Derbyshire	10,230	12
Merton	1,639	12
West Sussex	6,940	12
Croydon	3,389	12
Cumbria	5,674	12
Ealing	3,016	11
St. Helens	1,886	11
Kent	15,431	11
Kirklees	3,291	10
Trafford	1,878	10
Camden	972	10
Westminster	891	10
Corporation of London	21	10
Bromley	2,259	10
Avon	6,359	9
Lewisham	1,609	9
Dudley	2,551	9
Leicestershire	7,204	9
Northamptonshire	4,714	9
Barking	1,368	9
Havering	1,971	9
Waltham Forest	1,445	8
Birmingham	8,711	8
Rochdale	1,784	8
Barnet	1,463	7
Hounslow	1,226	7
Somerset	2,524	7
Sefton	1,944	7
Oldham	1,319	6
Bolton	1,602	6
Wirral	1,953	6
Redbridge	796	5
Tameside	968	5
Isle of Wight	357	5
Kingston-upon-Thames	485	5
Harrow	888	5
Lancashire	6,754	5
Enfield	765	4

	Surplus places	*Percentage surplus*
Dorset	1,165	3
Cornwall	744	2
Sandwell	328	1
Bury	0	0

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Patten: There are six drawings by Augustus John, Royal Academy; one oil painting, "Tobias and the Angel" —late 18th century north Italian school—and one engraving of Beata Beatrice by D. G. Rossetti. I look forward to showing these to the hon. Member at an early opportunity; he is welcome to bring his camera.

Lecturers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what changes have taken place in the past three years in the totals and proportion of *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time lecturers currently employed in further and higher education; and what are the financial consequences;

(2) what is his latest calculation on the proportion of *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time lecturers currently employed in further and higher education in England.

Mr. Boswell: The information is not available in the form requested, but table A gives details of full and part-time lecturer numbers in England. Table B gives details of expenditure on lecturers' salaries since 1990-91.

It is for individual institutions to determine their staffing levels and to meet the consequent costs within the total funding available to them from all sources.

Table A
Full-time and part-time lecturer numbers

thousands

	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
LEA maintained Institutions[1]			
Full-time	55	53	52
Part-time	22	24	23
Universities[2]			
Full-time	39	41	42
Part-time	3	3	3
PCFC Institutions			
Full-time	22	22	n/a
Part-time	3	4	n/a

Table B
Expenditure on lecturers' salaries

£ millions

	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
LEA maintained Institutions[1]			
Full-time	1,175	1,254	n/a
Part-time	151	180	n/a
Universities[2]			
Total	866	1,017	n/a
PCFC Institutions			
Total	n/a	1,200	n/a

Note: Figures shown are the latest available.

[1] Institutions now within the futher education sector, but not including sixth form colleges.

[2] Universities refer to universities funded by the Universities Funding Council.

n/a = not available.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Boswell: A total of 2,127 at 1 January 1994.

Lowestoft Middle School

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects to announce a decision on the Suffolk county council application to build a new middle school at Lowestoft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Suffolk's proposals are currently under consideration. My right hon. Friend will announce a decision on them as soon as possible.

Muslim Girls School, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he received an application from the Muslim Girls community school in Bradford for voluntary-aided status; what further information he requires about the application before reaching a decision; when he expects to announce a decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: We have received no such application. Because of the Secretary of State's role in these matters, it is not appropriate to comment on any proposals which may come before him for decision.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Staff

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will publish details of the number of people working full and part time at the House of Commons.

Mr. Beith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 18 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *520.*

Committee of Selection

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chairman of the Committee of Selection what criteria the Committee of Selection uses to fulfil the requirement of paragraph 2 of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of Standing Committees) to have regard to the qualifications of hon. Members nominated to serve on Standing Committees.

Sir Fergus Montomery: In nominating hon. Members to serve on Standing Committees, the Committee of Selection is required to have regard not only to the qualifications of hon. Members, but also to the composition of the House. For Bills certified by the Speaker as relating exclusively to Scotland, the Committee is required to nominate not fewer than 16 Members representing Scottish constituencies. Hon. Members interested in serving on particular Standing Committees may submit their names to the Committee for its consideration.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will *(a)* list the number of statutory instruments passed and *(b)* what percentage of these were subjet to the affirmative procedure for each year since 1977-78.

Mr. Newton: This information is available under the delegated legislation section of the Sessional Returns.

WALES

Council House Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will free from restrictions the cash held by local authorities from council house sales receipts for a phased programme of construction of homes to rent and for a phased programme of modernisation and refurbishment; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will permit an increase in the percentage of council house sales receipts being made available for use by local authorities.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No changes are planned. The rules already allow all capital receipts from council house sales to be used for new capital spending where there is no outstanding loan debt. Changing the requirements of section 59 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 would increase public borrowing.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mink Farms

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 7 December, *Official Report,* column *181*, what was the result of the application for a licence in respect of a mink farm at Llanybydder, Dyfed, established in February 1988; when that farm was in operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The application for a licence was withdrawn.

Welsh Language

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of funding will be available for the training of teachers to enable them to teach Welsh as a second language; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: £176,000 has been made available for 1993-94 by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales to help colleges meet the criteria for primary initial teacher training courses. These require that students must have the opportunity to learn Welsh. The council has yet to decide on the level of funds for 1994-95.

Student teachers on one or two-year initial teacher training courses in Welsh receive a bursary of £1,000 under the Department for Education trainee teacher bursary scheme. This financial incentive is aimed at maintaining teacher supply in the shortage areas, including Welsh.

The sum of £3 million has been made available in 1993-94 through the grants for education support and training programme for the in-service training and support of teachers of Welsh as a first and second language. Local education authorities have been directed to target the majority of these funds towards the training of teachers responsible for teaching Welsh as a second language. I am currently considering authority bids for 1994-95 and expect to make an announcement on the level of funding shortly.

In deciding on the future level of funds to be made available account will continue to be taken of the supply, demand and training needs of teachers of Welsh as a second language.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funding will be available to finance the training of teachers to a level of teaching proficiency through the medium of the Welsh language; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Mainstream funding for teaching provided by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales does not distinguish between Welsh medium and English medium teaching.

The Department has put in place an incentive supplement scheme aimed at increasing the supply of teachers trained to teach through the medium of the Welsh language. Expenditure under this scheme will amount to some £160,000 in 1993-94. I intend to make a similar level of funding available for 1994-95.

The sum of £264,400 has been made available in 1993-94 under the grants for education support and training programme for training to enable teachers to transfer from English medium to Welsh medium teaching. In addition, £12 million has been made available through the programme in 1993-94 for the in-service training and support for teachers on subject teaching. Local education authorities have been directed to target the majority of these funds, in both English and Welsh medium schools, towards the training needs of teachers in the national curriculum subjects requirements. I am currently considering authority bids for 1994-95 and expect to make an announcement on the level of funding shortly.

In deciding on the future level of funds to be made available account will continue to be taken of the supply, demand and training needs for Welsh medium teachers.

Business Statistics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the numbers of business start-ups and bankruptcies in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: Official estimates of bankruptcy orders are compiled for Wales and England combined and are not separately available for Wales. The best available guide to trends in numbers of business starts comes from VAT data. The number of VAT registrations in Wales is available for each year from 1980 onwards and is as follows:

Wales—VAT registrations

	Number
1980	7,100
1981	7,100
1982	7,700
1983	8,000
1984	7,600
1985	7,300
1986	7,800
1987	8,700
1988	10,900
1989	10,900
1990	10,200
1991	8,400
1992	[1]7,400

[1] The estimate for 1992 is not compatible with those for earlier years due to the effects of the increase in the VAT threshold from £25,400 to £35,000 introduced in the March 1991 Budget.

Source: Department of Trade and Industry.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his assessment of the performance and effectiveness of TECs in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The performance of Welsh TECs is closely monitored against the targets agreed in their business plans and they are also subject to two formal reviews of performance each year. It is my intention to publish information on Welsh TEC performance in the context of the quartile tables of key performance indicators prepared for TECs in England. This information will be available in the early part of the 1994-95 financial year.

Lecturers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what changes have taken place in the past three years in the totals and proportion of *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time lecturers currently employed in further and higher education; and what are the financial consequences;

(2) what is his latest calculation on the proportion of *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time lecturers currently employed in further and higher education.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Except for the university of Wales, information on part-time lecturers in the further and higher education sectors is not available. Academic staff of all grades may undertake lecturing duties, and the tables which follow give the available information on numbers of all academic staff and those in the lecturer grades at the university of Wales and at other publicly funded institutions in both sectors in Wales. Staff of the Open university are excluded.

University of Wales[1]

	Lecturers[2]	*All academic staff*
1990-91		
Full time	2,190	2,764
Part time	175	236
1991-92		
Full time	2,238	2,853
Part time	131	199
1992-93		
Full time	2,278	2,913
Part time	121	195

[1] At December.

[2] Includes readers, senior lecturers and lecturers.

Source: University Statistical Record.

Other further and higher educational establishments[1]
Full-time only

	Lecturers[2]	*All academic staff*
1990-91	4,038	4,331
1991-92	4,198	4,334
1992-93[3]	4,279	4,330

[1] At March. Includes information for the polytechnic of Wales (1990-91, 1991-92) and the university of Glamorgan (1992-93). Information on part-time staff by grade not available.

[2] Includes readers, principal lecturers, senior lecturers and lecturers.

[3] Provisional.

Source: Department for Education.

Decisions about the deployment of staff are for individual institutions. The deployment of staff does not affect the allocation of money to institutions from the funding bodies.

Magor-Castleton Motorway

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many submissions were received in the consultation exercise on the proposed Magor to Castleton motorway; and how many were *(a)* in favour and *(b)* opposed to the proposal.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A report on the results of the consultation and the issues raised is in preparation. The information requested will be made public when a decision is taken on whether or not to proceed with any of the published routes.

Milk

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many gallons of milk were consumed in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and how many gallons of milk were produced in Wales in that year.

Mr. Redwood: Milk Marketing Board statistics for milk production in Wales are published in Welsh Agricultural Statistics. The volume of milk produced and sold through milk marketing schemes in Wales in 1992 was 1,455 million litres or 320 million gallons. Total liquid milk consumption figures are not separately available for Wales.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Redwood: The head count of Welsh Office staff eligible to receive statutory sick pay is 2,430.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Independent Review Tribunal

40. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what discussion he has had with the Home Office regarding the proposed independent review tribunal for dealing with alleged miscarriages of justice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None. Officials in my Department and the Home Office are working together on the proposed new arrangements for considering alleged miscarriages of justice.

Legal Aid

41. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has to improve the legal aid system.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The legal aid scheme is kept under constant scrutiny to ensure that it is operating as efficienty and effectively as possible. In addition, it is part of the subject matter of the fundamental review of my Department's expenditure which is curently under way.

Judges and Barristers

42. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to broaden the social background of *(a)* judges and *(b)* barristers.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's policy is to appoint to judicial office entirely on merit those members of the legal profession who satisfy the relevant statutory conditions for appointment and are best qualified to fill the posts. However, the Bar is an independent profession and the selection of prospective barristers is therefore a matter for the Bar Council and not an area in which the Government can directly intervene.

Commercial Leases

43. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has to amend the current law relating to privity of contract in commercial leases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government will implement the recommendations in the Law Commission's report "Landlord and Tenant Law: Privity of Contract and Estate"—Law Com. No. 174—for all future leases including commercial leases, as soon as there is a suitable legislative opportunity.

Medical Ethics

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the work of the Law Commission in relation to medical ethics.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Law Commission is reviewing the law and procedures relating to decision making on behalf of mentally incapacitated adults, which involves consideration of ethical questions in relation to medical treatment and research.

Leasehold Flats

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he intends to introduce legislation to create a commonhold tenure for occupiers of leasehold flats.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government intend to introduce the commonhold legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. The commonhold system will not be restricted to flats, but will be available for use with other types of property.

HEALTH

NHS Trusts (Salaries)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish details of the code of practice in relation to salaries and pay rises of NHS trust chief executives.

Dr. Mawhinney: Guidance on determing rates of pay for executives in national health service trusts was set out in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's letter of 22 January 1991 to all NHS trust chairmen. That is the standing advice and copies are available in the Library. The chief executive of the National Health Service Management Executive also wrote to chairmen of all third wave trusts on 20 January 1993 explaining how the 1992 public sector pay restraint affected executive pay appointments at that time. Copies of that letter are also available in the Library. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State issued draft codes of conduct and accountability on 13 January to the NHS for its views and, subject to consultation, these will be put into effect from 1 April 1994. One of the main new features will be the publication, in annual reports, of the total remuneration from NHS sources of chairmen, executive and non-executive board members.

Loans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each scheme operated by her Department under which loans are available, the objectives of the scheme, the number of unrecovered loans, the total value of unrecovered loans, the average number of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990, the average value of unrecovered loans for each year since 1990 and the annual cost of recovering loans.

Mr. Sackville: The table gives information on schemes operated by the Department under which loans are available. It also provides information on any unrecovered loans. It excludes loans to staff, which are recovered through their salaries. It is not possible except at disproportionate cost to provide information on the annual cost of recovering loans.

Departmental loans

Loans	*Objective*
Loans repayable to DH when children's homes close or change use	Under section 58 of the Children Act 1989, providers of some children's homes (which were formerly approved schools) are required to repay past grants and loans to the Department of Health when the home closes or changes its use. Central Government capital was invested under section 104 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 for the establishment and refurbishment of approved schools and this continues to be recoverable under the Act. We hold no records of any unrecovered loans.
Loans under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968	To support the agreed national activities of the voluntary sector in relation to the health and personal social services. This is achieved by providing grants to voluntary organisations towards their administrative (core) costs and for certain national projects and, exceptionally, for well defined regional and local activities. While the section 64 power allows loans to be made, none has been made under the section 64 general scheme to date. Any proposal to make a loan would require approval of the Treasury.
Loans to the Medicines Control Agency	There are potentially two kinds of loan which the Department can make to the Medicines Control Agency. When the MCA became a trading fund its net assets were financed by public dividend capital and originating debt. The originating debt is to be repaid to the Department over a five-year period in instalments. The MCA was given the option, which it has taken up, to re-borrow an equivalent amount to that repaid – this amounts to £330,000 in the current financial year. As regards its recurrent and capital costs, the MCA is a self-financing agency which recovers its costs through licensing fees. However, loans may be made to the MCA for effective management of cash flow. All loan repayments would be recovered as they fall due.
Loans to NHS Trusts	The objective of the trust loans system is to provide finance for capital expenditure and for the effective management of cash flow at NHS trusts. All loan repayments are recovered as they fall due. None of the loans can be categorised as unrecovered.

Family Health Services Authorities

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 10 December, *Official Report*, column *394*, what was the number of secretaries, receptionists, administrators and practice managers in each of the 12 family health services authority areas which fell wholly or partly within the London initiative zone in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table.

Staff type	*1 October 1989*	*1 October 1990*	*1 October 1991*	*1 October 1992*	*1 April 1993*
Management and Administration[1]	n/a	573·8	676·3	772·1	758·4
Secretary/Clerical[2]	405·5	3,620·2	1,297·0	1,319·2	[illegible]
Receptionist[3]	2,612·1	—	2,530·6	2,497·7	2,396·7

The data relate to whole-time equivalent staff.

[1] No data are available for management and administrative staff for 1989; the figure for 1990 relates only to practice managers.

[2] The figure for the secretary/clerical category for 1989 relates to staff employed only as secretaries; the receptionist category relates to staff employed as receptionists, and as secretary/receptionists.

[3] The figure for secretary/clerical category for 1990 includes receptionists.

Hepatitis B

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what target she has received from the World Health Organisation in relation to hepatitis B universal vaccination; and what plans she has to meet that target;

(2) what plans she has to implement a hepatitis B universal vaccination strategy; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Targets for the introduction of hepatitis B vaccine into national immunisation programmes were set by the global advisory group of the World Health Organisation's expanded programme on immunisation in 1991, the recommendations being endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 1992. These targets called for countries with a prevalence of hepatitis B virus carriers of 8 per cent. or greater to include hepatitis B immunisation into their national immunisation programmes by 1995 and for all countries to include the vaccine by 1997. Target groups and strategies may vary with local epidemiology. The carrier rate in the United Kingdom is significantly below 1 per cent.

Hepatitis B vaccine was introduced into the United Kingdom in 1982 and is recommended for those at high risk of infection. Immunisation strategy is kept under review in the light of a range of factors, including the current low prevalence of the disease in this country.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the bodies and individuals from whom she has received representations calling for a universal hepatitis B vaccination programme in children.

Mr. Sackville: No recent representations have been received from organisations. We are aware that some professional interests favour universal immunisation. Policy is kept under review in the light of a range of factors including current prevalence.

Occasional letters have been received from interested individuals. These cannot be listed for reasons of confidentiality.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies her Department has undertaken of *(a)* the most common method of transmission of hepatitis B and *(b)* the causes of primary liver cancer.

Mr. Sackville: In the United Kingdom the most common form of acquisition of hepatitis B is known to be through unprotected sexual activity both between men and women and between men. This accounts for perhaps 60 per cent. of those cases in which a cause is identified. Transmission routes for hepatitis B are well understood. The Department has not received recent proposals for further study in this area or of the causes of primary liver cancer.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has commissioned into the duration of antibody responses to hepatitis B vaccination in children.

Mr. Sackville: None, but the possibility of the need for booster doses of vaccine continues to be kept under review.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the incidence of hepatitis B in each EC country in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The available information on reported cases among European Community countries which have submitted data to the World Health Organisation is:

	1991	*1992*
Denmark	71	51
Germany	5,081	5,987
Italy	3,262	2,985
Netherlands	264	252
Portugal	609	738
England and Wales	488	489

Differences in populations and surveillance systems should be borne in mind in assessing these figures.

NHS Private Income

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the total private income in the NHS for 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93;

(2) what was the private income of the NHS in each region and special health authority in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Private income of the national health service

Region, Special Health Authority, National Health Service Trust	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Northern regional health authority	1,579,019	1,801,937	2,071,309	1,877,310	1,332,230
Yorkshire regional health authority	3,837,428	4,070,335	5,044,191	4,541,752	2,551,178
Trent regional health authority	2,838,649	3,183,545	2,877,057	3,464,673	2,615,399
East Anglia regional health authority	3,911,425	4,743,750	5,278,653	7,318,941	6,068,307
North West Thames regional health authority	10,251,108	11,765,016	13,377,772	13,984,258	11,082,874
North East Thames regional health authority	11,064,093	14,063,599	16,267,305	11,158,170	9,893,003
South East Thames regional health authority	7,857,124	8,636,174	11,023,826	11,692,162	12,558,427
South West Thames regional health authority	2,808,233	3,368,424	4,150,714	3,527,592	2,966,909
Wessex regional health authority	2,233,589	2,516,311	3,322,716	4,383,335	3,530,475
Oxford regional health authority	5,812,328	8,138,495	9,510,480	9,724,622	10,803,281
South Western regional health authority	3,192,220	3,643,156	4,821,114	2,111,512	1,484,225
West Midlands regional health authority	3,704,756	4,405,253	5,612,685	6,326,507	5,525,374
Mersey regional health authority	2,070,550	1,706,556	2,051,833	2,006,183	312,253
North Western regional health authority	4,568,630	5,382,332	6,644,907	4,949,840	4,127,700
Hospitals for Sick Children special health authority	2,843,674	3,459,624	3,578,948	5,066,294	4,987,994
National hospitals for nervous diseases special health authority	1,014,771	1,099,076	1,234,224	1,707,059	1,508,084
Moorfield eye hospital special health authority	636,115	676,430	739,885	884,570	944,319
Bethlem Royal/Maudsley special health authority	111,959	128,768	134,547	183,815	155,266
National heart and chest hospitals special health authority	2,805,264	3,660,196	3,636,114	4,256,510	4,429,254
Royal Marsden hospital special health authority	2,986,469	3,883,394	4,586,605	6,390,534	8,159,002
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's special health authority	1,512,684	2,232,927	2,753,572	3,003,772	3,735,534
Eastman dental hospital special health authority	19,463	24,097	13,298	20,140	23,321
National health service trusts	n/a	n/a	n/a	32,254,000	58,520,000
Total income	77,659,551	92,589,395	108,731,755	140,833,551	157,314,409

Source: Annual accounts for regional health authorities, district health authorities, London postgraduate special health authorities and NHS trusts.

Notes:

1. The figures in the table include money received from national health service patients paying for accommodation in single rooms or small wards (section 63 NHS Act 1977), private in-patients (section 65) and private non-resident patients (section 66).
2. Overseas visitors (section 211) not eligible for free treatment have been excluded (as they are charged national health service patients).

In-patients

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the activity figures for in-patients plus day cases in terms of finished consultant episodes for each region and special health authority combined in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 for *(a)* NHS patients and *(b)* private patients.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is shown in the table. Information on private patients for 1992-93 is not yet available.

England, NHS Hospital activity data, 1990-91—1992-93 (a) Finished consultant episodes (in-patient plus day cases)[1]

	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
England	8,785,252	9,306,707	9,636,262
Northern	628,583	655,287	678,185
Yorkshire	722,130	751,428	784,549
Trent	809,186	858,823	899,532
East Anglia	360,934	379,294	388,343
North West Thames	536,203	576,714	600,446
North East Thames	695,279	746,633	762,213
South East Thames	629,250	673,068	702,475
South West Thames	457,600	500,588	522,221
Wessex	526,284	562,571	573,834
Oxford	383,333	404,923	431,021
South Western	588,049	617,689	647,201
West Midlands	959,648	1,006,699	1,029,052
Mersey	487,107	523,515	541,685
North Western	887,029	927,034	944,323
SHAs	114,637	122,441	131,182

[1] This includes a small number of private patients of which estimates are shown in the table *(b)*.

Source: KP70 return.

(b) Private patients in NHS hospitals—Finished Consultant Episodes

	1990-91	*1991-92*[2]
England[1]	81,366	89,863
Northern	3,349	3,178
Yorkshire	4,842	5,263
Trent	2,797	3,038
East Anglia	4,504	4,270
North West Thames	10,345	9,337
North East Thames	7,402	9,850
South East Thames	6,648	8,636
South West Thames	5,081	6,269
Wessex	2,643	2,673
Oxford	6,928	7,244
South Western	5,044	5,458
West Midlands	6,081	6,866
Mersey	2,370	2,249
North Western	6,445	7,224
SHAs	6,887	8,306

[1] Total may not add due to rounding.

[2] Provisional estimates.

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics, 1990-91; 1991-92.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 20 January, *Official Report,* column *794,* if she will specify the aggregate level of special grants and care in the community over the present financial year and each of the next three years.

Mr. Bowis: The special transitional grants for community care are planned to be:

	£ million
1993-94	565·4
1994-95	735·9
1995-96	647·6

In each case, the majority of the resources within the special transitional grant will be incorporated into the following year's local authority revenue support grant, so that the cumulative additional resource available for community care will be:

	£ million
1994-95	1,274·5
1995-96	1,838·0

We propose to make available a further £418 million in 1996-97, and will determine nearer the time how much of that will be included within the special transitional grant, and how much within the revenue support grant.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to require local authorities to spend a specific percentage of special transitional community care grant in the private and voluntary sector during the next financial year.

Mr. Bowis: We shall shortly be announcing the conditions which we propose to apply to the special transitional grant in 1994-95.

NHS Regional Authorities

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has reached decisions on the boundaries for the new NHS regional health authorities to be established on 1 April.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Following consultation, I have decided that the number of regional health authorities should be reduced to eight from 1 April 1994. The boundaries for the regions will, with one exception, be as set out in the consultation document "Managing the new NHS: Proposal to determine the new NHS regions and establish new Regional Health Authorities". The exception is the districts of East and West Cumbria which, in response to local representations, will be part of the new Northern and Yorkshire region and not North West region as originally proposed.

I shall be laying statutory instruments before the House early in March to implement the required changes to regional boundaries.

The chairmen of the eight regions will be:

Anglia and Oxford *(originally East Anglian and Oxford)*
Dr. Stuart Burgess CBE

Northern and Yorkshire *(originally North East and Yorkshire)*
Mr. John Greetham CBE

Trent
Sir Michael Carlisle *until end of July 1994 when he will be succeeded by*
Mr. Keith Ackroyd

North Thames
Sir William Staveley GCB

South Thames
Mr. William Wells

South and West *(originally South West)*
Ms Rennie Fritchie

West Midlands
Mr. Bryan Baker

North West
Sir Donald Wilson DL

Community Nurses

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the consultation exercise undertaken by the United Kingdom Central Council concerning proposals to amend the criteria for community nurse status; and what action her Department has taken on the conclusions of the consultation exercise.

Mr. Sackville: The United Kingdom Central Council is reviewing its proposal for post-registration education and practice as a consequence of its consultation exercise. We have not received its revised proposals.

NHS Supplies Authority

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out the names and the professional background of the current members of the NHS Supplies Authority.

Mr. Sackville: The chairman is Sir Robin Buchanan, who was previously chairman of Wessex regional health authority, and is a chartered accountant and company director. the other non-executive members are:

Mrs. Alison Cook, chairman of Barnsley district health authority, and a company solicitor; formerly company secretary within ICI.

Mr. Eric Greenhalgh, consultant and company chairman; formerly Director of Trading for the John Lewis Partnership department stores; Managing Director for David Jones, Australia, and also Selfridges; Chairman of Owen Owen plc; President of ACI; Vice-President and President-designate of the International Association of Department Stores.

Mr. Jim Hammond, Chief Executive, East Gloucestershire National Health Service Trust and a chartered engineer; formerly director and general manager of several companies in the construction industry.

Miss Catherine McLoughlin, Management consultant, and Chairman of Bromley Family Health Services Authority; formerly District General Manager for Haringey DHA, and Director of Nursing for the NHS Management Executive from 1989 to 1990 with extensive nursing experience.

Mr. Fred Hoult, Chairman of the Freeman Group of Hospitals NHS Trust, and director of a transport and distribution company and three property companies.

The executive directors are:

Mr. Terry Hunt, National Director and former Regional General Manager to North East Thames RHA.

Mr. Evan Sutherland, Deputy National Director and Director of Purchasing; formerly Regional Supplies Director to North Western RHA and extensive private sector procurement experience.

Mr. Richard Chantler, Director of Finance and Information and former senior manager with TNT Express Worldwide Ltd.; Fellow of the Institute of Certified Accountants.

Mrs. Roxanne Sutton, Director of Communications; formerly Director of Communications for North East Thames RHA, and extensive experience in NHS personnel management posts at hospital, district and regional level; Member of the Institute of Personnel Management.

Mr. Chris Uden, Director of Human Resources; formerly Director of Management Development with the NHS Procurement Directorate with extensive experience with British Gas in marketing, customer services and management development. Member of the Institute of Training and Development and Associate Member of the Institute of Personnel Management.

Drug Overdoses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people die each year from deliberate or accidental overdoses of prescribed drugs.

Mr. Sackville: In 1991, 1,783 people were recorded as having died from accidental, self-inflicted or undetermined, whether accidentally or purposely inflicted, poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biological substances. Whether or not these were prescribed is not recorded at death. However, most categories of these substances are only available on prescription. Major exceptions are "analgesics, antipyretics and antirheumatics" which accounted for 753 of the deaths and "other unspecified drugs and medicaments" which accounted for a further 294 of the total.

Detailed data about these deaths and the substances involved are published each year in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys "Mortality Statistics Series DH2 and DH4", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the 10 prescribed drugs used in the largest numbers of deliberate or accidental fatal overdoses.

Mr. Sackville: Table 10 in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys "Series DH4 Mortality" statistics, injury and poisoning, shows the substances involved where deaths were recorded as accidental, self-inflicted or undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted. Whether or not these were prescribed is not recorded at death.

Copies of the relevant OPCS publications are available in the Library.

Cannabis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of the medical ill-effects of cannabis on users.

Mr. Bowis: Consideration of the short and long-term effects of cannabis use is part of the normal medical assessment of any drug-taking individual who presents for treatment. In general, concentration, short-term memory and manual dexterity tend to be impaired during intoxication. Long-term, regular and heavy cannabis smoking may also cause respiratory diseases such as bronchitis or lung cancer.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of the medical applications of cannabis in the treatment or prevention of *(a)* glaucoma, *(b)* multiple sclerosis and *(c)* Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Sackville: Cannabis is known to lower intraocular pressure in glaucoma and to relieve muscle spasms associated with multiple sclerosis, although in neither case is it as effective as other drugs. We are not aware that cannabis has any benefit to patients with Alzheimer's disease.

Drug Prescriptions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual cost to the NHS of the medical service provided to those patients addicted to prescribed drugs.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally in the form requested. However, since 1986-87 top sliced funds have been made available to health authorities for the development of drug misuse services, including services for people addicted to prescribed drugs. This allocation, which totals over £24 million in 1993-94 represents a minimum that health authorities will spend on drug misuse services.

Heroin

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual cost to the NHS per prescription, of providing prescribed heroin to a patient.

Dr. Mawhinney: The average net ingredient cost per prescription item for all diamorphine products dispensed in the family health services authorities in England in 1992 was £27·16.

Prescriptions for diamorphine products are issued both to drug addicts and to patients with terminal illness as part of their symptom control.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to reduce the numbers of deaths resulting from variation in purity of heroin.

Mr. Bowis: On 6 January we launched a £2·6 million media campaign on the dangers of drug and solvent misuse. The campaign is supported by leaflets for young people, parents, professionals and others giving the facts and advice on drug misuse. This includes the fact that the strength of drugs made illegally or without medical supervision is unpredictable and dangerous.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid Essex area were waiting over one year for hospital admissions in *(a)* March 1991 and *(b)* the latest available month.

Dr. Mawhinney: The area covered by Mid Essex and West Essex district health authorities in March 1991 is now covered by Mid Essex hospital services trust and North Essex district health authority.

At March 1991 in Mid and West Essex district health authorities 3,143 patients had waited more than a year for treatment and 1,018 of these had waited more than two years. At September 1993 in the Mid Essex hospital services trust and North Essex district health authority the number waiting over one year had fallen by 56 per cent. to 1,379 and no one had waited more than two years.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of hospital admissions in the Mid Essex area are *(a)* immediate, *(b)* within five weeks, *(c)* within three months and *(d)* longer than a year; and what the figures were in March 1991;

(2) what was the average waiting time for admission to hospital in the Mid Essex area in *(a)* 1988, *(b)* March 1991 and *(c)* the latest available month.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is available only on a national or regional basis rather than district health authority or trust.

Chelmsford Hospitals

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list all those services provided for patient care at Broomfield and St. John's hospitals, Chelmsford that have been enhanced since May 1979; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will list any totally new services for patient care provided by Broomfield hospital, Chelmsford and St. John's hospital, Chelmsford since May 1979.

Mr. Sackville: We are aware of a number of new or enhanced services at these hospitals.

My hon. Friend may wish to contact Sir Jeffrey Bowman, chairman of Mid Essex hospital services national health service trust, for full details.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money in cash terms at current prices, has been spent on capital projects at Broomfield hospital, Chelmsford and St. John's hospital, Chelmsford, since May 1979.

Mr. Sackville: During the last 15 years, more than £25 million has been spent on various developments and improvements at Chelmsford. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Sir Jeffrey Bowman, chairman of Mid Essex hospital services national health service trust, for details of the schemes.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all those new services in health care which have been recommended or are being considered for moving to Broomfield hospital, Chelmsford from other hospital sites outside the Chelmsford area.

Mr. Sackville: Statutory consultation is taking place on a proposal to transfer the regional plastic surgery and burns unit from St. Andrew's hospital, Billericay to Broomfield hospital.

Health Spending

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent on the national health service in pounds sterling per head of the population in Mid Essex in *(a)* May 1979, *(b)* April 1991 and *(c)* the expected spending level in April 1994.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available centrally in this form. However, Mid Essex's revenue outturn increased from £35,554,483 in 1982-83—1982-83 cash —to £93,892,755 in 1991-92—1991-92 cash. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Alec Sexton, the chairman of North Essex health authority, for full details.

Patients, Mid-Essex

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the Mid Essex area have been treated in the latest month available for every 100 patients treated in March 1991.

Mr. Sackville: For every 100 finished consultation periods—ordinary admissions plus day cases—in the general and acute sector in national health service hospitals in the Mid Essex district in the financial year 1990-91, there were 105 in 1992-93.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide a figure for the number of staff in her Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Sackville: As at 31 December 1993 the Department of Health had 5,379 staff entitled to statutory sick pay.

Continuing Care

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rights a patient has to receive continuing care in NHS hospitals for *(a)* dementia and *(b)* other chronic conditions; and what regulations and guidance her Department has issued on this matter.

Mr. Bowis: The "Caring for People" White Paper—Cm 849—sets out clearly that all health authorities have a responsibility to secure continuing care for people who require it for reasons of ill-health.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps her Department is taking to ensure that there are sufficient long-stay beds for people wishing to receive continuing care in hospital.

Mr. Bowis: The White Paper "Caring for People" made it clear that the national health service has a continuing responsibility to secure long-term care for those who need it for reasons of ill-health. Health authorities as purchasers are encouraged to consider the range of options which may be available for the long-term care needs of their resident populations: whether by placing contracts for services with their own directly managed units or by other district health authorities, NHS trusts, or the independent sector.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures her Department has taken to publicise to patients and their relatives the options available to them for continuing care.

Mr. Bowis: The Government have made it clear to health authorities and local authority social services departments that they should explain to all people who may require continuing care the options available to them. Under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 local authorities are expected to publish community care plans in collaboration with health authorities which take into account the needs of the local population. The Department has produced a leaflet, "Community Care changes in April 1993", on community care services, which was made generally available to the public, and an information pack for voluntary and private sector providers explaining the new arrangements. These were also sent to voluntary organisations who represent patients/residents and their relatives.

Hospital Charges

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in what circumstances a person with the right to permanent residence in the United Kingdom is classed as an overseas visitor and liable to charges for treatment in hospital;

(2) in what circumstances a British citizen is classed as an overseas visitor and liable to charges for treatment in hospital.

Mr. Sackville: The services of the national health service are intended for people ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom regardless of nationality or origin. The NHS (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989—1989 SI No. 306—as amended by the NHS (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Amendment Regulations 1991—1991 SI No. 438—apply.

Efficiency Savings

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where she expects to identify efficiency savings in the national health service for 1994-95 in addition to the 2·25 per cent. announced in the budget for spending on direct patient care.

Dr. Mawhinney: Hospital and community health services will be required to demonstrate efficiency improvements of at least 2¼ per cent. in 1994-95. How these are achieved is a matter for local decision in the light of local circumstances.

NHS Productivity

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued or plans to issue to health authorities and trusts about improved productivity in the service.

Dr. Mawhinney: Specific guidance on productivity is not issued by the Department. However, health authorities and national health service trusts are assisted in their efforts to improve productivity by the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission and the value for money unit of the NHS Management Executive, which report on key areas and make appropriate recommendations. The NHS reforms have also given an incentive to improve productivity as providers have to compete for contracts.

NHS Pay

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been given to health authorities and trusts about pay levels for 1994-95.

Dr. Mawhinney: The chief executive of the national health service management executive wrote to general managers of health authorities and chief executives of NHS trusts on 30 November 1993 about the increase in public spending on health in 1994-95. The letter set out the implications for real growth, efficiency targets and pay rises. A copy of the letter EL(93)110 will be placed in the Library.

AIDS

Mr. Peter Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of AIDS in the age groups *(a)* 16 to 18, *(b)* 18 to 21 and *(c)* over 21 years were notified to the Department in each year since 1987.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested for the United Kingdom is shown in the table.

Age (years) at diagnosis	*Number of cases reported* *1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
16	1	—	—	1	1	—	—
17	—	—	1	2	1	—	—
18	2	1	—	—	—	2	1
19	5	2	3	4	3	5	3

Age (years) at diagnosis	*Number of cases reported*						
	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
20	—	2	4	4	2	4	3
21	6	4	3	1	3	3	3
22+	613	737	826	1,232	1,320	1,437	1,577
Not known	—	—	—	1	1	—	3
Total	627	746	837	1,245	1,331	1,451	1,590

"Food—a Fact of Life"

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice her Department gave to the British Nutrition Foundation in developing the material for "Food—a Fact of Life"; and what steps she took to ensure the content was consistent with the advice of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy and "Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients" for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sackville: The Department participates in the group monitoring the progress of the project and seeks to ensure consistency with departmental policy where relevant.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to her Department of the British Nutrition Foundation's "Food—a Fact of Life".

Mr. Sackville: The costs to the Department for the two years 1991-92 and 1992-93 was £170,000 and for the current year £50,000.

Selected List

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will make a final decision about the selected list.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Advisory Committee on National Health Service Drugs maintains a continual review of the drugs in the categories covered by the selected list scheme. It will produce recommendations about drugs in these categories within the next few months for Ministers to consider.

NHS Trust Federation

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *898*, what action has been taken to correct the answer given on 26 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *546*, concerning money received by the NHS Trust Federation from her Department; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: No correction is necessary. The National Health Service Trust Federation does not receive funding from the Department to meet its running costs. The payment without statutory authority was made in the financial year 1991-92 and has since been recovered. The Department has also provided funds to the federation to meet the costs incurred in organising conferences on information on behalf of the Department. These conferences were open to all NHS trusts, whether or not they were members of the federation.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the known party-political affiliations of trust chairs and non-executive directors.

Dr. Mawhinney: We do not seek information on political affiliation. Some appointees' political affiliation may be a matter of public record, but it would be inappropriate for us to maintain our own records on the basis of political allegiance.

Nuts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has about the number of people suffering from an allergy to nuts and the number of deaths that have resulted in recent years.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 17 January 1994, c. 391]:* I regret that my previous reply could give rise to a misunderstanding on the extent of information held centrally on cause of death. While there is no information centrally available on the number of people suffering from an allergy to nuts, the information held centrally on number of deaths is that for the latest 10 years, 1983-1992, for which data are available, there were no deaths registered where allergy to nuts was the assigned underlying cause.

EMPLOYMENT

Sex Discrimination

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average award of industrial tribunals for sex discrimination cases.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available information relates to 1992-93, when the average award made by industrial tribunals in cases where sex discrimination was the main complaint was £1,416.

Administration Costs

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the teacher placement service, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the administration of the teacher placement scheme rests with training and enterprise councils. The Department does not hold details of the administrative costs involved.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of TEC challenge, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the administration of TEC challenge rests with training and enterprise councils. The Department does not hold details of the administrative costs involved.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the programme development fund, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 31 January 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the expenditure on the administration of the Programme Development Fund (PDF).

We do not collect the information that you have requested.

It may help if I explain a little about the background to PDF and the way it is administered.

The Programme Development Fund is a fund held by all ES Regional Directors and by Directors for Scotland and Wales. It is there to support local initiatives for assisting people who need special help to get back to work.

These initiatives run alongside the mainstream work of ES offices and are a small, but important part of an overall total. Since, in the main, staff who administer PDF are also involved in a range of other activities it is impossible to separate out costs.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the business start-up scheme, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the administration of the business start-up scheme rests with training and enterprise councils. The Department does not hold details of the administrative costs involved.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the local initiative fund, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the administration of the local initiative fund rests with training and enterprise councils. The Department does not hold details of the administrative costs involved.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of compacts and inner-city compacts, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the administration of compacts and inner-city compacts rests with training and enterprise councils. The Department does not hold details of the administrative costs involved.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the education-business partnerships, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the administration of the education business partnerships rests with training and enterprise councils. The Department does not hold details of the administrative costs involved.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases have been brought before industrial tribunals since 1983; how many and what percentage of cases have been successful; and how many and what percentage of cases were about race discrimination.

Miss Widddecombe: The details are as follows:

All Jurisdictions		*Racial Discrimination (where this is the main complaint)*	
	Cases heard	*Number/ per cent. successful*	*Number/ per cent. of cases heard*
1983	10,381	3,229 (31·1)	166 (1·6)
1984 to March 1985	9,690	2,921 (30·1)	195 (2·0)
1985-86	13,357	5,405 (40·5)	265 (2·0)
1986-87	13,124	5,342 (40·7)	296 (2·3)
1987-88	10,464	4,185 (40·0)	265 (2·5)
1988-89	9,023	3,829 (42·4)	324 (3·6)
1989-90	10,229	4,598 (45·0)	336 (3·3)
1990-91	11,430	5,503 (48·1)	316 (2·8)
1991-92	13,778	7,022 (51·0)	323 (2·3)
1992-93	17,836	9,351 (52·4)	345 (1·9)

Programme Funding

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total amount of funding made available over the last year by *(a)* the programme development fund, *(b)* education business partnerships, *(c)* the teacher placement service, *(d)* compacts and inner-city compacts, *(e)* the business start-up scheme, *(f)* the local initiative fund and *(g)* TEC challenge.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 30 November 1993, *Official Report,* column *512.* This lists the funding made available for 1993-94 by *(a)* the programme development fund, *(b)* education business partnerships, *(c)* the teacher placement service, *(d)* compacts and inner-city compacts, *(e)* the business start-up scheme, *(f)* the local initiative fund.

In addition, £16·9 million has been made available for training and enterprise councils for TEC challenge in the current year.

Race Discrimination

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average award of industrial tribunals for race discrimination cases.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available information relates to 1992-93, when the average award made by industrial tribunals in cases where race discrimination was the main complaint was £3,333.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recruitment of staff is planned by the Health and Safety Executive before April 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Health and Safety Executive is considering plans to announce recruitment competitions for certain groups of specialist inspectors such as railways inspectors. The timing of any such recruitments has not been decided.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people in receipt of unemployment benefit within the Cunninghame, South parliamentary constituency have been unemployed for *(a)* more than six months, *(b)* more than 12 months and *(c)* more than two years; and if he will give these figures for (i) men and (ii) women for each month since April 1992;

(2) how many people in receipt of unemployment benefit within the Irvine travel-to-work area have been unemployed for *(a)* more than six months, *(b)* more than 12 months and *(c)* more than two years; and if he will give these figures for (i) men and (ii) women for each month since April 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: Figures on the numbers of people claiming unemployment and related benefits, by duration, are available on the unadjusted basis only, for the months of January, April, July and October and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those companies giving statutory notice of redundancies to his Department within the Irvine travel-to-work area from April 1992 to date; how many job losses were notified by each of the companies; and when statutory notice was given.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information given to the Department under the redundancy handling provisions of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 is provided in confidence.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many vacancies were listed in *(a)* Irvine jobcentre and *(b)* Kilwinning jobcentre during December; and what was the nature of these vacancies.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 31 January 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of vacancies listed in Irvine and Kilwinning Jobcentres in December.

I attach a table showing the notified vacancies for both offices.

Vacancies notified to Jobcentres are displayed in the self-service area of the office for selection by job seekers. This display will also include suitable vacancies from Jobcentres in the surrounding area. I have therefore included in the table the average number of vacancies on display in Irvine and Kilwinning Jobcentres in December 1993.

You asked for information about the nature of the vacancies which were notified and the table gives a breakdown according to whether they were permanent or temporary, full-time or part-time. Because this was the Christmas period the number of temporary vacancies notified was high.

You may also be interested to know that during December Irvine Jobcentre found jobs for 219 people and Kilwinning Jobcentre for 44 people.

I hope this is helpful.

	Notified vacancies December 1993					*Average Number of vacancies displayed*
	Permanent Full Time	*Permanent Part Time*	*Temporary Full Time*	*Temporary Part Time*	*Total*	
Irvine Jobcentre	77	51	99	1	228	260
Kilwinning Jobcentre	13	9	10	0	32	165

Amosite Asbestos

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list previous changes in Health and Safety Executive guidelines on the level of brown amosite asbestos considered to be safe.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Health and Safety Executive has not issued specific guidelines on the level of amosite which is considered safe; a safe level of exposure to any type of asbestos has yet to be identified. However, there is a practical level of exposure below which an increased risk of contracting an asbestos-related disease cannot be detected.

The guidelines which have applied to workplace exposure to amosite are listed in the table. These standards were used by Her Majesty's inspectors of factories to establish whether satisfacory control had been achieved under the Asbestos Regulations 1969. The exposure standards are expressed as fibres per millilitre of air averaged over a continuous period of four hours and were:

(a) 2 fibres per millilitre with effect from May 1970,
(b) 0·5 fibres per millilitre with effect from 1 January 1983,
(c) 0·2 fibres per millilitre with effect from 1 August 1984.

The value of 0·2 fibres per millilitre of air became the statutory control limit for amosite, on the advice of the Health and Safety Commission, when the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987 came into effect on 1 March 1988.

Women's Earnings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the number of women who have earnings below *(a)* the tax threshold and *(b)* the national insurance threshold, broken down into married women, lone parents and single women at the latest date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Broad estimates, based on the new earnings survey and estimates of the number of employees in employment, are as follows: in April 1993 there were 2·6 million women employees earning less than the PAYE threshold, of whom 2·3 million earned less than the national insurance lower earnings limit. Using the results of the family expenditure survey it is estimated that approximately 75 per cent. of each of these categories were married women, 5 per cent. lone parents and 20 per cent. single women.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The total number of staff in the Department of Employment eligible for statutory sick pay is 53,082.

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current level of youth unemployment in the city of Sunderland.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Claimant unemployment data by age are available quarterly for the months of January, April, July and October and are on the unadjusted basis. On 14 October 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of unemployed claimants under 25 years of age in the Sunderland local authority district was 5,463, 4 per cent. lower than in the same month a year earlier.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Redundant Churches

31. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how many redundant churches are being preserved by use of the redundant churches fund; and if he will make a statement on the flexibility exercised by the Church Commissioners regarding the sale of redundant churches for alternative use.

Mr. Alison: At the end of 1993, 289 redundant churches were vested in the redundant churches fund.

When a Church of England church is closed for regular public worship, the Pastoral Measure requires that a suitable alternative use be sought for it. The Commissioners make the final decision and regard as suitable a use which is consonant with the former use of the building as a place of worship, and with its historic and architectural qualities and which has planning permission.

Housing Investment

34. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is the Church Commissioners' policy on investing in providing low-cost family homes to rent.

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners' primary responsibility is to produce a proper return on their assets for the support of the clergy, so financial considerations must take priority in investments decisions. Furthermore, they are not a housing charity. However, the Commissioners are sensitive to the needs in this area and are, therefore, alert to opportunities to dispose of land for the provision of affordable housing where this does not conflict with their duty as trustees. Furthermore, their Octavia Hill residential estates in central London provide about 1,500 homes for people on modest incomes.

Clergy (Pay)

32. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how many *(a)* incumbents and *(b)* assistant clergy are currently in the pay of the Church Commissioners; how much money is involved during the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: There are about 10,500 stipendary clergy; I will write to my hon. Friend with the precise breakdown. The total annual cost of paying clergy stipends last year, including senior clergy, was approximately £155 million, of which the Commissioners met £63 million. An increasing proportion of this cost will fall on parishes as the Commissioners reduce their support to a more sustainable level. The active ministry will therefore depend far more on the giving of Church members.

Ethical Investment

Ms Lynne: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what efforts are made to ensure that investments made conform to the ideals of ethical investment.

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners' primary responsibility is to produce a proper return on their assets for the support of the clergy, so financial considerations must take priority in investment decisions. However, the Commissioners have always operated, and regularly reviewed, a strong ethical policy which takes account of social, ethical and environmental issues and which is sensitive to the views of Church people. They do not, for example, invest directly in companies whose main business is armaments, gambling, alcohol or tobacco. I have arranged for the hon. Member to receive a copy of the Commissioners' leaflet "A Question of Ethics".

SCOTLAND

NHS Staff Costs

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost of employing managers, advisers, administrators and clerical staff in the NHS in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to his previous question on this subject on 27 January, *Official Report*, column *345*.

Development Corporations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contacts his Department plans to have with Ayrshire and Scottish Enterprise, Irvine development corporation and Cunninghame district council concerning the transition of the development corporation's economic powers.

Mr. Stewart: The guidance issued by the Scottish Office Industry Department places the responsibility on the development corporation to prepare successor arrangements for economic development. Corporations are to consult fully the local enterprise company and local authorities about the preparation of proposals appropriate to their area. I understand that local discussions are going on at present between the development corporation and Enterprise Ayrshire. The development corporation is required to submit proposals for consideration by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the additional costs involved in winding up Irvine development corporation and Livingston development corporation before their original wind-up dates; and if the costs of winding up Irvine and Livingston new towns were accounted for in the Touche Ross report "Structure of Local Government in Scotland: Advice on Financial and Qualitative Appraisal of 'Options for Change'".

Mr. Stewart: I am satisfied that there are no additional costs in bringing forward the winding p dates of Irvine and Livingston development corporations. There will be transfers of resources between new town and local government programmes to reflect the transfer of functions and these will be effective from the dates on which the transfers are made. The Touche Ross report did not examine the costs of winding up the new town development corporations.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff currently employed by Irvine development corporation will be transferred to the bodies taking over the development corporation's economic and housing functions.

Mr. Stewart: Discussions towards establishing successor arrangements for economic development are taking place between Irvine development corporation and Enterprise Ayrshire. I hope that it will be possible to retain the expertise of appropriate staff, but it is for those bodies to make recommendations on this matter as part of the proposals the development corporation is required to submit to my right hon. Friend. In respect of the corporation's housing function, the successor bodies will not be determined until the outcome of the ballots are known. Again, it is too early to say how many staff may transfer.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contact there has been between his Department and Scottish companies concerning the current review of the Forestry Commission's status.

Sir Hector Monro: Officials have, from time to time, had useful discussions with wood processors and companies which have interests relevant to the work of the Forestry Review Group.

Private Nursing Homes

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many persons in each health board area, admitted to private residential or nursing homes since 1 April 1993 *(a)* are paying the full cost and *(b)* have had charges recovered from their estate following their death;

(2) if he will conduct a survey of how many residents of private residential or nursing homes have sold their homes to meet the charges for their residential care.

Mr. Stewart: Information relating to numbers of people paying the full cost of accommodation in residential care and nursing homes is not held centrally, nor is information about the numbers of residents who have had charges recovered from their estate following their death.

Information concerning the number of people who have sold their homes to meet the charges for their residential care is not held centrally, nor do I intend to conduct a survey on this.

Hospitals (Car Parking)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the income from car parking charges implemented by hospitals for each health board in Scotland for each year since 1990.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* There are two health boards whose hospitals receive income from car parking. The information available is as follows:

	Financial Year			
Health Board	*1990-91* £	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £	*1993-94*[1] £
Greater Glasgow	—	—	1,750	1,750
Lothian	—	—	—	65,000

[1] estimated.

New Towns

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the annual budget and turnover of each of Scotland's new towns for each year since their establishment.

Mr. Stewart: The information on development corporations' income and expenditure is contained in their annual reports, which are available in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Wormhoudt Murders

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the titles and general details of the 20 files released by his Department into the investigations of the murder of British service men on 28 May 1940 at Wormhoudt.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

BAOR War Crimes Group

WO309/26-27 —Investigation papers (Wormhoudt)
WO309/28-31 —Investigation papers (Wormhoudt/Le Paradis)
WO309/1801-1803—Correspondence etc. on wanted persons
WO309/1804-1812—Statements, interrogation reports etc.
WO309/1813 —Lt. Col. Scotland's report on investigation
WO309/1814 —As WO309/1813 (later, updated version)

Military Deputy Judge Advocate-General's Papers

WO311/100 —MD/JAG file on Wormhoudt case
WO311/680 —Visit of survivors to scene, in connection with investigation

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what further records his Department retains following the release of his Department's records on the investigation of the murder of British service men at Wormhoudt on 28 May 1940; and whether they are covered by *(a)* the 75-year or *(b)* the 30-year rule;

(2) if his Department retains any files which show the results of the requests to the Russian authorities in 1947 from British war crimes investigators for the return of General Willem Mohnke for questioning about the murder of British service men on 28 May 1940 at Wormhoudt.

Mr. Hanley: All surviving files on the original investigation of the killing of British soldiers at

Wormhoudt on 28 May 1940 have now been released. Records created within the last 30 years are covered by the Public Records Act, including any raised on this subject since the case was reopened in 1988. These records are subject to the Department's normal review procedures and the revised criteria contained in the White Paper on openness, Cm 2290.

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Aitken: The Department's central contracts branch has placed in excess of 500 contracts with consultants in each of the last few years. In addition to this figure, consultancy contracts are placed as part of specific projects and as low value orders of under £10,000. Under the Department's arrangements for the delegation of contractual authority, such contracts are placed without reference to the central contracts branch and so cannot be identified separately.

In view of this and the large number of centrally placed contracts involved over the last 15 years, an answer to this question could be provided only at disproportionate cost and effort.

Tank Shells

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what date British tank regiments were supplied with shells fitted with fin stabilised discarding sabots.

Mr. Hanley: The Army was first supplied with armour-piercing fin-stabilised discarding sabot rounds in January 1982. The rounds are stored centrally, and issued to individual tank regiments only when they deploy on operations.

Boards of Inquiry

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what manner, and by whom, serving soldiers due to appear before a regimental board of inquiry are given verbal and written details of the procedure to be followed, including their right of representation; and who is responsible for selecting any such representative.

Mr. Hanley: Witnesses or persons who, in the opinion of either the convening officer or the president of the board, may be affected by a board of inquiry or regimental inquiry are notified of the proceedings and are given the opportunity to be present and to be represented if they so wish. Such notification is not required to be in writing, but the convening order for all boards of inquiry and for most regimental inquiries will be published and displayed throughout the unit.

Such witnesses or persons may, if they wish, be present at the proceedings and give evidence, question witnesses, or produce witnesses to give evidence on matters affecting them. In addition, if represented, their representative may question witnesses and, with permission of the president, address the board of inquiry.

Selection of a representative is a matter of choice for the witness or person concerned. That representative may be an officer, solicitor or barrister.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Hanley: As at January 1994, just over 130,000 staff at the Ministry of Defence were covered by statutory sick pay regulations. This figure excludes some 1,500 casual staff, some of whom may be covered by these regulations.

South Africa

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the British military personnel who have undertaken official visits to South Africa in each year since 1990.

Mr. Hanley: Since 1990, British Ministry of Defence personnel have made official visits to the South African authorities on three occasions as follows:

October 1993
1 Assistant Under-Secretary of State, 1 Assistant Secretary and 1 Principal (all civilian members of the MOD)

December 1993
1 Brigadier

January 1994
1 Rear Admiral, 1 Commander and 1 Principal (MOD civilian)

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the forthcoming visit of the Royal Navy frigate HMS Norfolk to South Africa from 27 to 31 January; and if the Transitional Executive Council of South Africa or the European Union were consulted over arrangements for the visit.

Mr. Hanley: HMS Norfolk, accompanied by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Grey Rover, is visiting South Africa from 27 January to 1 February. The purpose of the visit was to re-establish relations between the Royal Navy and the South African navy. The Transitional Executive Council and our European Union partners were fully aware of the visit and raised no objections. The visit has been welcomed by a broad range of opinion in South Africa.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretaryof State for Defence if he will make a statement on the appointment of the British military attaché to the Republic of South Africa; what are his functions, responsibilities and activities; and how these are restricted by the European Union's criteria for the relaxation on the exchange of military attachés with South Africa.

Mr. Hanley: The British defence attaché in Pretoria took up his post on 22 November 1993. His primary role is to establish contacts with the defence forces of the new South Africa and to advise Her Majesty's ambassador on defence issues. European Union sanctions concerning the exchange of attachés were lifted on 4 October 1993.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all South African defence force personnel who have made official visits to the United Kingdom in each year since 1990.

Mr. Hanley: Since 1990, South African defence force personnel have made official visits to the United Kingdom at the invitation of the Government as follows:

May 1993—the Chief of the South African navy and the ship's company of the Drakensberg, a South African naval support vessel, to take part in ceremonies to mark the Battle of the Atlantic.

July 1993—the South African Chief of Air Staff to attend celebrations marking the 75th annniversary of the RAF.

Special exceptions to the embargo on defence contacts then in force were made in view of the particular historical circumstances of both visits.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* all visits by British military personnel to South Africa and *(b)* all visits by South African defence force personnel to the United Kingdom expected between 1 February and 27 April.

Mr. Hanley: On current plans, official visits by British Ministry of Defence personnel at the invitation of the South African authorities in the period between 1 February and 27 April will take place as follows:

Early February—1 Brigadier, 1 Lieutenant Colonel and 1 Principal (MOD civilian)

No visits to the United Kingdom by South African defence force personnel in that period are currently planned.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there will be any co-reprocessing of military and civil materials in THORP at Sellafield.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply. No.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Feeding Stuffs (Salmonella)

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many plants producing animal protein for incorporation into animal feeding stuffs which were found on first sampling in each year since 1981, to be salmonella positive *(a)* gave subsequent positive samples and *(b)* were prosecuted.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The numbers of plants producing animal protein for incorporation into animal feeding stuffs where salmonella was isolated both on the first official sampling of each year and subsequently during the year were as follows:

	Number
1981	[1]—
1982	13
1983	10
1984	7
1985	10
1986	9
1987	6
1988	3
1989	2
1990	1
1991	2
1992	1
1993	—

[1] Figures not available.

Where salmonella contamination is found the serving of notices preventing the movement of material until it is shown to be free of salmonella contamination is considered the appropriate action rather than prosecution.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many inspections were carried out by her officials of processing plants producing animal protein for incorporation into animal feeding stuffs in each year from 1981; and how many of the plants gave samples which were found to be salmonella-positive.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Details of inspections of plants producing animal protein for incorporation into animal feeding stuffs and the number of plants which gave samples positive for salmonella were as follows:

	Inspections	*Number of plants where positive salmonella was isolated*
1981	[1]—	[1]—
1982	193	35
1983	250	29
1984	251	30
1985	224	27
1986	206	22
1987	185	21
1988	154	15
1989	315	23
1990	245	18
1991	230	14
1992	194	8
1993	189	9

[1] Figures not available.

Inspections ranged between one and five days duration depending upon the type of plant.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many samples were taken from processing plants producing animal protein for incorporation into animal feeding stuffs in each year from 1981; and how many in each year were found to be salmonella-positive.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The number of official samples from processing plants producing animal protein for incorporation into animal feeding stuffs and the numbers found to be positive for salmonella were as follows:

	Number of official samples	*Number of official samples found to be positive*
1981	[1]—	[1]—
1982	1,085	114
1983	1,410	107
1984	1,403	115
1985	1,253	111
1986	1,202	111
1987	971	53
1988	847	44
1989	1,673	87
1990	1,388	40
1991	1,360	46
1992	1,320	22
1993	1,274	26

[1] Figures not available.

Milk

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many gallons of milk were consumed in England in the most recent year for which figures are available; and how many gallons of milk were produced in England in that year.

Mr. Jack: The volume of milk produced and sold through milk marketing schemes in England in 1992 was 9,743 million litres or 2,143 million gallons.

Total liquid milk consumption figures are not separately available for England. However, for England and Wales as a whole the volume of milk produced and sold through milk marketing schemes and subsequently used for liquid milk was 5,857 million litres, or 1,288 million gallons, in 1992. Except for the effect of trade in liquid milk, this will equate closely to consumption as measured in whole milk equivalent. This represents 52 per cent. of the total sales through marketing schemes for England and Wales of 11,198 million litres, or 2,463 million gallons.

These figures exclude milk sold outside milk marketing schemes, milk consumed on-farm, wastage and milk fed to stock.

The consumption of milk in the form of all products is difficult to assess because of problems of double counting when milk is manufactured into more than one product. However, approximately 15,880 million litres of milk were required to produce all the milk and milk products consumed in the United Kingdom in 1992. This figure is available only at the United Kingdom level. It should also be noted that some elements of this milk—for example, the skimmed milk by-products of imported butter production —are not consumed in the United Kingdom. Total United Kingdom production sold through milk marketing schemes in 1992 was 13,525 million litres.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research her Ministry has carried out into the ways in which bovine tuberculosis is transferred from badgers to cattle.

Mr. Soames: Research is continuing at the Department's central science laboratory in Gloucestershire on the ways in which bovine tuberculosis is transferred from badgers to cattle. Detailed observations are made on the way in which badgers infected with bovine tuberculosis may contaminate the environment. This work has demonstrated the potential importance of badger excretory products in disease transmission to cattle, with field margins having been identified as areas of highest risk.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of her Department's badger culling in terms of the reduction of bovine tuberculosis.

Mr. Soames: There have been no cases of confirmed bovine tuberculosis in cattle in the areas of Steeple Leaze, Dorset and Thornbury, Avon, since the ending in 1979 and 1981 respectively of the experimental programmes under which badger control operations were carried out continuously. The incidence of bovine TB in cattle in those areas had previously been high.

Analyses at the Department's central veterinary laboratory suggests that the effect of the routine badger control operations carried out in other areas between 1975 and 1982 reduced the incidence of infection in cattle herds by around 60 per cent, compared with no control.

Similar studies have shown that badger removal operations between 1986 and 1993 on farms which suffered a breakdown may have reduced the chances of a subsequent cattle breakdown by between 40 and 65 per cent.

The new strategy announced on 8 December will include a trial element to measure its effectiveness. Further details are set out in the background note in the Library of the House, a copy of which I have sent to the hon. Member.

Mr Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will declare a moratorium on the culling of badgers; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I have no such plans; I announced a new programme to control bovine TB in the House on 8 December, *Official Report,* columns *260-61.*

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will give details of *(a)* the incidence of bovine turbercolusis and *(b)* the numbers of badgers culled on the authority of her Department in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames: The number of cattle herds experiencing new confirmed breakdowns of tuberculosis in Great Britain for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available were as follows:

Year	*New confirmed breakdowns*	*Badgers culled*
1983	79	1,239
1984	73	1,337
1985	52	1,119
1986	82	782
1987	108	711
1988	122	778
1989	125	727
1990	143	811
1991	125	993
1992	155	1,054
1993	[1]273	[1]1,093

[1] Provisional figures.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will provide a figure for the number of staff in her Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Jack: Approximately 11,000 of the staff employed by the Department and its agencies are eligible for statutory sick pay.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people there are in her Department's meat hygiene service.

Mr. Soames: The meat hygiene service will be an agency of MAFF and will be launched in April 1995, taking over hygiene and welfare responsibilities in fresh meat plants from 300 local authorities. It will employ up to 1,300 plant-based staff, a saving of some 5 per cent. on current numbers. Management and administrative support will total no more than about 70, which will be less than is currently required.

At present approximately 230 man years are devoted to meat hygiene policy and its implementation within the core Department. This level of effort will be reduced significantly after the setting up of the meat hygiene service.

"Food—a Fact of Life"

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total cost to her Department of the British Nutrition Foundation's "Food—a Fact of Life".

Mr. Soames: The total level of support provided by this Department since 1990 has been £796,000. This educative tool is held in high regard by teachers and others and the Department is therefore planning to provide a further £250,000 worth of support in the coming financial year to enable it to be extended to the 11 to 16-year-old age group.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice her Ministry gave to the British Nutrition Foundation in developing the material for "Food—a Fact of Life"; and what steps were taken to ensure the material was in line with the Ministry's policy.

Mr. Soames: This Department has been closely involved with the development of this programme since its inception. Officials currently participate in the group monitoring its progress where they seek to ensure consistency with departmental policy where relevant.

Food Surpluses

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total sum expended by member states and by the EC itself on the storage and disposal of food surpluses in the most recent annual period for which figures are available; and if she will publish a table showing the relevant expenditure of the EC and by member states in each of the previous five years.

Mr. Jack: The guarantee section of the European guidance and guarantee fund—EAGGF—provides funding to member states for the costs of intervention storage, export refunds, and other disposal measures for products subject to the CAP. Information on expenditure on these measures for 1992 and for the previous five years can be obtained from the annual financial reports of the EAGGF guarantee section, copies of which have been deposited in the Library of the House of Commons. Annex 7 of these reports provides details of expenditure on intervention storage, and withdrawals and similar operations, and annex 5 on export refunds. The breakdown of expenditure by member state for these measures can be derived from annex 2 of these reports.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on farm incomes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Total income from farming is estimated to have risen by 40·7 per cent. in 1993 compared with 1992. This is welcome news for farmers and I hope will be recognised as such. Detailed estimates of income, output and productivity of United Kingdom agriculture in 1993 were published this morning and these have been placed in the Library of the House.

Whaling

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what exemptions from EC [illegible] governing whaling activities have been sought by the Norwegian Government in their submission to the Council of Ministers; and what has been the outcome of the Norwegian demands.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

The Norwegian Government have requested exemptions from the EC habitats directive annex IV*(a)* in respect of fin, minke and killer whales and from the EC convention on international trade in endangered species regulation in respect of fin and minke whales. The member states of the European Union have rejected these requests.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Customs and Excise (Searches)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column *767*, if he will list, for each United Kingdom port of entry, the breakdown by ethnic origin of persons stopped and searched by Customs and Excise officers during 1993.

Sir John Cope: The number of persons subject to search of persons of all kinds by Customs and Excise during 1993 distinguished by collection and ethnic origin is given in the table. Information for each port of entry is not held centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Search of persons by IC Division
1 January to 31 December 1993

Collection	*IC1*	*IC2*	*IC3*	*IC4*	*IC5*	*IC6*	*Total*
Belfast	337	2	5	—	1	3	348
Birmingham	328	10	35	29	5	—	407
Dover	1,054	45	71	42	9	7	1,228
East Anglia	1,833	99	271	77	13	13	2,306
East Midlands	186	—	11	7	—	—	204
Edinburgh	186	—	2	—	5	1	194
Glasgow	256	8	7	5	7	3	286
Leeds	335	6	15	4	—	1	361
Liverpool	85	5	22	3	9	1	125
London Airports	6,200	2,034	8,243	2,238	493	383	19,591
London Port	370	24	49	21	6	8	478

Collection	*IC1*	*IC2*	*IC3*	*IC4*	*IC5*	*IC6*	*Total*
Manchester	1,061	24	125	248	16	1	1,475
Northampton	574	75	19	9	2	5	684
Northern England	182	15	37	13	37	15	299
Southampton	684	38	40	82	15	31	890
South Wales and Borders	224	5	13	6	1	2	251
South West England	212	31	9	—	—	1	253
Thames Valley	11	—	—	4	—	—	15
Total	14,118	2,421	8,974	2,788	619	475	29,395

Notes:

1. IC=Identification code for ethnic origin.
2. IC1 Northern European.
   IC2 Southern European.
   IC3 Afro/Caribbean.
   IC4 Asian.
   IC5 Oriental.
   IC6 Middle Eastern.
3. London Airports includes Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted.

VAT

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he will exempt cultural bodies which have charitable status from VAT on certain cultural services and goods;

(2) what considerations he has given to EC directives on VAT giving exemptions to certain cultural services and goods;

(3) whether he will exempt non-profit-making cultural bodies from VAT on certain cultural services and goods;

(4) what steps he is considering to harmonise the application of VAT to certain cultural services and goods in the United Kingdom with other EC countries.

Sir John Cope: On 22 July, *Official Report*, column *303*, I announced that I would be holding discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage with a view to examining the case for exempting certain cultural services and associated goods supplied by public authorities. Discussions are continuing and when these have been completed a consultation paper will be issued to seek the views of interested parties.

Russia

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sums have been disbursed by the International Monetary Fund to Russia.

Mr. Nelson: Russia joined the IMF in June 1992. In August 1992, the IMF disbursed $1 billion under a first credit tranche drawing. In July 1993 a further drawing of $1·5 billion was made under the systematic transformation facility.

European Parliament Pension Scheme

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the payment of death gratuities and dependants' benefits to beneficiaries under the European Parliament (United Kingdom Representatives) pension scheme.

Mr. Portillo: Parliamentary approval will be sought later this year in an order under the European Parliament (Pay and Pensions) Act 1979 to changes to the European Parliament (United Kingdom representatives) pension scheme. These changes will bring the scheme's provisions for death gratuities and dependants' benefits into line with those introduced for the parliamentary contributory pension fund by the Parliamentary Pensions (Amendment) Regulations 1991. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £700 will be met from repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund. Once the order has been approved, the Contingencies Fund will be repaid upon approval of the Contingencies Fund repayment vote.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his departments covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Nelson: The number of staff in post at 1 January 1994 in my departments covered by statutory sick pay was 114,052.

Weapons (Customs and Excise)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many weapons have been seized by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise for each of the past 10 years *(a)* at each port and *(b)* by raids on suspects.

Sir John Cope: Customs does not hold central statistics on seizures of weapons that can be broken down in this way. However, the table sets out the number of illegal weapons seized by Customs and Excise nationally in the last 10 years.

Seizures of weapons by HM Customs and Excise over the 10 years to 1992-93

Year ended 31 March	*Hand guns*	*Rifles*	*Shot-guns*	*CS gas canis-ters*	*Stun guns*	*Total*
1984	908	155	10	152	11	1,236
1985	150	52	7	174	2	385
1986	108	156	11	141	30	446
1987	1,071	28	21	114	291	1,525
1988	168	31	6	276	309	790
1989	130	55	28	395	73	681
1990	1,489	144	44	414	301	2,392
1991	253	535	49	1,132	48	2,017
1992	176	126	82	692	53	1,129
1993	138	41	39	2,580	427	3,225
TOTALS	4,591	1,323	297	6,070	1,545	13,826

Income Support

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a breakdown of the average weekly spending on items in the family expenditure survey of *(a)* an individual of over 24 years and *(b)* a family of one parent and two children who are wholly dependent on income support.

Mr. Nelson: The figures in the table are from the 1992 family expenditure survey. The survey has a small number of households in these categories, so the figures are subject to large sampling variations. Figures are rounded to the nearest 50p. The figures refer to households whose gross income is made up of income support, child benefit and one parent benefit where appropriate and up to £2 of other income.

		per week
Expenditure Items	*(a) An individual of over 24 years* £	*(b) One adult and two children* £
Housing (net)	11·00	8·50
Fuel light and power	9·00	13·00
Food	14·00	27·50
Alchohol	3·50	·50
Tobacco	3·50	4·00
Household goods	7·00	6·00
Household services	3·00	4·50
Personal goods and services	1·50	4·50
Motoring	2·50	[1]—
Fares and other travel costs	2·00	3·50
Leisure goods	3·00	4·50
Leisure services	2·50	4·00
Miscellaneous	—	·50
Total expenditure	65·50	88·50

[1] Data not available as the sampling error is greater than 50 per cent.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ethnic Minority Business Grant

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the ethnic minority business grant, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The ethnic minority business grant is administered by a small number of staff, equivalent to less than one full-time post, who have a range of other duties. The itemised expenditure requested for the last year, and since the scheme was developed, is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of section 11 grants, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed;

(2) if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of the ethnic minority grant, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

Mr. Enright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial provisions was made in respect of the cost of implementing the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993; and on which sub-heads of which vote it appeared.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No separate financial provision was made in respect of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Costs have been contained within existing financial provisions.

Prison Visits (Homosexuals)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much public money was used, in the latest year for which figures are available, to fund prison visits for homosexual couples under the assisted prison visitors' scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None.

Foreign Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals from either the United States of America or Canada were either remand prisoners or sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 20 January;

(2) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals from each south Asian country were either remand prisoners or sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 20 January;

(3) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals from Hong Kong were either remand prisoners or sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 20 January;

(4) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals from each middle eastern country were either remand prisoners or sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 20 January;

(5) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals from each of the Caribbean countries were either remand prisoners or sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 20 January;

(6) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female Australian nationals were (i) remand or (ii) sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 24 January;

(7) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals from each south Pacific country, were (i) remand or (ii) sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 24 January;

(8) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals from each south American country, were (i) remand or (ii) sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 24 January;

(9) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals from each of the countries of south-east Asia, were (i) remand prisoners or (ii) sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 24 January;

(10) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals whose nationality was not known, were (i) remand or (ii) sentenced prisoners held in prisons in England and Wales as of 25 January;

(11) how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female Chinese nationals were either (i) remand or (ii) sentenced prisoners in prisons in England and Wales as of 25 January;

(12) what was the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female Vietnamese nationals who were either (i) remand or (ii) sentenced prisoners in prisons in England and Wales as of 25 January.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 31 January 1994:

FOREIGN NATIONALS

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your twelve recent Questions asking how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals from either the United States of America or Canada, each South Asian country, Hong Kong, each Middle Eastern country, each of the Caribbean countries, Australia, each South Pacific country, each South American country, each South East Asian country, China, Vietnam and unrecorded countries were either remand prisoners or sentenced prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales as of 20, 24 and 25 January.

The latest available provisional information is for 30 September 1993. The attached table gives a complete breakdown of the prison population by nationality as recorded centrally, including the nationalities specified in your questions.

Population in Prison Service Establishments, in England and Wales, by type of prisoner and nationality as at 30 September 1993

	Type of prisoner					
Nationality	*Male*			*Female*		
	Remand	*Sentenced*[1]	*All*[1]	*Remand*	*Sentenced*[1]	*All*[1]
United Kingdom	10,251	30,839	41,090	365	1,024	1,389
Irish Republic	157	372	529	2	10	12
All foreign natonals	553	1,767	2,320	70	185	255
Not recorded	45	553	598	2	16	18
Europe						
Albania	1	1	2	—	—	—
Andorra	2	8	10	—	—	—
Austria	1	4	5	—	—	—
Belgium	9	13	22	—	1	1
Cyprus	8	36	44	1	1	2
Czechoslovakia	1	2	3	—	—	—
Denmark	—	3	3	—	—	—
Finland	—	1	1	—	—	—
France	13	16	29	2	2	4
German Democratic Republic	2	2	4	—	—	—
German Federal Republic	11	26	37	3	—	3
Gibraltar	—	1	1	—	1	1
Greece	1	11	12	—	1	1
Hungary	1	2	3	—	1	1
Italy	19	43	62	—	4	4
Luxembourg	—	1	1	—	—	—
Malta	2	6	8	—	—	—
Netherlands	35	53	88	4	6	10
Norway	—	1	1	—	—	—
Poland	—	7	7	—	1	1
Portugal	13	14	27	3	—	3
Romania	1	2	3	—	—	—
Spain	15	20	35	2	—	2
Sweden	—	2	2	—	—	—
Switzerland	—	1	1	—	1	1
Turkey	16	54	70	—	1	1
Yugoslavia	1	9	10	—	—	—
Middle East						
Afghanistan	1	2	3	—	—	—
Egypt	—	4	4	—	—	—
Iran	2	22	24	—	1	1
Israel	3	10	13	—	—	—
Iraq	1	5	6	—	—	—
Jordan	2	6	8	1	—	1
Kuwait	—	2	2	—	—	—
Lebanon	3	9	12	—	—	—
Saudi Arabia	—	1	1	—	—	—
Sierre Leone	2	7	9	—	—	—
Syrian Arab Republic	2	1	3	—	—	—
United Arab Emirates	—	2	2	—	—	—
Yemen Arab Republic (North)	1	—	1	—	—	—
Yemen Peoples Democratic Republic (South)	1	1	2	—	—	—
India	35	169	204	—	10	10
Pakistan	55	199	254	2	7	9
Bangladesh	6	36	42	—	—	—
Hong Kong	—	5	5	—	1	1

Nationality	*Type of prisoner*					
	Male			*Female*		
	Remand	*Sentenced*[1]	*All*[1]	*Remand*	*Sentenced*[1]	*All*[1]
Other Asia						
Burma	—	2	2	—	—	—
China	3	7	10	—	1	1
British India Ocean Terr	2	1	3	—	—	—
Korea Republic (South)	—	1	1	—	2	2
Malaysia	3	5	8	1	—	1
Nepal	1	—	1	—	—	—
Philippines	—	3	3	1	1	2
Sri Lanka	3	12	15	—	—	—
Singapore	3	3	6	—	—	—
Thailand	—	2	2	—	1	1
Vietnam	5	8	13	—	—	—
Africa						
Algeria	—	7	7	—	—	—
Angola	—	5	5	—	—	—
Benin	—	—	—	—	1	1
Central African Republic	4	2	6	—	—	—
Ivory Coast	1	1	2	—	—	—
Ethiopia	1	2	3	—	—	—
Ghana	16	41	57	5	18	23
Gambia	—	4	4	—	—	—
Kenya	2	25	27	1	—	1
Liberia	1	2	3	—	—	—
Libya	1	7	8	—	—	—
Morocco	6	18	24	—	1	1
Mauritania	—	2	2	—	1	1
Mauritius	1	8	9	—	—	—
Malawi	—	3	3	—	1	1
Nigeria	37	134	171	14	48	62
Seychelles	1	4	5	—	—	—
Sudan	—	1	1	—	1	1
St. Helena	—	1	1	—	—	—
Somalia	9	9	18	—	—	—
Tunisia	—	6	6	—	—	—
Tanzania	4	5	9	1	—	1
Uganda	4	15	19	—	—	—
South Africa	3	17	20	—	2	2
Zambia	4	3	7	—	1	1
Zaire	2	6	8	—	—	—
Zimbabwe	2	9	11	—	—	—
Caribbean						
Antigua	2	7	9	—	—	—
Barbados	2	13	15	1	1	2
Costa Rica	—	1	1	—	—	—
Cuba	—	1	1	—	—	—
Dominica	—	7	7	—	—	—
Dominican Republic	1	3	4	—	1	1
Grenada	2	5	7	—	1	1
Haiti	—	1	1	—	—	—
Jamaica	109	322	431	16	31	47
St. Lucia	4	12	16	—	—	—
Monserrat	—	2	2	—	—	—
St. Christopher and Nevis	—	2	2	—	—	—
Trinidad and Tobago	4	10	14	—	—	—
St. Vincent and Grenadines	—	10	10	—	1	1
United States of America	15	40	55	3	17	20
Canada	4	14	18	—	1	1
America (North and South)						
Argentina	3	1	4	—	—	—
Belize	—	1	1	—	—	—
Bolivia	—	2	2	—	1	1
Brazil	—	4	4	1	2	3
Cayman Islands	—	1	1	—	—	—
Chile	—	4	4	2	—	2
Colombia	2	43	45	1	4	5
Guyana	6	20	26	2	6	8
Mexico	—	1	1	—	—	—
Peru	—	6	6	—	—	—
Surinam	1	—	1	—	—	—
Uruaguay	1	1	2	—	—	—
Venezuela	—	3	3	—	—	—

Nationality	*Male* *Remand*	*Sentenced*[1]	*All*[1]	*Female* *Remand*	*Sentenced*[1]	*All*[1]
Australia	6	18	24	1	—	1
New Zealand	3	11	14	1	1	2
Oceania						
Fiji	1	—	1	—	—	—
Guam	—	—	—	1	—	1
Papua New Guinea	1	—	1	—	—	—
Solomon Islands	1	—	1	—	—	—

Type of prisoner

[1] Includes Immigration Act detainees, non-criminal prisoners and persons committed in default of payment of a fine.

Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual cost to his Department of enforcement of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Misuse of Drugs Act provides the legal framework for controlling drugs to prevent their misuse and for dealing with social problems connected with their misuse. It also regulates the legitimate trade in drugs. For England and Wales, the cost to this Department of enforcing the provisions of the Act, including police activity and the costs of dealing with convicted offenders, was estimated at about £147 million for the year 1992-93.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of court cases involving the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 are *(a)* cannabis, *(b)* cocaine and *(c)* heroin related.

Mr. Maclean: In 1992, the last year for which figures are available, the percentage of persons found guilty of offences against the Misuse of Drugs Act in respect of each type of drug was: cannabis, 65 per cent.; cocaine, 3 per cent.; and heroin, 4·5 per cent.

Drug-related Crime

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the estimated annual cost of drug-related crime;

(2) what have been the changes in *(a)* the number of drug-related crimes and *(b)* the percentage of all crime that is drug related since 1979;

(3) what is his estimate of the percentage of crime committed annually that is drug related.

Mr. Maclean: The involvement of drug misusers in criminal activity is difficult to quantify. It is not possible to estimate with any accuracy the amount of crime which is drug related or the cost of such crime.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the changes in *(a)* the number of drug-related crimes involving firearms and *(b)* the percentage of all crimes involving firearms that are drug related.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in the United Kingdom have a criminal record for possession of cannabis; and how many police officers in the United Kingdom are solely engaged in combating drug-related crime.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the total number of persons who have a criminal record for possession of cannabis is not collected centrally. The number of persons who have been found guilty, cautioned or compounded for possession of cannabis in each year from 1982 to 1992 is given in table 3.3 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Statistics of drugs seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1992"—issue 30/93—a copy of which is in the Library.

By the end of 1992 over 1,400 police officers were wholly engaged in the investigation of drug-related crime in England and Wales; in Scotland more than 120 police officers were specifically engaged in drugs work; and in Northern Ireland some 34 officers were so occupied.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number and proportion of the prison population serving sentences for convictions on drug-related offences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 31 January 1994:

DRUG RELATED OFFENCES

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what is the total number and proportion of the prison population serving sentences for convictions on drug-related offences.

Figures for the population in Prison Service establishments by offence group are published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales", Table 1.8 of the volume for 1991 (Cm 2157). Provisional information for 30 September 1993 shows that 3,244 prisoners were recorded centrally as being sentenced for drug offences, just over 10 per cent. of the total sentenced population for whom an offence was recorded.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number and proportion of prisoners convicted for drug-related offences who reoffend.

Mr. Maclean: The available information on the reoffending of prisoners is the rate of reconviction within two and four years after discharge from prison.

The latest statistics are for those discharged from prison service establishments in 1987 after completion of a prison sentence for which the principal offence was a drugs offence. Within two years of discharge, 1,136 or 37 per cent. of those discharged had been convicted of a further offence; within four years, 1,506 or 49 per cent. of those discharged were reconvicted. The numbers exclude the reconviction of a small number of discharges whose criminal histories could not be traced in the offenders' index.

Passport Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for the future of the Passport Agency.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The performance and options for the future of the United Kingdom Passport Agency are currently being reviewed in accordance with the normal procedure for triennial reviews of executive agencies. A decision on the future of the Passport Agency will be made in the light of these reviews. An announcement will then be made.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost of issuing a passport by *(a)* the Passport Agency and *(b)* equivalent agencies in each of the other European Union countries.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The cost of the 10-year standard British passport is £18. I am advised that the cost of the passports of each of the European Union countries is as shown in the table:

	£
Belgium[1]	36-48
Denmark	40
France[1]	40
Germany	11·50
Greece[1]	19
Ireland	43
Italy[1]	39
Luxembourg[1]	4
Netherlands[1]	32
Portugal	13
Spain[1]	6

[1] Passports valid for five years.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the financial results for the past two years of the Passport Agency and the expected results for the next two years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Passport Agency's financial performance is measured by efficiency reductions in the unit cost of passport services. Over the period 1991-92 and 1992-93 the agency has made significant reductions in unit costs amounting to 4·2 per cent. compared with an aggregate target of 3·9 per cent. in this period. In the financial years 1993-94 and 1994-95 the agency expects to achieve further efficiency savings of around 3 per cent. in each year.

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* those prisons in which there is a problem with trafficking in illegal drugs and *(b)* those in which there is no problem with drug trafficking.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 31 January 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about drug trafficking in prison.

The attached figures show establishments where there have been convictions in the last two years for offences of "trafficking" ie selling or delivering controlled drugs and attempting, assisting or inciting the selling or delivery of controlled drugs. The figures also show the number of such convictions. There have been no trafficking convictions at any other Prison Service establishment.

The Prison Service is committed to taking all reasonable measures to prevent drugs entering prisons and to eliminate the use of drugs within prisons. Existing programmes include the extensive use of searching and intelligence, as well as support for drug abusers to help them overcome their addiction.

	Number
Aylesbury	1
Birmingham	1
Brinsford	2
Cardiff	1
Deerbolt	2
Drake Hall	1
Durham	1
Elmley	1
Feltham.	4
Glen Parva	2
Glen Parva	4
Hollesley Bay	2
Holloway	1
Holme House	1
Hull	2
Leeds	2
Leicester	1
Lincoln	1
Liverpool	3
Low Newton	1
Manchester	1
Morland	1
Norwich	1
Onley	2
Pentonville	1
Pucklechurch	1
Rochester	1
Rochester	2
Shrewsbury	2
Stocken	3
Stoke Heath	2
Styal	1
Swansea	1
Swinfen Hall	1
Wormwood Scrubs	3
TOTAL	57

Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's estimate of the annual expenditure by users on drugs.

Mr. Maclean: Drug misuse is an illegal and, therefore, clandestine activity. It is not possible to produce a reliable estimate of the amount spent annually on drugs by users.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the changes in the consumption of *(a)* heroin, *(b)* cocaine and *(c)* cannabis since 1979.

Mr. Maclean: Reliable information on levels of consumption of the drugs mentioned is not available. Information on the percentage change in the number of recorded seizures of each drug over the period in question is given in the table.

United Kingdom	*Number of seizures*		
	1979	*1992*	*percentage change*
Heroin	600	2,968	+395
Cocaine	348	2,365	+580
Cannabis	14,116	57,663	+308

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many registered addicts are addicted to prescribed drugs in the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will list the 10 prescribed drugs to which the largest number of addicts are addicted in the United Kingdom and the totals of addicts.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the identity of the drugs, dependence on which requires medical practitioners to notify the Home Office, and the numbers of persons addicted to those drugs, is given in table 2 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Statistics of drug addicts notified to the Home Office, United Kingdom, 1992"—issue 15/93—a copy of which is in the Library.

All these drugs are legitimately prescribed or administered on occasion, but the proprietary names of those drugs in the list, where they exist, are: methadone (Physeptone); dipipanone (Diconal); dextromoramide (Palfium); and phenazocine (Narphen). Methadone is the drug normally used to treat dependence on heroin.

Air Guns

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what controls exist on the sale of air guns and air rifles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The acquisition, possession and use of air weapons are regulated by the Firearms Act 1968 which prohibits their sale of hire to anyone under the age of 17. Young people under 14 may not buy, hire, be given, or own an air weapon and may use one only if they are supervised by someone over 21. Those air weapons which are classified as "specially dangerous" under the Firearms (Dangerous Air Weapons) Rules 1969 are subject to firearm certificate control.

In its second annual report the Firearms Consultative Committee, the independent statutory body established to advise Government on the firearms legislation, concluded that the law as it stands is adequate to deal with current levels of misuse. My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to introduce further controls.

Weapons Smuggling

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has made to other EC Governments concerning the smuggling of weapons into Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No specific representations have been made. A directive on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 18 June 1991. All member states of the European Union are bound by the directive which came into effect on 1 January 1993.

Under the directive, movements of firearms are subject to a new licensing system. As before, anyone bringing a firearm into this country must have prior permission. In addition to this, though, each transfer of a firearm into this country will be notified to my Department via a new information system. The information will be passed to police and customs officers who will investigate any irregularities.

Secure Establishments

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the secure establishments to which youngsters aged 12 to 14 years will be remanded by the courts while awaiting trial or sentence, giving the number of places available at each and the normal resident age range in each.

Mr. Maclean: I have tabled an amendemnt to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill which will provide courts with the power to remand 12 to 14-year-olds to local authority accommodation with a security requirement. The responsibility for placing a juvenile so remanded will rest with the local authority. The pool of secure accommodation available to local authorities to assist them in discharging this duty will be expanded. The Government will be providing further funding to local authorities for this purpose.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Howard: The number of Home Office staff covered by the statutory sick pay scheme is about 49,500.

Firearms Licences

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are held by the Metropolitan police to assess the suitability of an individual for a firearms licence.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Before issuing a firearm certificate a chief officer of police must be satisfied that the applicant is not prohibited from possessing a firearm, can be permitted to possess a firearm without danger to public safety or the peace, and has a good reason for having a firearm. These criteria are set out in the Firearms Act 1968 to 1992 and apply equally to all police force areas.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of firearms certificates issued per year for each of the last 10 years by the Metropolitan police; how many in each year were renewals; and what was the total number of valid certificates at each year.

Mr. Maclean: The following table shows for the Metropolitan police district for the years 1986 to 1992 the number of new firearms certificates granted, the number of renewals and the number on issue at 31 December. Figures for the years prior to 1986 are not readily available and those for 1993 are not yet available.

Firearm certificates granted, renewed and on issue at 31 December in the Metropolitan police district, 1986 to 1992

Year	*Granted*	*Renewed*	*On issue at 31 December*
1986	1,066	2,625	9,084
1987	993	2,568	9,036
1988	738	2,278	8,877

Year	*Granted*	*Renewed*	*On issue at 31 December*
1989	825	2,249	8,615
1990	864	2,657	9,929
1991	746	2,432	9,975
1992	855	2,531	9,427

Young Offenders

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements exist within the Prison Service statistical divisions for providing information on juveniles and young people in prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* Information on the Prison Service establishment in which held, the age, type of offence, length of service, type of custody, previous convictions, time served and on the frequency of reoffending following release of young offenders is compiled by the research and statistics department. It is published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales". Summary information is monitored on a monthly basis. Operational information about the numbers of young offenders is monitored daily.

The provision of full information has only recently been reinstated following completion of changes to the computer system to reflect the implementation in October 1992 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. The publication of the 1992 issue of "Prison Statistics" has been delayed.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Allowances

11. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people on disability living allowance and attendance allowance at any one time; and what were the equivalent figures for mobility allowance and attendance allowance in 1979.

12. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants are on disability living allowance and attendance allowance at any one time; and what were the comparable figures for mobility allowance and attendance allowance in 1979.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the table:

Receipt of attendance allowance, mobility allowance and disability living allowance

	1979-80	*1993-94*
Attendance allowance	285,000	830,000
Mobility allowance	140,000	n/a
Disability living allowance	n/a	1,005,000
Totals	[1]425,000	[2]1,835,000

Sources: The Government's expenditure plans 1984-85 to 1986-87 Cmnd. 9143-II and social security departmental report 1993-94 to 1995-96 Cmnd. 2213.

[1] People getting both benefits are counted twice underestimating the real increase between 1979-80 and 1993-94.

[2] From April 1992 disability living allowance replaced attendance allowance and mobility allowance for people who became disabled before age 65.

Pensioner Incomes

13. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average pensioner's income from savings.

Mr. Hague: Pensioners' estimated average weekly income from savings is as follows:

£30·30 for all pensioners[1];
£45·10 for pensioner couples; and
£21·60 for single pensioners.

[1] Single people over state pension age and couples where the husband is over state pension age.

Source: The 1990-91 family expenditure survey. Figures are at January 1991 prices.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much total pension incomes have increased per annum between 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available; and what was the equivalent figure between 1974 and 1979.

Mr. Hague: The estimated average annual increase in pensioners' total income in the years 1979 to 1990-91—the latest year for which figures are available—was:

3·1 per cent. for all pensioners[1];
2·9 per cent. for pensioner couples; and
2·9 per cent. for single pensioners.

The available information, although not directly comparable, shows an increase of 0·6 per cent. per year between 1974 and 1979.

[1] Single people over state pension age and couples where the husband is over state pension age.

Note: Information for the period 1979 to 1990-91 derives from the family expenditure survey, and is consistent with the methodology of the households below average incomes survey. For years prior to 1979 the FES is not consistent with the HBAI. In particular, there is no breakdown between single pensioners and pensioner couples.

26. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the rise in pensioners' total average net income since 1979.

Mr. Hague: The estimated rise in pensioners' total average net income, in real terms, from 1979 to 1990-91—the latest year for which figures are available—was:

Before housing costs:
42 per cent. for all pensioners[1];
39 per cent. for pensioner couples; and
39 per cent. for single pensioners.
After housing costs:
54 per cent. for all pensioners[1];
53 per cent. for pensioner couples; and
49 per cent. for single pensioners.

[1] Single people over state pension age and couples where the husband is over state pension age.

Source: The 1990-91 family expenditure survey.

23. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest estimate of the value of the average pensioner's income from savings and occupational pensions; and what were the comparable figures in 1979.

Mr. Hague: The latest estimate of the average weekly income to pensioners from savings and occupational pensions is:

£63·20 to all pensioners[1]
£99·50 to pensioner couples and
£41·80 to single pensioners.

The comparable figures for 1979 are:

£27·80 to all pensioners[1]
£46·40 to pensioner couples and
£18 to single pensioners.

[1] Single people over state pension age and couples where the

husband is over state pension age.
Source: 1990-91 family expenditure survey. All figures are at January 1991 prices.

Independent Living Fund

14. **Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many severely disabled people have received payments from the independent living (1993) fund; what percentage of its budget the fund has so far used; and how many clients received funding from its predecessor independent living fund in each of the last two years of its existence.

Mr. Scott: On 20 January, 108 people had received payments from the independent living (1993) fund and a further 28 cases had been approved for payment. The fund had spent 13 per cent. of its budget. The old ILF made 7,319 new awards in the year 1991-92 and 10,620 such awards in 1992-93. support for those cases continues through the independent living (extension) fund which is now paying 18,500 people at an estimated cost of £120 million in the current year. The 1993 fund is an integral part of the Government's community care initiative. It is therefore inappropriate to compare the performance of the two funds.

Family Credit

15. **Mrs. Browning:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual spending on family credit; and what was the spending on family income supplement in 1979.

Mr. Burt: The published forecast for family credit expenditure for 1993-94 is £965 million. This is 14 times more in real terms than the £24 million spent on family income supplement in 1978-79. The 1994 departmental report, to be published in March, will give a revised estimate.

25. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the results of the introduction of payment of family credit as a lump sum.

Mr. Burt: Since 25 October 1993, over 3,000 awards of family credit of £4 a week or less have been made by lump sum payment.

Invalidity Benefit

16. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people who will receive invalidity benefit two years after the introduction of the proposed incapacity benefit.

Mr. Scott: Invalidity benefit and sickness benefit will, subject to parliamentary approval, be replaced by a single new benefit—incapacity benefit—from April 1995. The estimated average number of people who will receive incapacity benefit in 1996-97 is 1,814,000.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes have been made in entitlement to and the method of calculating invalidity benefit since 1979.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the table:

Changes affecting entitlement to invalidity benefit since 1979

Date of change	*Change*
April 1979	Additional pension introduced
April 1979	Change to invalidity allowance age bands
November 1980	Uprating linked to retail price index
November 1980	5 per cent. abatement of invalidity pension and invalidity allowance
November 1981	5 per cent. abatement of invalidity allowance restored
November 1983	Extension of provision of dependency increase for dependent husbands
November 1984	Men and women able to claim an increase for a child and for person looking after children on the same basis as each other
November 1984	Occupational pension treated as earnings for adult and child dependency increases
November 1984	Earnings rule for child dependency increases introduced
November 1984	Child dependency increase no longer payable for non-resident children
September 1985	Introduction of a common earnings rule for men and women claiming an increase for their spouse
September 1985	Abolition of dependency increases for other adult relatives
September 1985	Invalidity allowance reduced by entitlement to additional pension and/or guaranteed minimum pension
November 1985	5 per cent. abatement of invalidity pension restored
October 1986	Reduced rates of sickness benefit abolished[1]
February 1987	Married women no longer subject to a second downrating of benefit after 104 weeks in hospital
April 1988	Benefit became payable in certain circumstances with statutory maternity pay
April 1988	Hospital downrating changed to take place at six weeks and 52 weeks instead of eight weeks and 104 weeks
October 1988	Two-year national insurance contribution test introduced for sickness benefit[1]
October 1989	Local authority councillor's allowances disregarded when considering incapacity for work; benefit offset against allowances in excess of therapeutic earnings limit
October 1989	Personal pensions treated as earnings for adult and child dependency increases
April 1990	Therapeutic earnings limit increased by 23 per cent. —1990 benefit uprating 7·6 per cent.
April 1990	People on employment rehabilitation courses allowed to keep invalidity benefit, or receive the rehabilitation allowance
April 1992	People allowed to sit as members of disability appeal tribunals one day a week without losing benefit
April 1992	Entitlement to additional pension curtailed for earnings after the 1990-91 tax year; accrued rights preserved
April 1994	Benefit uprating to include extra increase to provide help towards VAT on fuel

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[1] Changes to the entitlement conditions for sickness benefit which affected the numbers subsequently qualifying for invalidity benefit.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people receiving invalidity benefit on 1 December 1993 were at that time aged (i) between 45 and 49 years, (ii) between 50 and 54 years, (iii) between 55 and 57 years and (iv) 58 years or over.

Mr. Scott: Information for 1 December 1993 is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The latest available information relates to 4 April 1992, and is in the table.

Invalidity benefit recipients by age[1]

Invalidity benefit recipients	*Number*[2]
Aged 45-49	127,000
Aged 50-54	187,000
Aged 55-57	154,000
Aged 58 and over	674,000

[1] Age as at 31 March 1992.

[2] Based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants in Great Britain at 4 April 1992, rounded to the nearest thousand.

Income Support

18. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children in Britain are dependent on income support; and how many were dependent on supplementary benefit in 1979.

Mr. Burt: In February 1993, 2·97 million children were dependent on an adult receiving income support. In November 1979 there were 0·92 million.

Notes:

1. Sources: supplementary benefit statistics annual inquiry, November 1979/income support statistics quarterly inquiry, February 1993.
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest ten thousand.
3. Children are defined as being under 16 years of age. Dependants are young people under the age of 19 still living in the parental home.

Pensioner Households

19. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioner households there were in 1979 and in the year for which the latest figures are available below the 1979 supplementary benefit level.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available. Supplementary benefit rates varied widely between households and it is therefore not possible to refer to a single level.

Since 1979, pensioners' average income has increased by 42 per cent.

Child Support Agency

21. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for further changes to the operation of the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: The recently announced changes were formulated in the light of representations received from hon. Members and the public, and of the recommendations of the Social Security Select Committee. They form a balanced package which takes account of the interests of children, parents with care, absent parents, and the taxpayer.

There are no plans for further change.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether there is a distinction under the terms of the Child Support Act 1991 between who can be notified of the outcome of a maintenance assessment decision dependent on whether the case is being dealt with in England and Wales or in Scotland.

Mr. Burt: The only such distinction is that a child who is over the age of 11 years and is resident in Scotland may apply to the Child Support Agency for maintenance assessment to be made in respect of him. If he makes such an application he, together with the parent with care and the absent parent are notified of the outcome of the application. There is no provision for a child resident in England or Wales to make an application under the Child Support Act.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland considers representations made by residents of Wales on Child Support Agency matters.

Mr. Burt: Where an application for child support maintenance is made by a parent with care who is resident in Northern Ireland in respect of an absent parent who is resident in Wales, the application would be dealt with in Northern Ireland, in accordance with the Child Support (Great Britain Reciprocal Arrangements) Regulations (Northern Ireland). Similarly, if a number of cases are linked together because they share a parent in common all the cases are dealt with under the legislation under which the first application was considered. In these cases, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would consider representations other than those proper to the independent adjudicating authorities.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what revenues or savings to public funds are expected to accrue as a result of the creation of the Child Support Agency; and what changes in the expected revenues or savings will arise from the implementation of the proposed changes in the agency's rules.

Mr. Burt: The amount of child support maintenance originally estimated to be collected in 1993-94 is £530 million. The actual amount will be lower than the estimate, but it is not possible to provide an accurate revised figure, since the full impact of the proposed policy changes is not yet known.

28. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement summarising changes the Government are introducing into the operation of the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: The proposed changes include: a significant increase in the margin of protected income which all absent parents keep above income support levels; reductions in the element within the formula which reflects the care needed by children, when the youngest child reaches age 11 and 14; reductions in the rate of contribution towards the additional element, above the basic maintenance requirement, where there are fewer than three children; and a substantial extension of the provisions for phasing in new payments for absent parents who previously had a formal maintenance agreement.

The changes form a balanced package which takes account of the interests of parents with care, absent parents, children and the taxpayer.

"A Lost Generation"

22. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what responses he has made to the report "A Lost Generation", published by the National Children's Home, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: I received a copy of the report about a month after it was published, but not directly from the National Children's Home. I replied to the sender and drew attention to the Department's expenditure on income support in 1993-94 which is to exceed £16 billion—an increase of £1·6 billion over 1992-93.

Benefits

24. **Mr. Coe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent measures his Department has taken to maintain the real level of benefits.

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State shall shortly be laying before the House the annual uprating order which, subject to parliamentary approval, will increase social security benefit rates from April. Benefits will be increased in line with inflation with additional increases for those on income-related benefits, pensioners, and the sick and disabled.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish an analysis of the estimated per capita expenditure in England, Wales and Scotland on *(a)* supplementary benefit, *(b)* unemployment benefit, *(c)* sickness and invalidity benefit, *(d)* industrial disablement benefit *(e)* housing benefit and *(f)* other benefits.

Mr. Burt: Information is not available in the precise form requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Estimated per capita expenditure

£ per person per year

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*
Income support	257	295	288
Unemployment benefit	32	30	25
Sickness benefit/invalidity benefit	102	178	247
Industrial disablement benefit	10	11	19
Housing benefit/council tax benefit	86	122	87

Notes:

1. Figures are for 1992-93 and are estimates only.
2. Estimates are based on benefit expenditure per head of population in England, Scotland and Wales and not an average of the number receiving each benefit.

State Pensions

27. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people per annum lose their entitlement to part of their state pension because of incomplete contributions.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested.

The number of men and women resident in Great Britain who reached state pension age—65 for men and 60 for women—in the year ending 31 March 1993—the latest date for which information is available—and who were awarded a state retirement pension based on their own contributions at less than the standard rate due to insufficient contributions was 130,920.

Information is not available where state pension is claimed after age 65 for men or 60 for women or where a person has no entitlement to state pension.

National Insurance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average number of years of national insurance contributions per claimant which have been paid by people now receiving invalidity benefit.

Mr. Scott: The information is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Children (Unemployment)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the latest figures showing for the Durham area *(a)* the number of children who live in families with an unemployed head and *(b)* the number of children living in families with a long-term unemployed head.

Mr. Burt: Information is not available in the form requested. For information on Great Britain as a whole I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) on 28 January, *Official Report,* column *449*..

Benefit Overpayments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases action has been taken to recover overpayments of benefits under common law in each year since 1970.

Mr. Burt: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Social Fund

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the 1994-95 social fund budget will be broken down between *(a)* mandatory grants, *(b)* budgeting loans, *(c)* crisis loans and *(d)* community care grants.

Mr. Scott: No decision has yet been made on the breakdown of the discretionary social fund budget between loans and grants. Regulated payments from the social fund are not subject to a cash-limited budget.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the administrative cost as a proportion of expenditure on the social fund for each year since its inception.

Mr. Scott: Administration costs as a proportion of programme expenditure are published annually in the departmental report. Annual social fund administration costs have only been included since 1990-91. Details are in the table.

	Social fund administration costs (in £ millions)	*Administrative cost as a percentage of benefit expenditure*
1990-91	132	47·1
1991-92	163	45·2

The information for 1992-93 will be contained in the next departmental report due to be published in March 1994.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish a table showing the gross and net social fund discretionary budget in each year since 1988-89 in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms in 1993-94 prices, broken down into (i) budgeting loans, (ii) crisis loans and (iii) community care grants.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the table. Gross expenditure has risen in real terms since 1988-89. Direct comparisons between net expenditure in 1988-89 and subsequent years would ignore the additional expenditure made possible by the recycling of money received from loan repayments.

Social fund expenditure since 1988-89

all figures are £ million

	1988-89 outturn	*1989-90 outturn*	*1990-91 outturn*	*1991-92 outturn*	*1992-93 outturn*
Crisis loans (gross)	17	22	28	37	43
Budgeting loans (gross)	108	119	128	160	181
Crisis loans (net)	9	8	9	11	9
Budgeting loans (net)	68	25	22	38	27
Community care grants	41	60	67	79	90
Total gross expenditure	166	201	223	276	314
Total gross expenditure 1993-94 prices[1]	218	248	254	297	324

[1] Real terms figures have been calculated using the current GDP deflator and may alter. In any event the social fund budget is based on a number of factors, including the level of gross allocation permitted by expected loan recoveries; and is not linked to inflation forecasts.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing *(a)* the gross and *(b)* the net discretionary social fund budget on a per capita basis of the number of income support claimants in (i) cash and (ii) real terms for each year from 1988-89 to 1994-95.

Mr. Scott: The available information is in the table.

Expenditure and caseload figures for 1993-94 and subsequent years will not be available until after the end of the relevant financial year. However, the net social fund discretionary budget was increased by £5 million in 1993-94 which will lead to significantly higher expenditure in that year.

Social fund expenditure per capita of income support claimants

Year	*Cash terms* £	[1]*Real terms* £
1988-89	38·52	50·81
1989-90	48·38	59·69
1990-91	53·22	60·62
1991-92	59·23	63·52
1992-93	59·02	60·90

[1] Real terms figures are expressed at 1993-94 prices and have been calculated using the current GDP deflator and may alter.

Compensation Payments

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what percentage of the benefits claimants who have been awarded compensation for injury and disease and who have repaid benefits to the compensation recovery unit subsequently had their compensation payment reduced because of contributory negligence;

(2) what is the total sum of money claimed back under the Social Security Act 1990 by the compensation recovery unit from benefit claimants who have been awarded compensation for injury or disease and who have had their compensation payment reduced because of contributory negligence.

Mr. Scott: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Goode Report

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new proposals he has to implement the conclusions of the Goode report.

Mr. Hague: The Department issued a series of consultation papers in December to promote discussion of the issues raised by the Goode report. The responses to the consultation exercise will inform decision making, and the Government will make proposals in due course.

Advisory Panel on Assessment of Incapacity

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) for what reasons the identity of the members of the advisory panel on assessment of incapacity is regarded as confidential;

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of briefing and background papers supplied to members of the advisory panel on assessment of incapacity;

(3) whether members of the advisory panel on assessment of incapacity have access to the responses to the consultation document on the subject;

(4) if he will publish the form of invitation to join the advisory panel on assessment of incapacity.

Mr. Scott: The consultation exercise and the associated consultation document seek views from all interested parties on the proposed new, more objective, medical incapacity test. The assessment panel has been formed to help us construct incapacity scales to be used in the test. The work of the panel is an important part of the consultation exercise.

The panel is being asked to complete a series of exercises which focus on technical questions, and to give their individual expert opinions, not to act as representatives. We are not seeking to influence the decisions of panel members, and we hope they will be free from other pressures, although we do encourage them to discuss tasks with colleagues if they wish.

The panel has been drawn as widely as possible from the medical and scientific communities and from groups of and for disabled people so that a full range of views can be heard. We welcome the comments of individual panel members on the wider issues discussed in the consultation document as well as their views on the incapacity scales.

We are committed to producing a report on the results of the consultation exercise and on the new test. Parliament will then have the opportunity to consider the detail of the new test when the relevant regulations are made. This will allow the widest possible public scrutiny of the methods used.

A copy of the background paper used by the assessment panel and a form of the invitation to join the panel have been placed in the Library.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the projected savings from the arrangements for the dependents of new incapacity benefit claimants under pensionable age during weeks 28 to 52 of any period of sickness.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated that there will be a net saving of £5 million in 1995-96 and £10 million in 1996-97.

Note: Estimate expressed in constant 1993-94 prices, rounded to nearest £5 million and is net of offsetting changes in expenditure on income-related benefits.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the projected savings from the introduction of higher rate incapacity benefit payable to claimaints from weeks 28 to 52 in any period of sickness.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated that paying the higher rate of short-term incapacity benefit between the 28th and 52nd weeks of incapacity will produce net savings of around £110 million in 1995-96, and around £150 million in 1996-97.

Notes:

(1) Estimates expressed in constant 1993-94 prices, rounded to the nearest £10 million, and net of offsetting changes in income related benefit expenditure.

(2) Estimates take account of the effect on incapacity benefit recipients of the planned changes in the qualifying conditions for the disability premium paid with the income-related benefits.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will exempt benefits claimants who are awarded compensation for asbestos-related diseases from repaying benefits under the Social Security Act 1990.

Mr. Hague: The compensation recovery scheme is now administered under the Social Security Administration Act 1992. We have no plans to add awards for asbesto-related diseases to the list of exempt payments.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Scott: Including casual staff, approximately 100,000 as at 31 December 1993.

Mortgage Payments

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to provide means-tested assistance towards mortgage payments for people in low-paid employment who are excluded from income support.

Mr. Burt: We have no such plans. A mortgage benefit scheme which helps such people would be very costly as well as significantly increasing dependence on state assistance both by individuals and the market.

Job Seeker's Allowance

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what distinction will be made in payment of the job seeker's allowance between *(a)* claimants under 25 years old and *(b)* claimants over 25 years old, from April 1996.

Mr. Burt: Job seeker's allowance will be a single, integrated benefit with unified rates of payment aligned to those for income support. Therefore, differential rates will apply to people aged 18 to 24 and those aged 25 years or over.

Social Security Tribunal

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many times in the last six months he has not accepted the recommendation of the social security tribunal regarding a reduction in the repayment of benefit owed to the Department where the person has been sentenced through the criminal courts and is still in receipt of state benefits;

(2) how many times in the last six months he has used his powers to overturn a decision of the social security tribunal and instructed that no benefit repayment should be made where a person has been sentenced by the criminal court and is still in receipt of state benefit;

(3) what discretion the social security tribunal has to recommend that no repayments of state benefits are made where an illegal claim for benefit has been made, and the claimant has been sentenced by the criminal court.

Mr. Burt: Social security appeal tribunals can only determine whether the adjudication officer has applied the law correctly in determining an overpayment. The decision to enforce recovery of an overpayment is a matter solely for the Secretary of State. Therefore there is no discretion nor any recommendation in these circumstances.

State Earnings-related Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much SERPS pension is payable in 1994-95 to a contracted-out employee with average earnings who retired at pension age at the end of each year from 1980 to 1993.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 19 January 1994]:* The information is in the table.

Year of Award[1]	*Amount £*[2]
1979-80	1·56
1980-81	2·82
1981-82	3·91
1982-83	5·18
1983-84	5·61
1984-85	6·49
1985-86	7·28
1986-87	7·37
1987-88	8·23
1988-89	8·82
1989-90	8·93
1990-91	8·56

Year of Award[1]	Amount £[2]
1991-92	5·90
1992-93	5·41
1993-94	5·29

Source: estimate prepared by Government Actuary's Department based on "all persons" average earnings in each year.

Notes:

[1] Tax year 6 April—5 April

[2] Weekly amount of additional pension at proposed rates from 11 April 1994 net of "contracted-out deduction".

Pension Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Langaurgh (Mr. Bates) of 1 December, *Official Report,* column *598,* if he will give figures for the numbers of employees opted out of state earnings-related pensions in each region of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* Information for 1991-92, the latest year for which information is available, is in the table.

Number of people paying class 1 contributions during 1991-92 with an appropriate personal pension or an occupational pension, by region.

Region	Number (thousands)
Total United Kingdom	14,686·7
Northern	813·3
Yorkshire and Humberside	899·5
East midlands	1,049·2
East Anglia	521·2
South-east	4,574·0
South-west	1,145·7
West midlands	1,390·7
North-west	1,642·0
Wales	694·2
Scotland	1,389·4
Northern Ireland	345·7
Region unknown	221·8

Note: Figures relate to numbers of people not number of employments. Data derived from Inland Revenue statistics, 1 per cent. sample.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of people holding *(a)* personal pensions and *(b)* occupational pensions (i) in total and (ii) in each region of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* The number of people accruing benefits with personal pensions in 1991-92 was 7·8 million. The number of people accruing benefits in an occupational pension scheme in 1991-92 was 10·7 million. Only the numbers of people with appropriate personal pensions and contracted-out occupational pensions can be broken down by region. Information for 1991-92, the latest year for which information is available, is in the table.

Number of people paying class 1 contributions during 1991-92 with an appropriate personal pension or an occupational pension by region

(Thousands)

Region	Class 1 contracted out contributions only	Class 1 contracted-out and contracted-in contributions[1]	Appropriate personal pension
Total United Kingdom	8,159·0	1,197·9	5,329·8
Northern	481·6	57·0	274·7
Yorkshire and Humberside	326·7	95·2	477·6
East midlands	559·0	82·1	408·1
East Anglia	272·9	40·8	207·5
South-east	2,534·4	396·0	1,643·6
South-west	639·8	92·0	413·9
West midlands	761·5	103·9	525·3
North-west	955·0	120·8	566·2
Wales	414·1	54·7	225·4
Scotland	818·2	115·4	455·8
Northern Ireland	212·1	25·0	108·6
Region unknown	183·7	15·0	23·1

Note: Figures relate to numbers of people not number of employments. Data derived from Inland Revenue statistics, 1 per cent. sample.

[1] People who are contracted out for part of the year and contracted in for the remainder.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity Supplies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what *(a)* costs and *(b)* benefits accrue to Britain from the reduction in electricity voltage agreed with the European Community.

Mr. Eggar: All EC countries are changing their low voltage supply systems to a nominal voltage of 230/400 volts to provide voltage harmonisation throughout the EC. The United Kingdom decided to do so after extensive consultation.

The costs to Britain of this standardisation will largely be borne by the electricity supply industry. Estimates put these at £680 million, at 1992 prices, over a 30-year period, together with an annual increase in distribution losses of £20 million.

The benefits are less readily quantified but are those arising from standardisation which brings greater market opportunities to manufacturers, exporters and importers, and to consumers.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the conversion costs of the electricity supply industry to reduce voltage on supplies.

Mr. Eggar: The electricity supply industry has advised that to move from a reduction of 230 volts+10 per cent./–10 per cent. to, say, +6 per cent./–6 per cent. will require the replacement of many distribution transformers. The cost is estimated to be £680 million at 1992 prices assuming a phased replacement programme over a 30-year period.

GATT

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what agreements were reached at the trade negotiations committee of GATT, held on 20 January, in regards to preparation of a work programme on trade and the environment for the forthcoming Marrakesh meeting of GATT.

Mr. Needham: The GATT trade negotiations committee decided on 15 December to draw up a programme of work:

> to identify the relationship between trade measures and environmental measures, in order to promote sustainable development and
>
> to make appropriate recommendations on whether any modifications of the provisions of the multilateral trading system are required, compatible with the open, equitable and non-discriminatory nature of the system.

It was agreed that the TNC would present the programme of work for adoption as soon as possible and no later than the ministerial meeting in Marrakesh.

Nuclear Fuel Industry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new opportunities will become available to the British nuclear fuel industry following the recent decision of the French nuclear authorities to reopen its fast breeder reactor project at Creys Malville.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for the companies concerned.

Malaysia (Exports)

Mr. Mudie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the value of exports from the United Kingdom to Malaysia in each year since 1980.

Mr. Needham: The information is given in the following table.

Value of United Kingdom exports to Malaysia

Year	*£ million*
1980	223·3
1981	196·2
1982	210·6
1983	248·3
1984	283·1
1985	281·7
1986	226·9
1987	258·0
1988	310·4
1989	441·5
1990	550·7
1991	582·3
1992	635·9

Sources: Annual Abstract of Statistics Business Monitor MA20, Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Pergau Project

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many files marked "Not for NAO eyes" his Department holds in relating to the Pergau hydro-electric project in Malaysia.

Mr. Needham: My Department holds two files marked "Not for NAO eyes" relating to the National Audit Office inquiry into the Pergau hydro-electric project.

As explained in the answer I gave to the right hon. Gentleman on 6 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *38,* the marking "Not for National Audit Office eyes" is used only in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office, under which current documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the National Audit Office.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what options he is considering for the scope and format of the review of the future prospects of nuclear power in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) on 16 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *759.*

Coal Mines

Mr. Lester: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report,* column *645,* if a subsidy may be paid by the Government to British Coal if the mine in question is not expected to return to profit shortly without the aid of a subsidy.

Mr. Eggar: The aim of the subsidy is to provide temporary financial support to pits that have long-term potential, to provide them the time needed to reduce costs and become competitive. In order to qualify for subsidy my Department must therefore be satisfied that the pit has a realistic chance of supplying coal on a commercially viable basis in the longer term, without the need for subsidy.

Regional Enterprise Grants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what total amount of funding has been made available over the last year by *(a)* regional enterprise grants and *(b)* the English Estates scheme.

Mr. Sainsbury: The provision for regional enterprise grants in 1993-94 in England is £8·8 million. Forecast capital expenditure by English Estates on behalf of my Department in 1993-94 is £71 million.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has examined a copy of the Touche Ross report on the prospective profitability of the THORP plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 17 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *986.*

Deregulation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many copies of the final recommendations document of his deregulation task forces were printed; at what cost; to whom were they distributed; and if he will make a statement on the proposals for reform contained in the documents.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: A total of 10,000 copies of the booklet setting out the proposals of the seven business deregulation task forces have been printed at a cost of £1,100. Copies were made available to Members via the Vote Office and were distributed to Government Departments, the press, business and consumer organisations, people who submitted evidence to the task forces and members of the public on request. Of the 605 proposals, 250 have been agreed, 280 are under review and 75 have been rejected.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the methods used by his Department to assess whether particular regulations are a burden to business.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The principal methods of assessing whether regulations are an undue burden upon business are compliance cost assessment and risk assessment. The CCA methodology is set out in a booklet "Checking the Cost to Business: A Guide to Compliance Cost Assessment" and guidance on risk assessment is given in a booklet "Regulation in the Balance: A Guide to Risk Assessment". Copies of both booklets have been placed in the Library of the House.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been spent on information technology in each of the last five years within the Insolvency Service; and what is the projected expenditure over the next five years.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The expenditure on information technology on behalf of the Insolvency Service during the last and next five years is in the table:

	£ million
1989-90	[illegible]·9
1990-91	2·0
1991-92	1·5
1992-93	3·0
1993-94	5·2
1994-95	3·5
1995-96	2·6
1996-97	2·5
1997-98	2·5
1998-99	2·5

The current and earlier years figures include, where appropriate, capital expenditure paid, on behalf of the Insolvency Service, from the DTI's capital computer budget.

Figures for 1994-95 onwards include committed current and capital expenditure plus minor amounts for project enhancements. Future major projects are excluded as these are yet to be quantified or approved.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many bankruptcy prosecutions were successfully obtained by the Insolvency Service for each of the last five years; and how many of those cases in each year were prosecuted under each of the relevant sections of the Insolvency Act 1986.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The numbers of bankrupts successfully prosecuted by my Department on reports received from the Insolvency Service were 249 in 1989, 209 in 1990, 220 in 1991 and 192 in 1992. The total for 1993 will not be known until all court returns have been received.

Information on the number of convictions obtained under the relevant sections of the Insolvency Act 1986 and associated legislation is regularly published in the Insolvency Service general annual report, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Disqualification Proceedings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many directives he has issued in each of the last five years for the institution of disqualification proceedings showing the number issued *(a)* after receipt of a report from the Official Receiver and *(b)* after receipt of a report from insolvency practitioners.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The following number of directions to proceed have been given:

	In official receiver cases	*In insolvency practitioner cases*	*Total*
1988-89	201	218	419
1989-90	160	302	462
1990-91	204	295	499
1991-92	304	396	700
1992-93	164	400	564
1993[1]	50	273	323

[1] 9 months to 31 December 1993.

Bio-ethics

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which aspects of the report of the Nuffield committee on bio-ethics in relation to the use of genetic screening information by insurance companies are being considered by his Department.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Lord President on 11 January 1994, *Official Report,* column *83.* My Department, in consultation with others, is considering those aspects of the report concerned with the balance to be struck between the commercial freedom of insurance companies, considerations of public health and the individual's right to privacy.

British Nuclear Fuels plc

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the chairperson of BNFL about the redistribution of the surplus in the pension fund.

Mr. Eggar: I meet the chairman of British Nuclear Fuels plc from time to time to discuss a range of issues.

Employees of British Nuclear Fuels plc are members of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority pension schemes. There is no pension fund and consequently no surplus as these schemes are unfunded public service pension schemes. Payments to members are met through class IV, vote 3 of the supply estimates.

Energy Savings Trust

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to ensure that new gas suppliers maintain the support the Government have established for the energy savings trust.

Mr. Eggar: I shall consider what obligations it is appropriate to impose upon suppliers to the new competitive gas market in the light of the response to the consultation which I shall be carrying out jointly with the Director General of Gas Supply.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what requirement he *(a)* imposes and *(b)* plans to impose on the director-general of Ofgas to take into account energy efficiency in her decisions.

Mr. Eggar: Section 4 of the Gas Act imposes upon the Director General of Gas Supply the duty to exercise her functions under the Act in the manner which she considers is best calculated, inter alia, to promote efficiency and economy on the part of gas suppliers and the efficient use of gas.

Consultants

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the cost of employing consultants to advise on the future of *(a)* the Accounts Services Agency, *(b)* the industrial research establishment agencies, *(c)* the Insolvency Service Agency and *(d)* the Patent Office Agency.

Mr. Eggar: The fees paid to the consultants employed in each case are confidential for commercial reasons.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a copy of the relevant consultants' report dealing with the future of *(a)* the Accounts Services Agency, *(b)* the industrial research establishment agencies, *(c)* the Insolvency Service agency and *(d)* the United Kingdom Patent Office Agency.

Mr. Eggar: These reports may contain information which is managerially or commercially sensitive. Decisions on whether to place copies in the Library of the House will be taken when the findings of each report are considered.

Advisers

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the terms on which *(a)* Francis Maude and *(b)* Ray Reardon are employed as advisers to his Department.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Francis Maude has agreed to chair, in a voluntary capacity, the new deregulation task force.

Ray Reardon has been asked to consider how various corporate restructuring techniques could be applied to parts of the Department. He has also agreed to do this in a voluntary capacity.

They are not being paid to undertake these tasks although the Department has agreed to reimburse them their necessary travel expenses.

Iron and Steel Readaptation Benefit Scheme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will reconsider his decision to end the iron and steel readaptation benefit scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) on 27 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *369-70*.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 1 February 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993 the number of employees convicted of fraud was, respectively, two, one, none, three and three. Of these, six were dismissed by the Department, and three resigned before any internal disciplinary proceedings were taken.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Employees of the Lord Chancellor's Department who are convicted of fraud will be subject to internal disciplinary proceedings. Although each case will be treated on its own merits, serious fraud is regarded as gross misconduct, and will usually lead to dismissal at the conclusion of the internal disciplinary proceedings.

HEALTH

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the cost of implementing the regional health authority changes proposed from 1 April 1994.

Dr. Mawhinney: The proposals announced in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement on "Managing the New NHS" on 21 October 1993 will streamline national health service central management. It is not possible to estimate the cost of implementing the proposals at this stage. However, the changes will result in substantial savings which will be reinvested in patient care.

Public Relations

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the occasions since 1990 on which an external public relations company or consultant was employed by her Department with the name of the company or consultant involved; and what was the cost of each transaction.

Mr. Sackville: The functions that are identified as public relations are normally carried out by the Department's information division.

No public relations company or consultant has been directly employed since 1990. During European Drug Prevention Week the organisers sub-contracted a public relations consultant to help produce a video news release. Costs for this cannot be separately identified.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to buy or borrow photographs; and if she will make a statement;

(2) how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of her rooms.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to acquire any photographs. Four paintings and 11 prints loaned by the Government art collection adorn the walls of her office.

Overseas Adoption Helpline

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls have been received by the overseas adoption helpline in each quarter since it was set up; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The table lists the number of recorded inquiries received by the overseas adoption helpline since its inception on 11 May 1992.

Year and quarter	*Number of recorded inquiries*
1992	
May to June	[1]124
July to September	492
October to December	399
1993	
January to March	936
April to June	598
July to September	528
October to December	566

[1] This figure covers a seven week period only.

Learning Disabilities

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in the northern region have been born mentally handicapped in each year since 1989; and what was the name of the village or town of each child.

Mr. Bowis: Severe learning disability is not always detectable at birth. The overall prevalence in the United Kingdom of severe learning disability is estimated to be between three and four per 1,000 population.

Paediatric Consultants

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric consultants there were in England in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table.

Hospital paediatric consultants in England as at 30 September each year, in whole-time equivalents

	Paediatrics	*Paediatric neurology*	*Paediatric surgery*	*Child and adolescent psychiatry*	*Total*
1988	597·2	11·8	34·2	316·9	960·1
1989	678·8	11·2	39·5	310·3	1,039·8
1990	699·1	9·7	36·3	333·3	1,078·4
1991	723·0	14·7	47·3	325·9	1,110·9
1992	768·6	13·5	44·4	304·4	1,130·9

Notes: Information is taken from the Hospital Medical and Dental Census for each year. Information about the number of consultants in the community is not available by specialty.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants have sought early retirement in each of the last five years in each region.

Dr. Mawhinney: Data collected do not distinguish between consultants and associate specialists and it is not maintained in regional form.

The total numbers of consultants and associate specialists who retired early under provisions to allow for replacement of senior consultant posts are:

	Number
1989-90	75
1990-91	45
1991-92	38
1992-93	35
[1]1993-94	48

[1] To 31 December 1993.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of officers employed on programmes dealing with drug abuse in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bowis: Government guidelines state that drug misusers should have access to a range of services, including advice and counselling, in-patient and community detoxification, residential rehabilitation and follow up support, where needed. These services are provided by both the statutory and non-statutory sectors. Services employ a range of staff which may include specialist doctors, drug workers, general practitioners, community psychiatric nurses, social and youth workers. Information on the total of these is not held centrally.

Mr. Richard Marsh

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *1003*, what are the particular qualifications, expertise or experience relating to health and social services of her special adviser, Mr. Richard Marsh.

Mr. Sackville: I do not intend to comment on the qualifications, expertise or experience of the special adviser to my right hon. Friend.

International Peto Institute

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress there has been in the construction of an International Peto Institute in Budapest; when she expects building work to begin; when Her Majesty's Government's obligation to help fund this project will expire; and what assessment she has made of whether the funding pledged by Her Majesty's Government to this project could be more effectively spent in creating an equivalent facility in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bowis: Under the agreement between the United Kingdom and Hungarian Governments, further payments are dependent upon the commencement of construction of the International Peto Institute, for which no date has yet been set by the International Peto Foundation. Under this agreement, the institute has to be operational by February 1996 to avoid repayment of all or part of the payments made. Facilities for conductive education are already developing in the United Kingdom.

Diabetics

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policy she has for targeting care towards insulin-dependent diabetics who are lone parents.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has no plans to adopt such a policy.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the *(a)* total budget for diabetic care and *(b)* the budget for education work among diabetics.

Mr. Sackville: Figures for the total budget for diabetic care are not available nor are figures for the budget for education work among diabetics.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the numbers of insulin-dependent diabetics in the United Kingdom; and how many of them live alone.

Mr. Sackville: The number of insulin-dependent diabetics in the United Kingdom is not recorded; neither is it recorded how many live alone.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she plans to encourage diabetics to be open about their condition to ensure community support.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has no plans to seek to influence personal decisions of this nature.

Hypnosis

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on hypnotism for entertainment; and what research she has sponsored into hypnosis and its consequences for health.

Mr. Sackville: The use of hypnotism on stage is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for

National Heritage and, on television, for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Within the national health service, hospital medical staff and general practitioners can arrange for their patients to receive complementary and alternative therapies, including hypnosis, where they are satisfied that a clinical need for the treatment exists and if the resources can be made available locally, subject to the patient's consent to the treatment. It is widely accepted that hypnosis has a valuable role as an adjunct to medical and psychological treatments and is legitimately practised by a range of reputable therapists. Health professionals are bound by the ethical codes of conduct of their individual professions and, when practising in the NHS, by the terms of their contracts with NHS bodies. The Department has commissioned no research into hypnosis.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all chairs and non-executive directors of NHS trust hospitals who hold a chair or non-executive post at more than one NHS trust; and if she will list the trusts concerned.

Dr. Mawhinney: Under the National Health Service Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 1990—SI 2024 Regulation 11(1)(e)—serving chairmen or non-executive directors of national health service trusts may not serve concurrently on the board of another NHS authority or trust.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of hospital admissions in the East Anglia region are *(a)* immediate, *(b)* within six weeks, *(c)* within three months and *(d)* longer than a year; and what the figures were in May 1990.

Dr. Mawhinney: The latest year for which figures are available is 1991-92, in that year, 56 per cent. of hospital admissions were immediate. Of those admitted from waiting lists, 52·1 per cent. were admitted within six weeks, 69·1 per cent. within three months and 7 per cent. had to wait longer than a year.

In May 1990, 57 per cent. of admissions were immediate. Of those admitted from waiting lists, 40·7 per cent. were admitted within six weeks, 67·1 per cent. within three months and 4·6 per cent. had to wait longer than a year.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in *(a)* the East Anglian region and *(b)* the Great Yarmouth and Waveney district had been waiting more than one year for hospital admission in (i) April 1991 and (ii) the latest available month.

Dr. Mawhinney: There were 10,175 patients waiting more than 12 months for in-patient or day case treatment in East Anglian regional health authority at 31 March 1991. This included 3,502 patients who had been waiting more than two years. By 30 September 1993, the number waiting more than a year had decreased by 66 per cent. to 3,503 and no one was waiting more than two years.

The area covered by Great Yarmouth and Waveney district health authority in March 1991 is now covered by Anglian Harbours and James Paget hospital national health service trusts. At 31 March 1991, in the district health authority 1,420 patients had waited more than a year for treatment and 586 of these had waited more than two years. By 30 September 1993 in the trusts, the number waiting over a year had fallen by 68 per cent. to 450 and no one was waiting more than two years.

Skin Disorders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which statistics her Department keeps about the prevalence of skin disorders in the United Kingdom *(a)* by region, *(b)* by district health authority and *(c)* by family health services authority.

Mr. Sackville: The Department holds data for England and Wales on the incidence of skin cancer, on death rates, on numbers of deaths and on the average annual years of life lost per 10,000 of the resident population by region, district health authoriy and family health services authority. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys keeps a register of newly diagnosed cases of skin cancer by regional health authority, district health authority and FHSA. It also records the number of deaths by sex and age from diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue by region, district health authority and FHSA. In addition, the Department keeps central statistics by district and regions on leprosy, which is a notifiable disease.

Health Expenditure

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent per head of population in *(a)* Great Yarmouth and Waveney health district and *(b)* the East Anglia region in (i) May 1979 and (ii) May 1991; and what is the expected level in April 1994.

Mr. Sackville: The information available shows that Great Yarmouth and Waveney health authority's revenue outturn increased from £40,349,819 in 1988-89—1988-89 cash—to £73,181,520 in 1992-1993—1992-1993 cash. Over the same period, East Anglia region's revenue outturn increased from £474,430,697 to £717,980,886. The population of East Anglia region was 2,034,439 in 1988 and 2,089,398 in 1992, that of Great Yarmouth and Waveney in the same years was 200,091 and 202,255. This represents a spend per head of population in 1988-89 of over £201 in Great Yarmouth and Waveney and £233 in East Anglia as a whole. In 1992-93, the corresponding figures are over £361 for Great Yarmouth and £343 for East Anglia.

Consultant Referrals

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of consultant referrals in the East Anglia region are *(a)* immediate, *(b)* within six weeks, *(c)* within three months and *(d)* longer than a year; and what the figures were in May 1990.

Dr. Mawhinney: Summaries of waiting times for in-patient and day case treatment are given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England" published twice yearly. The latest published figures for September 1993 are available in the Library. Under the patients charter, regional health authorities are required to set local charter standards for waiting times for first out-patient appointments. These are published locally.

Hospital Treatment

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients from the Great Yarmouth and Waveney health district were treated in hospitals outside the district in the last year in which figures are available; and how many out-of-district patients were treated within the Anglian Harbours hospital trust and the James Paget hospital.

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend may wish to Contact Dr. Ronald Duncan, Mrs. Kath Currie and Mr. John Wells, chairmen of the Great Yarmouth and Waveney health authority, Anglian Harbours national health service trust and the James Paget hospital trust respectively, for this information.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest figures for response times by ambulances to 999 calls for each of the trust and health authority areas in East Anglia; and what is the average for England as a whole.

Mr. Sackville: Information on ambulance emergency response times is not collected centrally on an individual health authority or trust basis. The latest available information by ambulance authority is shown in the table.

Patient transport services
Emergency calls response times 1992-93: England

Ambulance authority	*Total number of emergency calls resulting in ambulance arriving at scene of incidents (Thousands)*	*Response within 8 minutes Per cent.*	*Response within 19 minutes (rural) 14 minutes (urban) Per cent.*
Rural authorities			
Cumbria	15·3	55·6	91·2
Durham	30·3	51·6	97·1
Humberside	43·0	72·8	99·2
Northumbria (NHS Trust)	77·6	67·8	99·0
North Yorkshire	23·1	58·8	95·4
Derbyshire	35·2	46·6	95·7
Leicestershire	32·6	54·4	97·0
Lincolnshire (NHS Trust)	17·8	62·2	95·3
Nottinghamshire	54·7	57·9	97·7
Cambridgeshire	19·1	40·9	94·2
Norfolk (NHS Trust)	27·5	57·5	96·7
Suffolk	11·9	53·2	92·1
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	59·6	54·3	96·9
Essex (NHS Trust)	66·1	57·8	98·6
East Sussex	36·9	67·7	97·7
Kent	57·8	55·2	96·4
West Sussex	26·8	65·6	97·3
Dorset	27·8	54·6	96·1
Hampshire	46·7	55·9	97·4
Wiltshire	15·1	60·7	95·9
Isle of Wight	4·3	59·5	97·9
Berkshire	28·4	58·9	99·0
Buckinghamshire	22·1	62·0	97·0
Northamptonshire	17·8	68·0	98·2
Oxfordshire	16·1	51·8	94·2
Cornwall (NHS Trust)	16·5	41·2	90·0
Devon (NHS Trust)	38·4	60·2	98·5
Gloucestershire (NHS Trust)	13·5	57·8	96·8
Somerset	11·8	58·9	94·7
Hereford and Worcester	21·3	61·9	97·1
Shropshire	12·7	51·1	96·0
Staffordshire (NHS Trust)	39·6	53·4	95·3
Warwickshire	14·4	49·4	95·3
Lancashire	69·8	65·9	98·7
Urban authorities			
Cleveland (NHS Trust)	24·2	73·0	97·0
West Yorkshire	108·2	55·0	94·0
South Yorkshire (NHS Trust)	56·4	46·6	89·9
Surrey	44·0	55·1	94·8
London Ambulance Service	474·5	11·3	58·5
Avon (NHS Trust)	37·0	55·5	90·0
West Midlands	140·7	45·2	91·1
Mersey (NHS Trust)	147·7	68·1	95·4
Greater Manchester	165·4	60·5	97·4

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines have been issued by her Department regarding the need for hospital accident and emergency departments to make staffing provision for possible increased workload caused by occasional, exceptionally high levels of emergency treatment required.

Mr. Sackville: Every health authority is required to have contingency plans for dealing with major incidents. However, it is for individual hospitals to determine local staffing levels in accident and emergency departments which, so far as possible, match expected workloads and take account of busy periods.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in her Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Sackville: Prior to March 1991, the Department of Social Security was responsible for action on staff discipline for the Department of Health. It will be providing information for 1989 to March 1991.

The following information gives the number of Department of Health staff judged to be guilty of obtaining money by making false representations since March 1991:

In 1991, three staff were judged guilty of fraud and two were dismissed. The third was given a severe reprimand.

In 1992, one member of staff was given an oral warning and another was downgraded.

In 1993, four staff were dismissed.

In 1991 and 1992, those not dismissed were guilty of minor offences.

The penalty imposed depends on the severity of the offence, the member of staff's length of service and previous conduct. In cases of fraud involving significant amounts of money, dismissal is automatic.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Sackville: All civil servants are subject to strict rules of conduct and are expected at all times to maintain high levels of integrity. Any member of the Department of Health's staff found guilty of obtaining money or goods by making false representations would be subject to disciplinary penalties which range from a written warning to dismissal. All cases of fraud involving significant amounts of money would result in dismissal.

Patient Care

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all those services for patient care in East Anglian regional hospitals, Anglian Harbours hospitals trust and the James Paget hospital Gorleston, which have been expanded since May 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The number of patients treated in East Anglian region continues to rise. Since 1982, in-patient activity is up by more than 40 per cent. and day cases up by more than 135 per cent. In the Great Yarmouth and Waveney health authority area the increases were over 40 per cent. and 300 per cent. respectively.

Since 1979, the number of hospital doctors in the region has risen by more than 50 per cent. and there have been more than 40 major capital projects in the region costing over £130 million.

My hon. Friend may wish to contact Sir Colin Walker and Dr. Ronald Currie, chairmen of East Anglian regional health authority and the Great Yarmouth and Waveney health authority respectively, for more details.

NHS Pay

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision has been made in the NHS budget for 1994-95 for the implementation of the recommendations of the pay review bodies.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health said at the time of the Chancellor's autumn statement, the national health service has been given additional resources of some £1·6 billion for 1994-95. If pay rises are earned through increased efficiency, as the Government urged in their evidence to the review bodies, these resources will make possible an increase in activity of around 4 per cent.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

St. Helena

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visitors and work permits have been applied for by residents of St. Helena; and how many have been granted in each year since 1989.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: St. Helenians do not require prior entry clearance to come to the United Kingdom as visitors and the number actually entering the United Kingdom is not separately recorded.

The number of work permits granted to St. Helenians from 1989 to 1993 is as follows:

Year	*Work permit*
1989	51
1990	53
1991	30
1992	34
1993	20

Figures for the total number of applications are not available.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements exist for St. Helenians to be treated for serious injury or disease which cannot be carried out on the island.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The services on St. Helena provide medical attention in the first instance. Patients requiring longer-term treatment are referred to Cape Town or the United Kingdom under arrangements which work well. These referrals travel by the Royal Mail Ship St. Helena.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many St. Helenians have been working *(a)* on Ascension island and *(b)* in the Falklands in each year since 1989.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The number of St. Helenians working on Ascension island and the Falkland islands in the years 1989 to 1993 was as follows:

	Ascension Island	*Falkland Islands*
1989	459	132
1990	470	209
1991	501	262
1992	488	274
1993	534	214

Kashmir

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Indian high commission on the issuing of visas to allow *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* Amnesty International access to that part of Kashmir which is under Indian jurisdiction.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have frequently urged the Indian Government to allow visits by independent observers and human rights groups, including Amnesty International, to Kashmir.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy toward the decision of the International Court of Justice to rule on the legality of nuclear weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our position is that the use of nuclear weapons would have to be judged as lawful or not in the light of the particular circumstances in which they were used, and that it is inappropriate to burden the International Court of Justice with hypothetical questions of this nature.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he will undertake in deciding whether to make submissions to the International Court of Justice on the legality of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We will be making a submission to the International Court of Justice on the question of the legality of nuclear weapons. Submissions are due to be made by 10 June.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to make a submission to the International Court of Justice on the legality of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We will be making a submission.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is prepared to submit from British organisations on the legality of nuclear weapons to the International Court of Justice.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None. Our submission to the International Court of Justice will set out the position of the Government on this question.

India

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Indian high commissioner about the continued detention of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Abdul Gani Lone and Shabir Shah.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Her Majesty's high commission in New Delhi has been following the cases of Syed Ali Shah Gilani, Shabir Shah and Abdul Gani Lone and has provided us with regular reports. We have repeatedly raised our concerns about human rights with the Indian Government, and shall continue to do so when we believe such representations are helpful and appropriate.

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the working methods and constitution of the Indian National Human Rights Commission *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to its investigation of the Bijbehara massacre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Indian Human Rights Commission is due to publish its first quarterly report at the end of January. We have not sought to prejudge the operation of the commission before it has established itself. We shall look carefully at its first report which we understand will include an account of the incident at Bijbehara in October.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government is proposing following the Biro report on human rights issues in Sudan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Dr. Biro is finalising his report, which he will submit shortly to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. We will work to secure the continuation of his mandate. We will continue to press the Government of Sudan both bilaterally and in international forums over its human rights performance.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's latest estimate of the state of the SPLA factions in the southern Sudan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Discussions involving the leaders of the SPLA "mainstream" and "united" factions are continuing under the auspices of the IGADD initiative. On 6 January, the faction leaders signed a joint declaration outlining their position on an agenda for peace talks. Together with our European Union partners, we will continue to urge the faction leaders to settle their differences by peaceful means, and to respond constructively to the IGADD initiative.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest information available to the United Kingdom Government about what has happened to the people in the Nuba mountains area of Sudan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our information is limited, given the restrictions on access to the area. We remain profoundly concerned, however. We note the assessment in the interim report of the UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Sudan that the "violations committed by the Sudanese Army and the paramilitary forces under its control . . . seem to be of such a grave nature that the fate of the Nuba communities in the area may be questioned".

We strongly support the rapporteur's recommendation that the Sudanese Government give human rights organisations free access to the Nuba mountains.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Goodlad: No member of this Department has been judged to have been guilty of fraud since 1989.

One officer in the diplomatic wing was, however, found guilty in 1992 of false accounting, served nine months' imprisonment and was dismissed from the Department. One other officer was found guilty in 1993 of false overtime claims and was also dismissed.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Goodlad: Possible cases of fraud are investigated fully. All cases, other than minor offences, are referred to the Crown Prosecution Service to consider police investigation and, if appropriate, prosecution. Individuals found guilty of fraud would be subject to internal disciplinary proceedings, which would generally lead to dismissal, independently of any action taken by the Crown Prosecution Service.

Malaysian Arms Deal

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many files marked "Not for NAO eyes" relating to the Malaysian arms deal are held in his Department or in the high commission in Kuala Lumpur.

Mr. Goodlad: None.

NATIONAL FINANCE

North Sea Oil

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total amount of revenue which has accrued to the Exchequer for each year since 1979 from North sea oil, breaking this down into each aspect of the relevant tax regulations.

Mr. Dorrell: Revenues raised from North sea oil and gas production by category of tax since 1979-80 have been as follows:

£ million

Year	Petroleum revenue tax	Supplementary petroleum duty	Corporation Tax		Royalty	Total
			ACT setoff	Main-stream CT		
[1]1979-80	1,435	—	78	172	628	2,313
1980-81	2,410	—	97	244	992	3,743
1981-82	2,390	2,025	270	411	1,396	6,492
1982-83	3,274	2,395	202	319	1,632	7,822
1983-84	6,017	—	430	447	1,904	8,798
1984-85	7,177	—	1,244	1,188	2,426	12,035
1985-86	6,375	—	1,085	1,831	2,057	11,348
1986-87	1,188	—	1,130	1,546	919	4,783
1987-88	2,296	—	681	617	1,024	4,618
1988-89	1,371	—	685	510	602	3,168
1989-90	1,050	—	495	248	575	2,368
1990-91	860	—	363	484	605	2,312
1991-92	–216	—	370	268	557	979
1992-93	69	—	480	202	554	1,305
[1]1993-94	500	—	300	—	600	1,400

[1] 1994-95 Financial Statement and Budget Report estimate.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 20 December on VAT on domestic fuel reference 0595/29.

Sir John Cope: I replied to this letter on 27 January 1994.

Maintenance Orders

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what part of a maintenance order imposed by the Child Support Agency is allowable against personal taxation.

Mr. Dorrell: Payments made under a Child Support Agency assessment, like those made under a court order or legally enforceable written agreement, may qualify for tax relief up to a limit equal to the married couple's allowance, currently £1,720. Where an assessment replaces arrangements first made before March 1988, tax relief may be available up to a limit equal to the payments for which the payer was entitled to relief in 1988-89.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report,* columns *974-75,* if he will outline the particular qualifications, expertise or experience in the economic and financial area of *(a)* Mrs. Tessa Keswich and *(b)* Mr. David Ruffley.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is not my practice to comment on the qualifications, expertise or experience of my special advisers.

Gross Domestic Product

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current gross domestic product per head by constituency.

Mr. Nelson: The information is not available at this level of detail. The most detailed available estimates of GDP are at the county level. The most recent information available by county is for 1991, which was published in the December 1993 issue of "Economic Trends", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Community Care Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the figure for community care expenditure agreed for each of the next three financial years under *(a)* the Department of Health and *(b)* other departmental programmes in (i) cash and (ii) real terms.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* The level of spending on community care will be determined by individual local authorities, and will reflect their views about local needs and relative spending priorities. The Department of Health programme makes provision for a special transitional grant to local authorities, in recognition of their new responsibilities for community care, amounting to £735·9 million in 1994-95 and £647·6 million in 1995-96, including funding in respect of the arrangements to succeed the independent living fund. A decision on the special transitional grant for 1996-97 has not yet been taken.

The total of the Department of Health special transitional grant and the transfer from Department of Social Security announced last year, is shown in the table. It should be noted that, apart from the special transitional grant, local authorities are not obliged to spend these amounts on community care; nor need they be confined to these amounts.

£ million

	1994-95	*1995-96*	*1996-97*
Cash plans	1,274·5	1,838·0	2,256·0
1993-94 prices	1,225·5	1,703·4	2,039·8

Comparable figures for the Scottish Office, made up of the DSS transfer and the special grant for implementation and ILF successor arrangements, are as follows:

£ million

	1994-95	*1995-96*	*1996-97*
Cash plans	147·3	158·0	—
1993-94 prices	137·1	142·2	—

The figures for the Welsh Office were provided by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales on 25 January, *Official Report,* column *229.*

In Northern Ireland, the DSS transfer will be £65·3 million in 1994-95 and £100·3 million in 1995-96—£60·8 million and £90·2 million in 1993-94 prices.

In addition, the Department of Social Security plans to spend £120 million on successor arrangements to the independent living fund in 1994-95, and approximately £1,830 million on benefits for those in residential or nursing home care prior to 1 April 1993. Figures for later years are not available.

Nora Heeren

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what instructions were given to Customs and Excise officers regarding the inspection of the Nora Heeren;

(2) if the Customs and Excise conducted a full inspection of the cargo of the Nora Heeren.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Customs officers were asked to inspect the cargo on board ship, and to inspect the ship's papers relating to it.

A visual inspection of the cargo, stowed on deck, was carried out. Inspection of the ship's holds was also made so far as it was possible without offloading the cargo ashore.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the reduction in mortgage interest relief will be in 1994-95 and 1995-96 for a taxpayer on the average income for households with a mortgage, and with an average mortgage, as a result of measures announced in the March and November 1993 Budgets; and whether this information can be broken down to produce figures for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions;

(2) what the reduction in mortgage interest relief will be in 1994-95 and 1995-96 for a taxpayer on average earnings with an average mortgage as a result of measures announced in the March and November 1993 Budgets; and whether this information can be broken down to produce figures for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* Assuming current levels of mortgage interest rates, the reduction in relief on the average mortgage of £30,000 will be £115·50 a year in 1994-95 and a further £115·50 in 1995-96. For those mortgagors who have mortgages of less than £30,000—about half of all mortgagors—the reduction in relief will be lower. A person with an average mortgage is benefiting by £1,920 a year as a result of the reduction in interest rates since 1990. Forecasts of the average size of mortgages in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions are not available.

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise at his forthcoming meeting with President Clinton the proliferation risks posed by the international trade in nuclear materials.

The Prime Minister: The agenda for my meeting with President Clinton has not yet been fixed.

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister if he will commission a report on the estimated costs of *(a)* heating, *(b)* lighting and *(c)* non-catering staff arising from the use 10 Downing street by private organisations.

The Prime Minister: No. When charitable or other non-official events are held at 10 Downing street, the organisers are responsible for all catering and staff costs as well as other miscellaneous direct costs.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 23 November, *Official Report,* column *33,* if he will now list the titles of papers his office has made available to the Scott inquiry.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to him on 5 March 1993, *Official Report,* column *306.*

Oceanographic Laboratory

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Prime Minister what plans the Cabinet Office has for an investigation by the efficiency unit of the work of the Proudman oceanographic laboratory.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 16 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *611*.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister which non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

The Prime Minister: A full list of non-departmental public bodies, in existence for each year since 1979, is available in the following publications: "Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies" (Pliatzky Report, Cm 7797, January 1980), "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: Facts and Figures 1980", "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: Facts and Figures 1981", and "Public Bodies", published annually from 1982. Copies of these publications are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

For each year since 1986, lists have been prepared centrally of public bodies which have been created and abolished. Copies will be sent to the Libraries of both Houses. Such summary data for the years 1979 to 1985 were not prepared and could be reconstructed only at disproportionate cost.

Meetings

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his practice to give substantive details of his meetings showing when he has met and plans to meet in replying to hon. Members' questions on his engagements; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No.

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the companies of individuals which made the representations regarding the sale of machine tools to Iraq referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) of 24 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *580*.

The Prime Minister: It would be inappropriate to comment on matters which are the subject of Lord Justice Scott's inquiry while it is in progress.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 1 February.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 1 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Malaysia

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister how many files marked "Not for NAO Eyes" relating to the Malaysian arms deal are held by *(a)* his secretariat and *(b)* the Cabinet Office.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column 704, what were the major categories of trade, with amounts and dates, that he included in his export figures to Malaysia of £5 billion.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Information of the value of United Kingdom exports to Malaysia since 1982 is given in the table:

United Kingdom exports to Malaysia

£ million, current prices

Section		*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*[1]	*Total*
0	Food and live animals	8·0	10·9	9·5	7·6	6·1	6·9	6·8	9·0	7·7	12·5	11·1	16·2	112·1
1	Beverages and tobacco	2·3	3·3	3·2	3·4	3·4	4·4	4·2	5·3	7·6	10·9	10·0	11·2	69·2
2	Crude materials, inedible, except fuels	1·9	1·5	1·4	1·8	1·4	3·2	11·9	14·9	21·2	25·8	24·3	38·0	147·1
3	Mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials	1·6	1·9	1·8	1·9	1·5	1·3	1·3	1·4	5·5	2·7	2·3	2·4	25·5
4	Animal and vegetable oils, fats and waxes	0·5	0·2	0·4	0·4	0·3	0·3	0·3	0·4	0·4	0·4	0·3	0·5	4·6
5	Chemicals and related products	33·9	41·8	48·3	56·4	49·2	45·6	51·6	56·4	58·6	58·3	64·3	65·3	629·7
6	Manufactured goods classified chiefly by material	26·0	35·9	45·0	41·1	26·7	54·7	56·8	66·9	75·0	74·7	79·0	92·3	674·1
7	Machinery and transport equipment	109·8	107·9	133·3	128·9	96·8	108·2	145·7	226·1	335·4	356·2	361·5	566·7	2,676·5
8	Miscellaneous manufactured articles	20·7	24·2	31·5	31·6	29·3	25·9	27·7	35·1	35·0	37·2	77·2	56·5	431·8
9	Other commodities and transactions	6·0	20·7	8·9	8·6	12·3	7·5	4·0	26·1	4·2	3·7	5·8	12·8	120·5
	Total	210·6	248·3	283·1	281·7	226·9	258·0	310·4	441·5	550·7	582·3	635·9	861·9	4,891·2

[1] January to November 1993.

Notes: Trade categoriesed by Sections of the Standard International Trade Classification.

Source: Business Monitors MA20 and MM20, Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I have no plans to buy or borrow any photographs.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Heseltine: There are five paintings and no photographs on the walls of my office at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Tobacco

Ms Primarolo: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what Government grants or subsidies have been made to the tobacco industry in the United Kingdom or abroad in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sainsbury: The following regional selective assistance grants have been paid by the Government to the tobacco industry in the United Kingdom over the last five years. No other assistance has been made available, nor any abroad.

Financial year	*Amount paid* £
1989-90	357,285
1990-91	78,128
1991-92	19,505
1992-93	521,502
1993-94	232,768

Newsprint and Timber (Imports)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the annual tonnage and the annual value of imports into the United Kingdom of *(a)* newsprint and *(b)* timber for each year since 1980.

Mr. Needham: The information is given in the table.

Annual tonnage and value of United Kingdom imports

Year	*Timber* Weight (thousand tonnes	*Timber* Value (£ millions)	*Newsprint* Weight (thousand tonnes)	*Newsprint* Value (£ millions)
1980	4,247	680	1,074	283
1981	3,763	600	1,306	360
1982	4,260	669	1,246	377
1983	5,068	933	1,244	383
1984	4,792	1,001	1,255	398
1985	4,362	886	1,217	414
1986	4,870	994	1,135	391
1987	5,570	1,190	n/a	n/a
1988	6,161	1,347	1,459	600
1989	5,787	1,415	1,577	660
1990	5,340	1,397	1,308	541
1991	4,119	1,033	1,334	574
1992	4,254	1,013	1,333	486

Notes:

The 1987 figures for newsprint are not separately available from writing and printing paper due to commercial confidentiality.

Timber is classified under headings 245.01, 246, 247 and 248 of the International Trade Classification. Newsprint is classified under heading 641.1.

Source: Business Monitor MA20, Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Oil and Gas Reserves

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the proportion of United Kingdom oil and gas reserves which have so far been taken from offshore fields.

Mr. Eggar: Cumulative oil and gas production to the end of 1992 has been 1,560 million tonnes and 855 billion cu m respectively. The range of estimated reserves on the United Kingdom Continental Shelf—UKCS—that is, onshore and offshore, is as follows:

United Kingdom initially recoverable reserves (31 December 1992)

Range of estimates	*Oil (million tonnes)* Lower	*Oil (million tonnes)* Upper	*Gas (billion cubic metres)* Lower	*Gas (billion cubic metres)* Upper
Discovered	2,170	3,635	1,465	2,720
Potential additional reserves	160	500	140	325
Undiscovered	530	3,370	270	1,277
Total	2,860	7,505	1,875	4,322

The data are published in table 7 on page 20 of my Department's "Development of the Oil and Gas Reserves of the United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Part 2 of the publication provides more detail of the reserves and explains how they are estimated. The limits of the ranges should not be regarded as maxima and minima.

The figures do not provide an indication of the longevity of UKCS reserves. In recent years, the annual increment to estimates of reserves has often been larger than the amount produced in the year. At the end of 1992, for example, estimated remaining proven plus probable reserves of oil were about 135 million tonnes higher than the equivalent at the end of 1991; that is, the reserves increased by 230 million tonnes whilst production in 1992 was 94 million tonnes.

Exporters (Support)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase support for British exporters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The Government are more than ever committed to helping United Kingdom companies win in overseas markets. To achieve this, we are developing a long-term export strategy, involving a partnership between Government and industry.

A particularly good example of the partnership being developed is the export promoter scheme. My Department is recruiting people with private sector experience, on secondment, to act as export promoters. Some 65 are already on board and actively helping business. These secondees bring to government a business oriented way of tackling problems and promoting export opportunities.

To guide the overall strategy for export promotion, market plans are being drawn up for each of the United Kingdom's top 80 overseas markets. This will help ensure that resources are focused to best effect. We are building on the strengths of the United Kingdom capital goods industry; and targeting the overseas markets which offer the best prospects for those strengths.

Over the past two years the Export Credits Guarantee Department—ECGD—premium rates have been cut by more than a quarter. And in the last Budget the Government announced a further round of reductions—some as high as 20 per cent.—for business with important emerging markets such as Argentina, India, Mexico, Poland, Slovakia and Turkey. By 1996-97, ECGD cover for key markets, where the risks are subject to special controls, will be virtually double the level available in 1991-92.

Over the next three years, the cover available for important markets like China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia and South Africa will exceed £9 billion. This is in addition to an allocation of US$1 billion already set aside for business with the former Soviet Union.

These initiatives will build substantially on the current matrix of support available to help our exporters. This will ensure that ever greater numbers of United Kingdom exporters get the first-class support they deserve to help them win in world markets.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many bankruptcy and company case administrations were completed in each of the last five years *(a)* by the Insolvency Service and *(b)* by insolvency practitioners.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: *(a)* Official Receivers completed their administration, including handing over cases to insolvency practitioners where they have been appointed trustee or liquidator in place of the Official Receiver, of the following numbers of compulsory insolvencies:

	Bankruptcy	*Company*
1989-90	7,980	3,861
1990-91	10,799	4,982
1991-92	15,516	5,900
1992-93	16,169	4,957
1993-94 (9 months)	16,751	4,711

(b) Insolvency practitioners completed the administration in the following number of compulsory insolvencies:

	Bankruptcy	*Company*
1989-90	N/A	N/A
1990-91	N/A	N/A
1991-92	2,844	857
1992-93	3,024	1,030
1993-94 (9 months)	2,452	861

The Insolvency Service does not maintain data on the number of voluntary liquidations completed in any year.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many successful fraudulent trading prosecutions there were in each of the last five years arising from investigations by *(a)* the Insolvency Service, *(b)* insolvency practitioners and *(c)* other bodies.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Prosecutions by my Department for fraudulent trading resulted in 17 convictions in 1989-90, 22 convictions in 1990-91, 11 convictions in 1991-92, 24 convictions in 1992-93 and 26 convictions so far in 1993-94. Records are not kept in such a form that information about the origin of all these cases is readily available, but I can say that 19 of the convictions in 1992-93 arose from investigations by the Insolvency Service, and that 24 of the convictions in 1993-94 arose from such investigations.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many disqualification reports were received by the Insolvency Service in each of the last five years from *(a)* the Official Receiver and *(b)* insolvency practitioners.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The number of disqualification reports received was as follows:

Practitioners	*Official Receivers*	*Insolvency*
1988-89	1,204	3,005
1989-90	1,358	2,086
1990-91	1,617	2,891
1991-92	2,402	3,769
1992-93	2,657	4,053
9 months to 31 December 1993	2,487	2,841

A report is received where at least some element of unfit conduct on the part of the director(s) has been identified. Unfit conduct may vary from, for example, an isolated delay in complying with requirements relating to the production and filing of accounts and returns at Companies House to a failure to safeguard deposit monies received from members of the public. It would not therefore be appropriate to institute disqualification proceedings in every case in which a report is submitted.

Phoenix Companies

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions his Department has instigated criminal prosecutions in each of the years 1991, 1992 and 1993 in relation to possible offences involving the use of phoenix companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: In 1990-91, 11 prosecutions were carried out by my Department for offences under section 216 of the Insolvency Act 1986. The figure for 1991-92 was nine and, for 1992-93, five. So far in this financial year, there have been eight such prosecutions.

Electricity Franchises

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further representations he has received from individuals and organisations expressing concern about the postponement of electricity franchises in the 1 Mw to 100 Kw bracket since his answer of 18 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *318*.

Mr. Eggar: I received a number of representations during the coal review on this issue. In the White Paper "The Prospects for Coal", Cm 2235, published in March 1993, the Government confirmed that they did not intend to postpone the reduction of the electricity franchise to 100 Kw.

Nuclear Material

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report,* columns *184-85,* how many of the *(a)* temporary and *(b)* permanent withdrawals from safeguards involved plutonium.

Mr. Eggar: There have been 70 notifications of withdrawal of plutonium from safeguards since May 1979. These were all either small amounts withdrawn as samples for analytical or research purposes or part of transactions, involving the temporary transfer of plutonium to or from the civil cycle, which did not involve the net transfer of any plutonium from safeguards.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has made available to the Scott inquiry a copy of a letter by L. F. Byrne of Allivane International Ltd. to the export licensing branch of his Department dated 6 April 1988.

Mr. Needham: The Department has no record of this document.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the implications of THORP's beginning operations on 17 January for the delivery of spent fuel from Japan after 1 January under the terms of planning condition No. 9 of the amended planning permission of 6 April 1988 for receipt of spent nuclear fuel granted by Copeland borough council under the Town and Country Planning Act 1971.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for Copeland borough council as planning authority and British Nuclear Fuels plc as operator of the Sellafield site.

Export Control Compliance

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many copies of his Department's code of practice on export control compliance have been distributed since 21 May 1993.

Mr. Needham: Some 3,500 copies have been distributed since 21 May 1993, making a total of 9,500 distributed since publication.

Departmental Directory

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a copy of the DTI "Functional Directory".

Mr. Eggar: A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Electricity Pricing

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will undertake a review of the powers of the regulator in respect of electricity pricing.

Mr. Eggar: I have no plans for such a review. The Director General of Electricity Supply is free to seek a review of his powers in respect of electricity pricing if he is not satisfied that his existing powers are adequate.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Eggar: Dismissal.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Eggar: The information is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1989-93	Nil
1994	1

The employee concerned was dismissed.

Cetaceans

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what steps he is taking to ensure maximum information on the effect of seismic activity on cetaceans is collected during offshore oil exploration;

(2) if he will make it his policy to require holders of offshore oil exploration licences to invite independent researchers to carry out surveys of the behaviour of cetaceans during seismic operations.

Mr. Eggar: My officials encourage companies to offer facilities to environmental bodies to observe cetaceans. I understand that a number of seismic surveys conducted in blocks licensed during the 14th round have been accompanied by observers from such bodies.

It is not always possible to do this: adverse weather conditions can force changes to the dates of surveys at short notice, while the small size of some survey vessels means accommodation space is sometimes strictly limited.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to require operators to carry out preliminary surveys of the distribution and behaviour of cetaceans before carrying out offshore seismic operations or any source testing; and if he will make these surveys publicly available before operations or testing begin.

Mr. Eggar: In the 14th round, applicants for blocks in areas frequented by cetaceans were asked to carry out a preliminary environmental survey of all local sensitivities including cetaceans. Before carrying out seismic operations in sensitive areas, licensees are, in any event, expected to consult with the sea mammals research unit. In addition, during the survey, the lowest possible energy settings should be used.

By seeking such environmental surveys prior to licensing, I have the opportunity to ensure environmental concerns are taken into account when deciding licence awards. Similar arrangements will apply in future. Such surveys are the property of the companies commissioning them.

Export Licences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all occasions when hon. Members have sought assistance in obtaining export licences during the past five years to import items from overseas.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* My Department is only one of a number of Departments which operate import controls by issuing import licences. Before an import licence can be issued, it is often a pre-requisite that an export licence is provided by the competent authorities of the exporting country. My Department would not expect to know whether assistance had been sought to secure the provision of such an export licence; and no instance are know of.

The other Departments operating similar licensing controls are the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—agriculutral products—the Home Office—drugs—the Department of the Environment—wildlife—and the Health and Safety Executive—explosives and fireworks.

Human Genes (Patenting)

Dr. Moonie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines his office has produced on the patenting of human genes; what discussions he has had on this subject with his European counterparts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* In accordance with current practice, patents may be granted for inventions relating to human genes of identified function and outside the body if they comply with the usual requirements of patentability—that is, novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability.

Agreement has now been reached within the framework of the European Council on a draft EC directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions, which sets out to harmonise what is patentable in this area along the lines mentioned above. Council is expected to adopt a formal common position shortly.

I understand that the Office of Science and Technology supports the policy of the Medical Research Council in not filing any futher patent applications for DNA sequences of unknown function. The Office of Science and Technology has not, however, produced any guidelines on when patents on human genes should be sought.

Late Payment

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his Department's consultation on late payment.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* On 30 November 1993, the Department of Trade and Industry issued a consultation paper "Late Payment of Commercial Debt". The consultation paper seeks views from interested parties on possible options to address late payment, including a statutory right to interest and a British standard for prompt payment. Responses have been requested by 31 March 1994.

Nora Heeren

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his Department obtained a full cargo manifest of the Nora Heeren.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 24 January, *Official Report*, column *12*.

European Plug and Socket System

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the safety implications of adopting a harmonised European plug and socket system; what representations he has had from *(a)* trade and *(b)* consumer representatives about a harmonised European plug and socket system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* CENELEC, the relevant standards-making body, has not published a standard for a harmonised European plug and socket system against which an accurate assessment could be made. In considering whether any change to our present standards might be desirable at some future date full account will be taken of consumer safety issues and the many representations which we have received.

My Department is in frequent contact with the principal trade associations covering electrical appliances and fittings, and also with such bodies as the British Standards Institution, the Institution of Electrical Engineers, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Consumers Association. We have also commissioned an independent analysis of the possible costs and benefits for the United Kingdom. Work is continuing on the final report from the consultants and we expect to publish the full report in the spring to form the basis for a wider consultation.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Grants (Remission of Debt)

Mr. Enright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidelines are used for the remission of debt on grants issued by his Department.

Mr. Sproat: The guidelines used by my Department, and the bodies we sponsor, to determine whether or not to write off a particular grant are set out in "Government Accounting". These are that losses are to be written off only after a most careful appraisal of the facts; that Departments satisfy themselves that there is no feasible alternative; and that all reasonable action has been taken to effect recovery. I am satisfied that the control systems for authorising the write off of grants are working effectively in my Department.

For grants made by sponsored bodies, the decision to write off is, in the first instance, taken by the body, subject to delegated limits. For amounts above those limits, approval by my Department and the Treasury will be required, depending on the sums involved.

Theatres

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what support his Department intends to give to signed performances in theatres.

Mr. Brooke: Each building-based theatre company supported by the Arts Council aims to provide at least one signed performance of each production. Touring companies are also being encouraged to do at least one signed performance at each venue. According to a recent report by the Royal National Theatre, approximately 40 theatres currently provide signed performances. One of the problems in this area has been the shortage of trained personnel. The Arts Council has now provided two training courses for signed theatre interpreters.

Regional Orchestras

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will estimate the minimum staffing of regional orchestras; and if he will make a statement on the financial situation of those in receipt of public funds.

Mr. Brooke: According to the Arts Council, the minimum number of players in each of the major regional orchestras is as follows:

	Number
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra	79
Bournemouth Sinfonietta	29
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra	103
Halle Orchestra	98
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra	91
Northern Sinfonia	37

Depending on programmes, these numbers can be augmented through the employment of contract musicians. The numbers of administrative staff vary because of the differing situations of the orchestras. For example, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society is responsible for Philharmonic hall as well as the orchestra; and the two Bournemouth orchestras are jointly administered.

The Arts Council carefully monitors the financial situation of all its clients and, in consultation with the orchestras themselves, would be able to provide the additional information requested.

Concessionary Television Licence Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will consider further expanding the concessionary television licence scheme to include those people who previously lived in sheltered accommodation or institutional care, but who now live at home in consequence of the community care policy.

Mr. Sproat: No. The Government have no plans to extend the regulations governing the concessionary television licence scheme.

Royal Palaces (Accommodation)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *652*, what accommodation consists of for the private secretaries and officials of the Queen's households and other households in the grace and favour accommodation at the occupied royal palaces.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* The accommodation that is provided to serving members of the royal household and for which either rent is charged or the benefit of which is taken into account in determining wage and salary levels is as follows:

St. James's Palace

17 apartments in total of which 5 have 1 reception room with 1, 2 or 3 bedrooms. 4 have 2 reception rooms with between 2 and 4 bedrooms and 5 have 3 reception rooms with generally 4 bedrooms. The remaining 3 apartments have 4 reception rooms and 4 bedrooms.

Marlborough House Mews

5 apartments of which 4 have 1 reception room and 1 to 3 bedrooms and 1 is a bedsit.

Kensington Palace

9 apartments of which 1 has 1 reception room and 2 bedrooms, 6 have 2 reception rooms and 2 or 3 bedrooms and 2 have 3 reception rooms with 3 or 4 bedrooms.

Windsor Castle

8 apartments within the curtilage of which 2 have 1 reception room with 1 bedroom, 1 has 1 reception room plus 3 bedrooms, 1 has 2 reception rooms with 4 bedrooms, 1 has 3 reception rooms with 4 bedrooms, 1 has 3 reception rooms and 5 bedrooms and 2 have 4 reception rooms with 5 bedrooms.

Windsor Castle Grounds

8 apartments, comprising 5 with 1 reception room each and 1 to 3 bedrooms. 2 have 2 reception tooms and 3 bedrooms and 1 has 4 reception rooms and 4 bedrooms.

Buckingham Palace Mews

4 apartments, 1 with 1 reception room and 1 bedroom. 2 have 2 reception rooms and 3 bedrooms and 1 has 3 reception rooms and 6 bedrooms.

Hampton Court Mews

1 apartment with 1 reception room and 1 bedroom.

Bushy Park

2 houses, 1 with 3 reception rooms and 5 bedrooms and 1 with 2 reception rooms and 4 bedrooms.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the implications of the Government's "back to basics" policy for his Department during 1994.

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 21 January, *Official Report*, column *849*.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what working definition of "back to basics" is used by his Department; and what his Department has done in the past three months to implement the policy.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 20 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 21 January, *Official Report*, column *849*.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* The number of staff within the Department of National Heritage excluding its agencies, the Historic Royal Palaces and the Royal Parks, on 31 December 1993 who were eligible to receive statutory sick pay was 333.

Tower of London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total cost of constructing the new jewel house at the Tower of London.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Historic Royal Palaces under its chief executive, Mr. David Beeton. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Beeton to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 27 January 1994:

The Secretary of State for National Heritage has asked me to reply to your Written Parliamentary Question on what is the total cost of constructing the new Jewel House at the Tower of London.

The detailed estimate, which I approved before work started on site in October 1992 was £10,007,000. The latest estimate of that total cost is £9,753,819. Work will be completed on the original timetable and the Jewel House opened on the 24 March 1994.

This total cost has been funded from increased business income, generated by my Agency in the last three years, during which period the annual call on the taxpayer has fallen from £10·26 million (1991-92) to £7·6 million (1993-94). The scheme is forecast to increase the business income of the Tower by £4 million a year.

ENVIRONMENT

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many representations he has received on the subject of the THORP project; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many representations he has received in support of the THORP project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: A total of 42,500 responses to the public consultation were received. About 15,000 respondents supported THORP. A detailed breakdown of responses is in the BNFL Sellafield further public consultation summary of responses document which is in the House Library.

Environmental Approach (Launch Meeting)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria were used in choosing to launch Her Majesty's Government's strategy documents on sustainable development, climate change, biodiversity and sustainable forestry, at the Banqueting house on 25 January; and which hon. Members were given advance notice of the date and venue of the launch.

Mr. Atkins: The launch in the Banqueting house was primarily a press conference, although in the presence of individuals, or representatives of organisations, who had been associated with preparation of the documents. My right hon. Friend informed the House on 20 January, in answer to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), *Official Report* column *844*, that publication would be on 25 January.

Hotels (Change of Use)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce an outcome to his review of the change of use of hotels and guest houses to hostels for social security claimants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Shortly.

Environmental Conference

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total cost of the environmental conference on Rio two years on held at the Mansion house on 25 January.

Mr. Atkins: The conference was held in the Banqueting house, Whitehall, not the Mansion house, and cost approximately £20,000.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the present policy on high-level waste management is covered by Her Majesty's Government's commitment to meet the responsibility of nuclear waste management by the present generation.

Mr. Atkins: The Government's policy is that high-level radioactive wastes should be stored for at least 50 years to allow them to cool. As this is the most appropriate technical means of dealing with the wastes, it is the strategy which best meets our responsibilities to future generations.

Radioactive Waste Inventory

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial contribution is made by his Department to the radioactive waste inventory.

Mr. Atkins: The cost of the radioactive waste inventory is shared between the Department of the Environment and UK Nirex Ltd. The cost to the Department of the 1994 inventory, for which contracts have recently been let, is expected to be £163,871 spread over two and a half years.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to strengthen part 1 of the Building Regulations relating to energy conservation.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 19 January, *Official Report*, columns *671-72*.

Market Franchises

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number and nature of the representations he has received *(a)* in favour of the proposal to abolish market franchises and *(b)* against it.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) on 18 January, *Official Report*, column *564*.

TRANSPORT

Airports (Night Flying)

Mr. Mellor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for revised night flying restrictions for Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted for summer 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: On 10 November 1993 the Secretary of State for Transport published proposals for revised night flying restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted for the 1994 summer season and for the arrangements to apply from winter 1994-95 until the end of the summer 1998 season. Comments on the summer 1994 proposals were invited by 31 December 1993 and on those applying for the longer term by 11 February 1994. As indicated in the consultation paper, airlines normally expect to finalise their timetables for the summer season during January. We acknowledged their need for an early decision by separating the proposals in the consultation paper to enable us to announce conclusions for the 1994 summer season in advance of those for the following years. The conclusions that I have reached relate to the 1994 summer season only and in no way prejudge the conclusions that I may reach in respect of the following four years.

On 6 July 1993, following an extensive period of consultation, the Government announced a new five-year policy for night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted whereby quotas, based on the noise rating of aircraft, would provide the basis of control. A quota was announced for each airport which would enable a greater number of movements at night to take place if the quieter types of aircraft were used or fewer movements if noisier types were used. Many people welcomed this approach. However, following judicial review proceedings the court ruled that section 78(3)(b) of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 requires specification of "the maximum number of occasions" on which aircraft may be permitted to take off or land in a specified period.

The proposals put out to consultation in November were that there should be a movements limit for each airport with the quota system also applying as a supplementary control. An alternative approach was also set out which would dispense with the need for quotas but impose subsidiary limits on movements by the noisier types of aircraft. The responses to the consultation have shown that there is very little support for this alternative approach. I have therefore concluded that the night restrictions for summer 1994 should be in the form of movements limits supplemented by quotas. The movements limits and quotas for each airport for the summer 1994 season will be:

	Movements limits	*Quota*
Heathrow	3,250	7,000
Gatwick	7,000	9,550
Stansted	6,500	4,200

The figures for Heathrow and Gatwick are as proposed in the consultation paper; the movements limit for Stansted is lower.

I also confirm that the provision in place for the current winter season for end-of-season flexibility up to 10 per cent.—and with penalty for excess thereafter—should apply, as proposed, to the movements limits as well as to the quotas for the summer season.

I have given careful consideration to the responses from airlines and aviation bodies asking to be allowed more movements, particularly at Heathrow and Gatwick. I have also given careful consideration to the responses from people living around the three airports, the local authorities and other local organisations, that the proposed movements limits and quotas were too high. My aim remains, as previously, to maintain the policy of continuing to protect local communities from excessive exposure to aircraft noise while not unduly restricting those who wish to go about their business at night. I have concluded that the movements limits and quotas which I have confirmed today for all three airports should achieve this.

At Stansted it remains difficult to predict the likely pattern of traffic wishing to operate at night even only a few months ahead. Although traffic is still growing, operations have not developed quite as fast as they might have and this is reflected in the lower movements limit confirmed today. The movements limit for Stansted is still higher in relation to the quota than that for other airports. This underlines our commitment to quieter aircraft. Services at Stansted are expected to expand. The numbers which I am confirming today should provide an incentive to those who operate those services to use only the quietest types of aircraft at night.

While the arrangements for reporting on movements and usage of the quota were generally welcomed, some responses raised doubts as to whether they would provide sufficient assurance that the system was being administered properly. It was suggested that the reporting arrangements should embrace "a full audit trail" to provide this assurance. I do not doubt the integrity of those operating the system at present, but it is undoubtedly complex. It is right that people should be assured that it is being operated properly. I therefore welcome the suggestion—and the fact that it has come out of the present consultation—that the reporting arrangements should cover the full audit trail. I am therefore asking the Aircraft Noise Monitoring Advisory Committee to consider how best to achieve this.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions have been made to facilitate the introduction of international rail passenger services through the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: Major infrastructure improvements have been undertaken on United Kingdom lines to the channel tunnel. Regular services to Paris and Brussels from the new dedicated international passenger terminal at Waterloo will begin this year. Day and night time services will also run from regions north and west of London to Paris and Brussels. These services should begin in 1995.

BR/SNCF and SNCB have on order from a consortium led by GEC-Alsthom a fleet of high-speed trains for use on inter-capital services. BR is responsible for 11 of these Eurostar trainsets. BR is also purchasing from the consortium seven modified versions of these same trainsets to provide daytime services from north of London to Paris and Brussels.

The board has been considering the financing options for these trainsets and has concluded that leasing arrangements can give commercial and financing benefits. A number of leases have been finalised in 1993-94, through the board's subsidiary, European Passenger Services, to which I have given my approval, and more leases are expected. The Government intend to give a non-statutory guarantee to BRB in respect of its liability under the leases. The guarantee will be notified to Parliament in the usual way.

A new joint venture company, European Night Services Ltd., has also been set up by BR, SNCF, German and Dutch railways to provide sleeper services through the channel tunnel. European Night Services has entered into a leasing arrangement in respect of the rolling stock which will be used for these services.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the forecasts of the number of commuters expected *(a)* to use the channel tunnel rail link and *(b)* to leave the channel tunnel rail link at St. Pancras.

Mr. Freeman: It is too early to say. The number of commuters using the line and the St. Pancras terminus will depend, among other factors, upon the general level of commuting from Kent into London and upon the precise service pattern adopted.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for a direct link between the channel tunnel rail link and crossrail.

Mr. Freeman: The proposed connection via Forest Gate and Ripple Lane was ruled out because it would have been expensive, environmentally damaging and possibly impractical.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will define the relationship which now exists between his Department and Union Railways following the final announcement of the channel tunnel rail link route.

Mr. Freeman: Union Railways continues to have operational responsibility for all aspects of the channel tunnel rail link project. Union Railways is responsible, under the overall direction of the Department of Transport, for the private aspects of the proposed hybrid Bill; and acts, together with European Passenger Services, as project manager to the Department for the competition to transfer UR and EPS to the private sector.

Vehicle Insurance

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the introduction of insurance discs, similar to the tax discs already required, as an additional way of identifying those drivers who fail to insure their vehicles.

Mr. Key: As explained in the answer I gave on 23 June 1993 to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), there would be some practical problems associated with a windscreen insurance disc system. However, we continue to take the problem of uninsured driving very seriously and would be willing to look again at any proposal for overcoming these drawbacks.

Transport Policy

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the main points of his programme for a sustainable transport policy.

Mr. MacGregor: The main points for a sustainable transport policy are set out in "Sustainable Development —The UK Strategy", a copy of which is in the Library.

Ports

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out for each port the number of ports state control inspectors in 1993 flag by flag.

Mr. Norris: The following are provisional figures for port state control inspections conducted in 1993 by port and by flag:

By port	*Number*
Aberdeen	209
Avonmouth	27
Ayr	1
Barry	8
Belfast	82
Blyth	6
Brightlingsea	1
Cardiff	239
Dundee	1
Falmouth	20
Felixstowe	1
Fowey	7
Garston	1
Glasgow	95
Goole	16
Great Yarmouth	16
Grimsby	9
Gunness	5
Harwich	3
Heysham	3
Hull	248
Immingham	22
Ipswich	6
Killingholme	2
King's Lynn	1
Leith	47
Lerwick	9
Liverpool	227
London	332
Lowestoft	1
Manchester	3
Medway Ports	1
Middlesbrough	130
Milford Haven	36
Montrose	4
Mostyn	1
Newcastle	131
Newhaven	1
Newport (IOW)	2
Newport (Wales)	14
Par	2
Peterhead	1
Plymouth	27
Poole	9
Portsmouth	4

By port	*Number*
Ramsgate	5
Seaham	4
Selby	1
Sharpness	3
Southampton	219
Stranraer	1
Sullom Voe	7
Sunderland	3
Swansea	10
Tees	1
Teignmouth	4
Weymouth	1
Whitstable	1

2. By Flag

	Number
Algeria	1
Antilles (Netherlands)	27
Antigua and Barbuda	123
Austria	5
Azerbaijan	1
Bahamas	216
Bahrain	2
Bangladesh	3
Belgium	8
Belize	2
Bolivia	2
Bulgaria	13
Canada	1
China	9
Colombia	1
Croatia	1
Cyprus	168
Czechoslovakia	4
Denmark	120
Egypt	6
Estonia	10
Ethiopia	2
Faeroe Islands	2
Finland	22
France	25
Germany	137
Ghana	3
Greece	107
Honduras	23
Iceland	1
India	16
Iran	7
Ireland	77
Italy	31
Ivory Coast	2
Japan	7
Latvia	15
Lebanon	1
Liberia	79
Libya	3
Lithuania	13
Luxembourg	12
Malaysia	2
Malta	90
Marshall Islands	1
Mexico	2
Morocco	7
Myanmar	3
Netherlands	147
Nigeria	11
Norway	167
Pakistan	6
Panama	118
Philippines	10
Poland	38
Portugal	8
Quatar	2
Romania	6
Russia	135
St. Vincent and Grenadines	73
Saudi Arabia	1
Singapore	12
Spain	8
Sir Lanka	3
Sudan	2
Sweden	48
Switzerland	3
Syria	3
Taiwan	1
Thailand	2
Turkey	9
Tuvalu	2
Ukraine	18
C.E.I	11
United Arab Emirates	1
U.S.A.	10
Vanuatu	3

A19

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the installation of the hard shoulder on the A19 will be carried out.

Mr. Key: There are no proposals to provide a hard shoulder on the A19.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many serious accidents and deaths have occurred on the section of the A19 running through the Easington district in each year since 1991.

Mr. Key: The number of personal injury accidents that have occurred on the A19 in Easington district each year since 1991 is:

Year	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*
1991	2	6	45
1992	1	7	31
[1]1993	3	3	35

[1] To November.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the section of the A19 which runs adjacent to Peterlee to be illuminated.

Mr. Key: A scheme to provide highway lighting between Passfield way, Peterlee and Sheraton is currently being assessed.

There are no current proposals to provide highway lighting north of Passfield way.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects emergency telephones to be installed on the A19; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Work is expected to commence shortly on a scheme to provide emergency telephones on the A19-A168 between Dishforth and Stockton on Tees. A further scheme on the A19 between Stockton on Tees and the Tyne tunnel is planned.

The telephones will be provided in existing lay-bys at approximately one-mile intervals where possible with a direct link to the local police control room.

MV Nora Heeren

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange for an immediate port state control inspection of MV Nora Heeren.

Mr. Norris: No; the Nora Heeren is understood to have left United Kingdom waters on 21 January. A port state control inspection of the vessel was conducted at Middlesbrough last September and the Department has no reason to doubt the seaworthiness of the vessel.

M40

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give figures for traffic flows on the M40 between junctions 4 and 5 during October 1993.

Mr. Key: The average daily flows over the month of October 1993 were

39,310 vehicles Eastbound.
38,977 vehicles Westbound.

Flows on weekdays are generally higher than those at weekends.

Coaches (Weight)

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department takes to prevent coaches registered in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* elsewhere in Europe of more than 17 tonnes gross weight from using United Kingdom roads.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Coaches using Britain's roads which are subject to a maximum permitted weight of 17 tonnes are liable to be check weighed by vehicles inspectorate examiners. Those found to be more than 17 tonnes can be prohibited from continuing their journey. Drivers and operators of overweight coaches are also subject to prosecution. If the vehicle is registered elsewhere in Europe they are also reported to their Government for appropriate action.

London to Warsaw Air Services

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about current air services from London to Warsaw; what was the position a year ago; and what are the reasons for the changes that have been made.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* There are currently no direct air services between London and Warsaw. I refer my right hon. Friend to the letter I wrote to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 16 November 1993 which was deposited in the Library of the House and which explains the background to the current situation. During the winter season 1992-93 British Airways and LOT each operated a daily return service between London and Warsaw.

Driving Standards Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the numbers and grades and salary costs of staff at each Driving Standards Agency office affected by the proposed marketing test of the booking of driving tests and the processing of driving test fees.

Mr. Key: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Driving Standards Agency under its chief executive, Dr. Ford. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dr. S. J. Ford to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 27 January 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the Market Testing of DSA's driver test booking service.

First you asked about the numbers and grades of the staff at each office affected. The staff-in-post information is in the attached schedule.

Secondly, you asked for salary costs at the Agency offices. In our 1993-94 Business Plan, which was deposited in the Library of the House in May 1993, DSA estimated its total payroll costs for 1993-94 to be £3·6 million for all regional offices and £1·8 million for the headquarters office (although not all of these staff will be affected by the market test).

Driving Standards Agency
Regional staff in post as at 31 December 1993

Grade	*North East*	*North West*	*West Midlands*	[1]*East Nottingham*	[1]*East Cambridge*	*Wales*	*West*	*South East*	*Scotland*	*Metropolitan*
SEO	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
HEO	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1·5
EO	4	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	5
AO	13·5	6	5	3·5	3	5·4	4	8	5	18
AA	28·5	18	13	10	6·5	11·2	6·25	15·5	11	39·5
Typist	1	0	0	0·5	0	0	0	0	0	1·5
Support	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
P/keeper	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Telephonist	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	51	28	21	17	11·5	19·6	12·25	27·5	19	69·5

[1] A further 22 staff located in the Headquarters office in Nottingham are partially engaged in providing finance services for the Driver Test Booking Services in Nottingham and Cambridge.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Office Ministers have no plans at present to buy or loan any photographs.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Sir John Wheeler: There are 49 paintings and three photographs in the Northern Ireland Office Ministers' rooms.

Prisoners (Christmas Leave)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will name the prisoners who were granted Christmas leave in 1993.

Sir John Wheeler: No. It would not be appropriate to name the 446 individual prisoners who were granted Christmas leave in 1993.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so ratified and consulted upon.

Sir John Wheeler: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointments.

Arable Area Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was *(a)* the maximum, *(b)* the minimum and *(c)* the average amount paid out under the arable area payments scheme in Northern Ireland in the latest available year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Final statistics for the 1993 scheme year are not yet complete. As at 31 December 1993, 96 per cent. of claims had been paid of which: *(a)* the maximum amount paid out was £33,394; *(b)* the minimum amount paid was £48·03; and *(c)* the average amount paid out was £1,241 per applicant.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Sir John Wheeler: The figures are:—

	Number of employees	*Number dismissed*
1989	—	—
1990	—	—
1991	1	1
1992	3	2
1993	2	2

Note: One employee resigned in 1992 at the time of disclosure.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Sir John Wheeler: The procedures in respect of disciplinary offences are described in the "Departmental Terms and Conditions of Service" which apply to all civil servants. The attention of all staff is drawn to these conditions. The procedures are invoked following allegations of misconduct, including fraud. A range of penalties, including dismissal, are available to the Department.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Vessels (Safety)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will extend current grant aid for mandatory safety equipment to fishing vessels under 12m.

Mr. Jack: Grant aid is available, in respect of vessels which are required by the Fishing Vessel (Safety Provisions) Rules 1975 to have a United Kingdom fishing vessel (safety) certificate, to meet the relevant safety requirements. Certification applies only to vessels of 12m or more in length. The Department of Transport is considering a House of Lords Select Committee recommendation that a more stringent statutory safety regime should be applied to vessels under 12m. Once a final decision is taken on this, Fisheries Ministers will consider what are the implications for the safety grants scheme.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in her Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Jack: Since 1989, there have been 12 cases of what can be considered fraud, mainly petty theft or incorrect expenses claims, of which five resulted in dismissal.

GATT

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what matters in regard to the recently completed general agreement on tariffs and trade for EU agriculture policy were discussed at the Agriculture Council of 24-25 January.

Mr. Jack: The Agriculture Council met and concluded its agenda on Monday 24 January. It took forward the business following from the decisions at the preceding December Council. Although the GATT Uruguay round on agriculture was not itself on the agenda, its implications for future reform of the fruit and vegetable regime were noted.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on the implications for *(a)* low-input agriculture and *(b)* continued protection of countryside habitats of wildlife populations of the GATT completed in December 1993.

Mr. Jack: Non-trade-distorting payments, including incentives for environmentally beneficial farming practices such as those that entail habitat protection and reduced use of fertilisers and pesticides, are classed as "green box". As a result, they are exempt from the limitations elsewhere in the agreement, including those on domestic support.

Bovine Embryo Transfers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines the Government have laid down on bovine embryo transfers.

Mr. Soames: The Bovine Embryo Collection and Transfer Regulations 1993 require that embryo transfer is carried out by either a veterinary surgeon on the register of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons—RCVS—or a member of an approved embryo transfer team which is under the control of a veterinary surgeon on the register. The RCVS has produced a code of practice for embryo collection and transfer in cattle. The code is published in the 1993 edition of the "Guide to Professional Conduct" which is sent to all those listed on the register. I have arranged for a copy of the code of practice to be placed in the Library of the House.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to buy or loan any photographs; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Government art collection has a number of photographs in its collection from which the Minister may borrow as she wishes. She has no plans to buy photographs.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of her rooms.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend has four paintings and one photograph on the walls of her office at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will give *(a)* the maximum, *(b)* the minimum and *(c)* the average amount paid out under the arable area payments scheme in England in the latest available year; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Under the integrated administration and control system, a single application for arable area payments must be submitted in respect of all the land farmed by the same individual or organisation and some applications cover a significant number of separate holdings, which may be located in different parts of the United Kingdom. The maximum total payment made to date to an applicant under the 1992-93 arable area payments scheme has been of the order of £1·25 million. Claims under the simplified arrangements for small producers in 1992-93 can range from about £50 up to just over £2,000 for land situated in England. The total amounts paid to date averaged over the total number of applications submitted in England for 1992-93, would give an average payment of slightly less than £13,400. This does not include the final instalment of the area payment for oilseeds, which is due to be made early in 1994.

Milk

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much milk was produced and consumed in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European Community as a whole in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* The quantity of milk produced by dairy cows and the quantity of liquid milk consumed in both the EC as a whole and in the United Kingdom are given in the table.

Production and consumption in the former GDR is excluded from the EC total for the years 1987 to 1989 inclusive. Production includes deliveries to dairies, sales direct from farms, milk consumed on farm, milk fed to stock and wastage. The drinking milk consumption figure includes whole milk, semi-skimmed milk, skimmed milk and buttermilk. It is derived as production plus imports less exports, less stock change and less wastage.

Milk production and consumption in the EC and the United Kingdom 1987-1991 [4]

'000s tonnes	*1987*[1]	*1988*[1]	*1989*[1]	*1990*	*1991*
Dairy Cows milk production[2]:					
EC	112,179	109,800	198,248	117,500	114,865
of which, United Kingdom:	15,506	15,140	14,943	15,251	14,762
Drinking milk consumption[3]:					
EC:	28,978	28,868	28,781	28,542	28,488
of which, United Kingdom:	7,064	7,077	7,081	7,043	7,039

[1] Excludes the former GDR.

[2] Gross production from the dairy herd, including milk fed to stock and wastage.

[3] Consumption of whole milk, semi-skimmed milk, skimmed milk and buttermilk in product weight. Consumption is derived as production plus imports, less exports, less stock change and less wastage.

[4] EC data are not available for 1992. For the United Kingdom, 1992 production was 14,702,000 tonnes and consumption was 7,072,000 tonnes.

Salmon

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment she has made of the effect of the decision of the European Court of Justice in joined cases CZ67/8 (Keck), 24 November 1988, on measures by European Community member states to restrict the importation of farmed salmon and other fishery-products from Norway; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* I have been asked to reply.

The decision of the European Court of Justice on joined cases C267 and C268/91—Keck and Mithouard—of 24 November 1993 is very recent, and its full implications for intra-Community trade are still being considered. The cases relate to national measures which prohibit the reselling of products at prices less than their actual purchase price. In concluding that the purpose of the national measures under consideration was not to regulate trade in goods between member states, the European Court of Justice held that the measures were permissible provided that they had the same effect, in law and in fact, upon all products, domestic or imported, of the same kind, and were not used expressly to prohibit or restrict imports or to inhibit free trade.

I have no reason to believe that there is any similarity between the situation addressed by the European Court in the cases referred to, and the current situation of over-supply of salmon to the European market.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Liberian Trust Fund

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution Britain has made to the Liberian trust fund; and what are the limitations placed upon the use of those funds.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have contributed $1 million to the United Nations Trust Fund for Liberia. The contribution is for humanitarian relief purposes only.

Humanitarian Aid

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the United Nations agencies in delivering humanitarian aid.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Each of the operational humanitarian agencies of the United Nations has a role in delivering humanitarian aid, according to its individual mandate. Co-ordination of the delivery of such aid is the responsibility of the United Nations department of humanitarian affairs.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the distribution of aid funds to the eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The main objective of the know-how fund, Britain's programme of bilateral technical assistance to central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, is to help these countries move towards democracy and a free market economy by providing advice and expertise. Total expenditure for 1992-93 was £47·1 million. The public expenditure provision for 1993-94 is £53 million. A list of projects and the latest annual report are in the Libraries of both Houses.

Aid Programme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the consequences of the United Kingdom's efforts for developing countries; and what proposals he has to improve the United Kingdom's aid programme.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The effectiveness of the United Kingdom aid programme has been recognised by the development assistance committee of the OECD. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development's speech at Chatham house on 18 October 1993 described future directions for the aid programme. Copies of the speech are in the Libraries of the House.

World Bank

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the accountability to Parliament of the United Kingdom board member of the World bank.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom executive director of the World bank is appointed by, and accountable to, Her Majesty's Government. The Government are accountable to Parliament for payments made to these institutions.

South Africa

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the remaining European Union restrictive measures in force against South Africa.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* The remaining measures are an embargo on exports of arms and para-military equipment to South Africa; an embargo on imports of arms and para-military equipment from South Africa; a refusal to co-operate in the military sphere—that is, a continuing ban on joint military exercises.

On 4 October 1993, the Foreign Affairs Council lifted the separate ban on accreditation of defence attachés and on official contacts and agreements in the security sphere.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much humanitarian aid is currently supplied by the United Kingdom to the former Yugoslavia; and what information he has on aid supplied by other countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* We have committed over £157 million, including our share of EC aid, for victims of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. We were the largest bilateral contributor to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' programmes there in 1993. Other major bilateral donors include the United States, France, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands. We also contribute substantially to the Sarajevo airlift; through our contribution of 2,300 troops to UNPROFOR and through our approximately 140 ODA staff in the field.

I pay tribute to the courage and dedication of the former ODA driver Paul Goodall who was so brutally murdered on 27 January. Following a review of security procedures with the UN, the ODA resumed convoy operations, on a phased basis, on 31 January. Despite the appalling atrocity committed against our drivers, their colleagues are determined that the aid effort should continue and are keen to resume full operations.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Voter Registration

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the percentage of voter non-registration in each of the age groups *(a)* from 17 to 24 years, *(b)* from 25 to 29 years, *(c)* from 30 to 49 years and *(d)* over 50 years; if he will publish a breakdown of the estimated number of non-registered voters in each of those age groups by sex and ethnic origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Peter Lloyd: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys carried out research on behalf of the Home Office and the Scottish Office Home and Health Department after the 1991 census to assess the coverage and quality of the electoral register in Great Britain in 1991. The proportions of eligible people in the survey who were not included in the register, for different groups of people, are set out in the table. Copies of the survey, "Electoral registration in 1991", are in the Library.

Non-registration by age and sex

	Men *Per cent.*	*Women* *Per cent.*	*All* *Per cent.*
Aged 17 (attainers)	20·3	24·4	21·9
18-19	10·4	13·6	12·1
20	21·1	18·5	19·5
21-24	22·5	19·3	20·6
25-29	16·6	12·3	14·9
30-49	7·2	4·3	5·8
50 and over	2·6	1·8	2·1

Non-registration by ethnic groups

	Per cent.
White	6·5
Black	24·0
Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi	15·1
Other groups	23·5

Secure Training Centres

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which sites are under consideration as locations for the proposed secure training centres for persistent juvenile offenders.

Mr. Maclean: A notice was placed in the Official Journal of the European Communities—OJEC—on 5 January inviting expressions of interest from companies to finance, design, build/refurbish, operate and maintain secure training centres either on Home Office land or on alternative sites which they themselves would propose. The deadline for receipt of applications is 11 February 1994. Before then, I cannot say which sites will be considered.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which organisations have been invited to consider the establishment and running of secure training centres for persistent juvenile offenders.

Mr. Maclean: Potential providers of secure training centres will be identified through responses to the OJEC notice issued on 5 January 1994. Invitations to tender will be issued following an assessment of the responses received.

Terrorism

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report,* columns *475-76,* if he will list all those who have been convicted of scheduled, terrorist-related offences held in custody in England and Wales, giving in each case the nature of their conviction, the sentence given and the date on which their sentence began.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 1 February 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about prisoners in custody in England and Wales convicted of terrorist related offences.

Readily available information on prisonerss serving sentences in England and Wales for serious offences related to terrorism is limited to those classified as Category A.

As at 28 January 1994 there were 44 such prisoners. Details of year of conviction, sentence and offence are set out in the attached table.

Year	*Sentence*	*Offence*
1976	Life	Attempted murder and possession of explosives
1976	Life	Attempted murder and possession of explosives
1976	Life	Attempted murder
1976	Life	Attempted murder and conspiracy to cause explosions
1976	Life	Murder
1977	Life	Murder
1977	Life	Murder
1977	Life	Murder
1977	Life	Murder
1977	Life	Murder
1980	Life	Murder
1980	Life	Murder
1980	Life	Murder
1981	Life	Attempted murder
1983	30 years	Attempted murder
1983	35 years	Attempted murder
1985	Life	Murder
1985	Life	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1985	15 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1985	Life	Murder
1986	25 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1986	45 years	Planting explosives to endanger life
1986	Life	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1986	Life	Murder and conspiracy to cause explosions
1986	Life	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1986	Life	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1986	Life	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1986	Life	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1987	25 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1988	Life	Murder
1988	17 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1988	20 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1990	30 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1990	30 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1990	30 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1993	30 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1993	Life	Murder and attempted murder
1993	18 years	Attempted murder
1993	22 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1993	20 years	Arson
1993	15 years	Arson
1993	25 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1993	25 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions
1993	23 years	Conspiracy to cause explosions

Sharon Tabarn

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has investigated the death after hypnosis of Sharon Tabarn of Hesketh Bank, Lancashire.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There was a police investigation into the circumstances surrounding Ms Tabarn's death. Such matters are entirely the responsibility of the chief officer of the police force concerned. I understand that an inquest subsequently found that Ms Tabarn died from natural causes.

Mohammed Riaz and Abdul Raja

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 10 December, *Official Report*, column *414*, when he expects to tell Mohammed Riaz and Abdul Qayyum Raja the life sentences they are to serve; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The decision as to the period to be served for retribution and deterrence was sent to each prisoner individually on 20 December 1993.

Life Sentences

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many life sentences have been referred to him since he became Home Secretary; what was the racial origin of each prisoner; in how many cases he has *(a)* increased the sentence recommended, *(b)* reduced the sentence recommended and *(c)* not varied the sentence; by what date he expects all those serving life sentences will have been informed of the sentence they are to serve; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since he took office, my right hon. and learned Friend has received 151 reports from the judiciary in respect of prisoners sentenced to mandatory life imprisonment. Details of their ethnic origin would be available only at disproportionate cost. The cases are being processed in accordance with the arrangements set out in my right hon. and learned Friend's reply to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) of 4 November 1993, at columns *376-78*. The gist of the relevant judicial recommendations has been disclosed to 128 of these prisoners, and representations have been received from 26 of them. The period for retribution and deterrence—the tariff—has not been set in any of these cases.

Also, in accordance with the arrangements referred to above, retrospective disclosure is being given to those prisoners whose tariffs have already been set. To date, 91 such disclosures have been made. Representations have been received from six prisoners, four of whom have received decisions.

We aim to complete the process of tariff setting and retrospective disclosure for all prisoners currently in custody, by the end of this year.

Prison Dog Service

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on plans to market test the prison dog service section; and how much the exercise has cost.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 1 February 1994:

> The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about progress with plans to market test the Prison Dog Service; and how much the exercise has cost.
>
> This market test has been suspended, as under present law contractors in directly managed prisons would be unable to exercise powers to stop and search inmates. Provision is included in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill to change this situation and plans for market testing will be re-considered when it becomes law.
>
> Work on the project is estimated to have cost approximately £10,500, mainly for two staff members temporarily allocated to it.

Fire Service College

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Fire Service college annual report and accounts for the year ended March 1993 will be published;

(2) what was the financial target set for the Fire Service college on being given trading fund status; and if it has been achieved.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Fire Service college under its commandant chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from B. L. Fuller to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 31 January 1994:

> The Secretary of State has asked The Fire Service College to write to you directly in reply to two of your Parliamentary Questions about the College.
>
> The Fire Service College Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended March 1993 were laid before both Houses on 4 November 1993 as part of Votes and Proceedings on that day. Printed copies of the Report should be available shortly but have been delayed due to my negotiating what the cost to the College would be of providing a limited number of copies.
>
> On being given trading fund status, The Fire Service College was set two financial targets:
>
> (i) "to manage the funded operations so that the revenue of the fund consists principally of receipts in respect of goods or services provided in the course of the funded operations and is not less than sufficient, taking one year with another, to meet outgoings which are properly chargeable to revenue account."
>
> (ii) "a further financial objective desirable of achievement by the Fire Service College for the period 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1995 shall be to achieve a minimum return, average over the period as a whole, of 6·5 per cent. in the form of an operating surplus expressed as a percentage of average net assets employed at current values."
>
> The first was not met in 1992-93, the second cannot be finally assessed until 1995 but the first year showed a return of 0·65 per cent.
>
> I hope this is helpful.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Fire Service college has made a loss since achieving trading fund status; and who will make good such a loss.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Fire Service college became an agency operating as a trading fund on 1 April 1992. In the year 1992-93, it made a small operating surplus, but, after allowing for interest on the capital debt, it recorded a deficit of £1·152 million. The college is a Home Office establishment and the situation is being kept under review.

Prisons (Code of Standards)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will be publishing the Prison Service code of standards referred in para 7.22 of the Prison Service corporate plan published in April 1993.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is hoped to publish a code of standards early in 1994.

Prison Service Headquarters

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what payment has been paid to Hyperion Properties in respect of the cancellation of the move of the Prison Service headquarters to Derby; and on what basis the payment was made;

(2) what payment has been made to any company other than Hyperion Properties in respect of the cancellation of the move of the Prison Service headquarters to Derby; and on what basis such payment was made;

(3) what has been the cost of negotiations between the Prison Service and/or his Department and companies seeking compensation in respect of the cancellation of the move of the Prison Service headquarters to Derby.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 1 February 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the cancellation of the move of Prison Service Headquarters to Derby.

A payment of a little under £9 million has been paid to Hyperion Properties plc in settlement of their claim for damages for breach of contract following the cancellation of relocation. This payment represents full and final settlement of all claims from Hyperion, their contractor and sub-contractors.

In addition, £20,000 was paid to Barcol-Air (UK) Ltd in respect of design work for the air conditioning system which would have been installed in the headquarters in Derby.

The Prison Service's costs in negotiating this settlement amounted to around £128,000.

Obscene Publications

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the adequacy of the enforcement of the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

Mr. Maclean: The enforcement of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 is a matter for the police, and it is for the chief officers concerned to allocate resources to particular police activities. The Government are, however, most concerned to ensure that the law on obscenity is enforced as effectively as possible, and we take special account of the views of those who actually enforce the legislation, particularly when they identify gaps in the law which should be closed. That is why we have come forward in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill with a number of measures designed to improve matters in this area. These were described in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 7 December 1993, at column *163*.

The most recent statistics we have for prosecutions under the Obscene Publications Act are for 1992. In that year, there were 213 prosecutions and 171 convictions under section 2 of the Act. Figures for seizures and forfeitures under section 3 of the Act are not collected centrally. However, from inquiries we have made of the two largest forces in England and Wales—the Metropolitan police and Greater Manchester—both of which have specialised obscene publications squads, I understand that a total of 234,386 items were seized by them in 1992.

Buckley Hall Prison

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Buckley Hall prison will be market tested; if an in-house bid has yet been received; and when the prison will open.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 1 February 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Buckley Hall prison.

No in-house bid has yet been received. The process of market testing has started and expressions of interest in tendering were received on 21 January. It is expected that invitations to tender will be issued in early February. The opening of the prison is dependent on the rebuilding programme. It is planned to open the prison in phases and the earliest possible date for the opening of the first phase would be October 1994.

Asylum

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a breakdown of the number of asylum seekers held in detention on 1 January, *(a)* by nationality, *(b)* by length of detention and *(c)* by immigration status at the time of application.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information shows that 622 asylum seekers were held in detention on 21 January; information relating to 1 January is not available.

The breakdown by nationality is as follows:

	Number
Afghanistan	1
Algeria	44
Angola	17
Bangladesh	7
Benin	1
Bermuda	1
Brazil	2
Bulgaria	1
Burma	1
Cameroon	2
China	9
Columbia	5
Congo	2
Cyprus	8
Djibouti	1
Egypt	3
Ethiopia	14
Eritrea	2
Ghana	74
Guinea-Bissau	2
Haiti	1
India	106
Iran	2
Ivory Coast	12
Jamaica	1
Kenya	20
Lebanon	1
Liberia	4
Libya	2
Lithuania	1
Malawi	1
Morocco	1
Niger	4
Nigeria	67
Pakistan	20
Peru	1

	Number
Poland	1
Romania	7
Sierra Leone	7
Singapore	1
Somalia	16
South Africa	2
Sri Lanka	22
Sudan	5
Tanzania	3
Tongo	1
Tunisia	2
Turkey	53
Uganda	2
Ex-USSR	4
Ex-Yugoslavia	9
Zaire	34
Zambia	1
Zimbabwe	1
Nationality Doubtful	1
Unrecorded	9
Total	622

The breakdown by length of detention is as follows:

Length of detention	*Number*
Less than 1 month	193
1-2 months	216
2-6 months	133
6-12 months	64
12 months +	16
Total	622

Of the 622 asylum seekers held in detention, 341 had been detained at the port of entry and 228 were discovered to thave entered unlawfully. They would not, therefore, have had current leave at the time of their application. The remaining 53 detainees are the subjects of deportation action. Of these, 42 are known to have been overstayers at the time of their asylum applications. The status of the remaining 11, who are to be deported on conducive grounds, or on the recommendation of a court, is not recorded.

Mr. Glens Tarimo

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons Glens Tarimo, being deported to Nairobi on 27 December, was placed on a plane to Khartoum.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Mr. Tarimo was removed to Nairobi via Khartoum, the same route by which he had arrived, in accordance with normal practice.

Prisons (Market Testing)

Ms Roddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria will be used to select the next two operational prisons for market testing.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matte has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 1 February 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about market testing of further operational prisons.

The approach to the selection of operational prisons for market testing will be to select those where there is the greatest scope for improving performance. The Prisons Board will look at factors such as the extent and quality of regime activities and the cost per place in determining whether good value for money is currently being provided.

Consideration will also be given to factors which may affect performance, such as the nature of the prisoner population and any limitations of the buildings.

Crime Victims

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce provisions, in respect of compensating victims of violent crime, for individual assessment of loss of earnings and other financial loss.

Mr. Maclean: The recent White Paper, "Compensating Victims of Violent Crime: Changes to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme", Cm 2434, explained the Government's intention to establish a new tariff scheme, which will come into force on 1 April 1994. Under that scheme, compensation payments to blameless victims of violent crime will be made from a tariff of awards for injuries of comparable severity. The tariff levels have been set by reference to awards made in the recent past by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board which, because they are based on common law damages, include elements for loss of earnings and the other heads of damage. To that extent, the awards will contain an element of loss of earnings, but there will be no separate assessment.

The new scheme will be more straightforward and claimants should get their compensation more quickly and with less fuss. When the tariff scheme is introduced, the majority of claimants should get as much as or more than they could have expected under the current arrangements.

Detainees (Escorts)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report* column *927*, what was the total amount paid to private security firms for escorting detainees and their dependants overseas in 1993, including ticketing costs;

(2) what was the total amount paid to Airline Securities Consultants Ltd. for escorting detainees and their dependants overseas in 1993; and what has been the total paid to ASC ever for this purpose.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The total amount paid to private security firms for escorting detainees and their dependants overseas in 1993, including ticketing costs, was £615,035. Information about payments to Airline Security Consultants Ltd. is commercially confidential.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *927*, who provided the 7 per cent. of in-flight escorts for people being removed at public expense, including deportees, which were not provided by the private sector.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Provincial police forces.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deportees, and how many of their dependants, were escorted by private security firms in 1993.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Between April and December 1993, 167 people removed under powers in the Immigration Act 1971, including deportees and their dependants, were escorted overseas by private security firms. Statistics for January to March 1993 are not available.

Deportees (Drugs Administration)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in what percentage of deportations in 1993 drugs were administered to the deportee or their dependants;

(2) in what percentage of cases where drugs were administered to deportees or their dependants in 1993 their medical records were checked first.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is not normal practice for drugs to be administered to deportees or their dependants. Where medical records are available, they would be consulted as necessary before the administration of any medication.

New Prisons

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the estimated timetable for the financing, designing, building and opening of the new prisons announced in October 1993;

(2) when he will be inviting private sector proposals for financing, designing, building and managing the six new prisons which were announced in October last year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 1 February 1994:

> The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your two recent Questions about the timing of plans for the design, construction, management and finance by the private sector of the six new prisons which were announced in October last year.
>
> Expressions of interest for the first two of these, in South Wales and on Merseyside, have been invited. Private sector companies interested in bidding for these contracts have been asked to let the Prison Service have their initial responses by 11 February 1994. By 31 March 1994 the Prison Service plans to issue invitations to tender for the two projects. The timetable for the award of contracts and completion of the prisons will depend on the initial responses, but it is intended that the two prisons should be brought into use as speedily as possible.
>
> Work is currently in progress to identify suitable sites for the other four prisons.

Dog Attacks

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the most recent figures for dog attacks on humans in the metropolitan areas for *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1993.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not available in all the metropolitan areas.

Ethnic Minorities (Grants)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what total amount of funds have been made available over the last year under *(a)* the safer cities scheme, *(b)* section 11 grants, *(c)* ethnic minority grants and *(d)* ethnic minority business grant.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During the 1992-93 financial year funds were made available under these schemes as follows:

	£ million
Safer cities	7·7
Section 11	129·7
EMG	4·0
EMBI	0·4

Safer Cities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of safer cities, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Since the safer cities programme was launched in 1988, the following expenditure has been incurred on the programme's administration:

£ thousand

	1988-93	*1993-94*[1]	*Totals*
Publicity	533	90	623
Evaluation	188	47	235
Administration	1,619	309	1,928
Salaries	3,617	1,013	4,630
Surveys	1,060	62	1,122
Capital	307	3	310

[1] 1993-94 figures represent expenditure up to, and including, the third quarter.

The above mentioned budgets comprise the following categories of expenditure:

Publicity—producing action plans, annual reports, local brochures-organising seminars and conferences-publicising crime prevention schemes and activities.

Evaluation—data collection, census statistics, analysis software, analysis consultancies and census boundary data in order to evaluate the Programme.

Administration—project running costs, including stationery, staff travel and subsistence expenses–office rent and rates–minor office works–recruitment of staff–staff training–workshops and a national conference–equipment maintenance costs

Salaries—salaries of project staff

Surveys—local surveys and research work to identify crime problems and solutions, and to evaluate grant-aided schemes-centrally commissioned surveys to assist the evaluation of the Programme

Capital—project furniture and equipment

A further breakdown of the programme's expenditure could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Fire and Emergency Calls

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the number of fire and emergency calls per 1,000 population in each fire authority area, *(b)* the number of fire officers per 1,000 population and *(c)* the number of fire and emergency calls per officer, for each fire authority are in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1991.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is being collated. I will send a table to the hon. Member as soon as it is available.

Airline Securities Consultants Ltd.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the outcome of his Department's investigations into the two other cases apart from Dorothy Nirokedi and Meya Mangeta regarding complaints alleging excessive force by Airline Securities Consultants Ltd.; whether his Department will continue to use Airline Securities Consultants Ltd.; and if he will publish in full the complaints against this company, and his Department's investigations of them;

(2) what were the names of the deportees involved in the four complaints alleging excessive force in individual cases in which Airline Securities Consultants Ltd. has been employed by his Department to escort deportees; and where they were deported from.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The complaints about the alleged use of excessive force in escorting Mrs. Dorothy Nwokedi and Mr. Meya Mangete have been thoroughly investigated and were found to be unsubstantiated. Two further complaints about the conduct of Airline Security Consultants Ltd. in escorting two people being removed from the United Kingdom are still being investigated. These people have not sought any publicity for their cases and it would not be appropriate to disclose their names. Nor would it be appropriate to publish the complaints made against Airline Security Consultants or the reports of these investigations. I will, however, write to the hon. Member advising her of the outcome when they have been completed. I do not consider there are grounds for suspending the use of Airline Security Consultants Ltd. to escort deportees.

Research Projects

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those research projects *(a)* undertaken internally by his Department and *(b)* commissioned by his Department from external contractors, within the last five years, which have gathered data on the employment status (i) of persons convicted of crimes and (ii) of persons given custodial sentences.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not routinely collected, and special research exercises are required to do so. The national prison survey, carried out in 1991, provides the information for a representative sample for persons given custodial sentences. Results are published in "Home Office Research Studies" No. 128. The research and planning unit has recently commissioned a similar survey on offenders on probation "People On Probation", results of which will be available around the end of the year.

Many of the projects in the research and planning unit's programme include reference of some sort to employment status. The main projects are listed in the table, including publication details of those completed.

Internal projects

1. The National Prison Survey 1991: main findings, (HORS No. 128).
2. Developments in the use of compensation orders magistrates' courts since 1988, (HORS No. 126).
3. Deductions from benefit for fine default, (RPU Paper No. 60).
4. Unit fines: experiments in four courts, (RPU Paper No. 59).
5. Day Centre reconviction rates, British Journal of Criminology 32(3) 1992.
6. People on probation.
7. Implementation and use of the combination order.
8. Predicting sexual reconviction.
9. Reconviction Prediction score.

External projects

10. Custodial and post-custodial work and employment.
11. Managing the needs of women prisoners.
12. Imprisonment and family ties.
13. The dynamics of recidivism.

Criminology Researchers

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the granting of permission to criminology researchers to interview prisoners.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Mr. John McFall, dated 1 February 1994.

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the policy on granting permission to criminology researchers interview prisoners.

Requests to interview inmates in prison establishments in England and Wales are considered on the basis of the practicability and likely benefit of the research, the demands of the research project on Prison Service resources, the qualifications of the researcher, and the consent of the prisoner.

Deportation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report,* column *927,* what plans he has to ensure that his Department makes appropriate checks on private security firms employed by carriers required by the Immigration Service to effect the removal of a passenger refused leave to enter.

Mr. Charles Wardle: As I explained in the answer to which the hon. Member refers, carriers are responsible for all the arrangements necessary to comply with directions to remove people refused leave to enter. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Hoax Fire Calls

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hoax fire calls per 1,000 population were made in each fire authority area in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1991.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on malicious false alarm incidents attended by local authority fire brigades is shown in the table.

Malicious false alarm incidents per 1,000 population by brigade area, 1989-91

Brigade area	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
United Kingdom	2·3	2·4	2·6
England and Wales	2·2	2·3	2·5
England	2·2	2·3	2·5

Brigade area	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
England, non-Metropolitan	1·4	1·5	1·6
Avon	1·4	1·4	1·7
Bedfordshire	1·3	1·3	1·1
Berkshire	1·1	1·2	1·6
Buckinghamshire	1·3	1·4	1·3
Cambridgeshire	1·3	1·3	1·6
Cheshire	1·4	1·7	1·6
Cleveland	6·8	6·4	7·9
Cornwall	0·5	0·5	0·6
Cumbria	1·3	1·3	1·6
Derbyshire	1·6	1·6	1·6
Devon	1·2	1·4	1·7
Dorset	0·6	0·9	1·2
Durham	3·1	3·8	4·0
East Sussex	1·0	0·9	1·1
Essex	1·4	1·4	1·6
Gloucestershire	1·1	1·5	1·5
Hampshire	0·5	0·6	0·6
Hereford and Worcester	1·3	1·5	1·4
Hertfordshire	0·9	1·0	1·0
Humberside	2·7	3·4	3·4
Isle of Wight	0·5	0·5	0·7
Kent	1·6	1·3	1·6
Lancashire	2·3	2·5	3·1
Leicestershire	1·8	1·9	1·9
Lincolnshire	1·4	1·5	1·5
Norfolk	0·9	0·9	0·9
North Yorkshire	0·8	0·9	0·8
Northamptonshire	1·0	1·0	1·1
Northumberland	1·2	1·5	1·8
Nottinghamshire	1·6	1·6	1·5
Oxfordshire	1·1	1·4	1·4
Shropshire	0·8	1·5	1·9
Somerset	0·5	0·6	1·2
Staffordshire	1·3	1·4	1·7
Suffolk	0·5	0·5	0·6
Surrey	1·1	1·3	1·2
Warwickshire	1·0	1·3	1·0
West Sussex	1·0	1·0	0·9
Wiltshire	0·8	0·8	1·1
England, Metropolitan	3·6	3·7	3·8
Greater Manchester	4·3	4·5	5·1
Merseyside	4·7	4·3	4·6
South Yorkshire	2·7	2·8	3·0
Tyne and Wear	5·1	5·4	6·1
West Midlands	3·4	3·4	3·6
West Yorkshire	3·8	3·6	3·5
Greater London	3·0	3·2	3·2
Wales	2·5	2·7	2·6
Clwyd	1·5	2·0	1·8
Dyfed	1·6	1·5	1·6
Gwent	2·6	3·1	3·2
Gwynedd	1·5	1·2	1·1
Mid Glamorgan	3·4	3·5	3·4
Powys	0·7	0·5	0·8
South Glamorgan	3·7	3·3	3·2
West Glamorgan	3·1	3·8	3·3
Northern Ireland	2·5	2·7	2·4
Scotland	2·7	3·0	3·6
Strathclyde	3·4	3·5	5·0
Highland and Islands	0·7	0·9	1·4
Grampian	0·9	1·0	1·2
Tayside	2·0	2·4	2·6
Lothian	3·2	4·4	3·8
Fife	2·6	2·0	2·9
Central	2·5	2·3	2·2
Dumfries	1·6	1·7	1·9

Immigration (Children)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children, and from which countries, have entered the United Kingdom for adoption in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Statistics of children entering the United Kingdom with a view to adoption are not collected centrally.

Prisoners (Press Interviews)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what rules exist to prevent payment to convicted prisoners or their agents or relatives, as a way of capitalising on their notoriety and crime by granting press interviews;

(2) if he will consider taking powers to prevent all payments to convicted prisoners who agree to sell their stories to the media.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* Prison Service standing orders prohibit sentenced prisoners from engaging in correspondence, or in communicating by telephone about matters, which includes material intended for publication in return for payment. Visits to inmates by journalists or authors in their professional capacity are generally not allowed. In addition, the newspaper industry's code of practice specifically provides that people involved in crime or their associates should not be paid for their stories. It would not be feasible to devise legal restraints sufficiently broad to prevent criminals profiting from published accounts of their criminal activities, while at the same time avoiding unjustifiable restrictions on media reporting of matters of legitimate public interest. Enforcement could be particularly difficult since payment could be made indirectly, covertly or outside the jurisdiction.

Young Prisoners

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* 18-year-olds, *(b)* 19-year-olds, *(c)* 20-year-olds and *(d)* 21-year-olds were held in Prison Service establishments, both on remand and sentenced, on the last day of each month from 31 January 1992 to the present; and in which establishments they were held;

(2) how many *(a)* 15-year-olds, and *(b)* 16-year-olds, *(c)* 17-year-olds were held in Prison Service establishments, both on remand and sentenced, on the last day of each month from 31 January 1992 to the present; and in which establishments they were held.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 1 February 1994.

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions asking how many *(a)* 15-year-olds, *(b)* 16-year-olds, *(c)* 17-year-olds, *(d)* 18-year-olds, *(e)* 19-year-olds, *(f)* 20-year-olds and *(g)* 21-year-olds were held in Prison Service

establishments, both on remand and sentenced, on the last day of each month from 31 January 1992 to the present; and in which establishments they were held.

The available provisional information is given in the attached tables.

Population[1] aged 15 to 21, by type of custody in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales 1992–93

Custody type	Age 15	16	17	18	19	20	21	All ages
September 1993								
Male								
Remand	34	100	387	734	832	741	802	3,630
Sent[2]	70	169	427	875	1,446	1,632	1,809	6,428
Female								
Remand	—	—	9	16	18	23	25	91
Sent[2]	4	9	9	21	40	45	48	176
TOTAL	108	278	832	1,646	2,336	2,441	2,684	10,325
June 1993								
Male								
Remand	35	87	399	723	764	717	735	3,460
Sent[2]	94	204	494	904	1,385	1,440	1,621	6,142
Female								
Remand	—	1	13	17	19	20	23	93
Sent[2]	2	6	7	31	53	39	42	180
TOTAL	131	298	913	1,675	2,221	2,216	2,421	9,875
June 1992								
Male								
Remand	29	71	493	646	721	701	621	3,282
Sent[2]	76	178	463	1,004	1,404	1,686	1,905	6,716
Female								
Remand	—	—	9	11	20	23	21	84
Sent[2]	1	7	11	32	41	32	44	168
TOTAL	106	256	976	1,693	2,186	2,442	2,591	10,250
March 1992								
Male								
Remand	19	62	470	664	724	709	632	3,280
Sent[2]	74	188	470	1,027	1,451	1,626	1,870	6,706
Female								
Remand	—	—	9	15	23	26	26	99
Sent[2]	1	5	7	28	46	38	48	173
TOTAL	94	255	956	1,734	2,244	2,399	2,576	10,258

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[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Includes non-criminal prisoners and those sentenced for non-payment of a fine.

Population[1] in prison service establishments, England and Wales aged under 21, by establishment and type of custody on 30 September 1993

Establishment	Custody type	Age 15	16	17	18	19	20
Male							
Aylesbury	Sentenced[2]	—	—	4	27	74	95
Bedford	Remand	—	—	—	1	1	—
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	2	2
Birmingham	Remand	—	—	1	—	1	3
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	—	1
Brinsford	Remand	2	13	41	63	69	59
	Sentenced[2]	7	26	44	41	41	42
Brixton	Remand	—	—	1	1	—	2
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	1	—	—
Bullingdon	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	1	1
Camp Hill	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	2	—
Cardiff	Remand	1	1	11	16	30	17
	Sentenced[2]	—	2	2	4	3	4
Castington	Sentenced[2]	—	1	5	46	79	107
Chelmsford	Remand	—	—	6	12	17	18
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	1	3	2

Establishment	*Custody type*			*Age*			
		15	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*	*20*
Deerbolt	Remand	1	1	3	5	3	1
	Sentenced[2]	24	34	56	54	75	85
Dorchester	Remand	—	—	2	6	8	11
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	2	6
Dover	Sentenced[2]	—	—	5	34	63	72
Elmley	Remand	—	—	—	—	—	1
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	—	1
Exeter	Remand	—	—	4	10	13	10
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	4	3	4
Feltham	Remand	1	22	40	79	105	80
	Sentenced[2]	11	40	101	83	70	101
Finnamore Wood	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	12	29	32
Full Sutton	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	—	2
Garth	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	—	1
Glen Parva	Remand	6	14	50	84	81	70
	Sentenced[2]	1	3	16	82	146	148
Gloucester	Remand	—	4	9	20	28	17
	Sentenced[2]	—	1	2	6	1	5
Guy Marsh	Sentenced[2]	7	14	53	24	32	27
Hatfield	Sentenced[2]	—	—	2	36	63	67
Haslar	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	1	1	1
Hindley	Remand	4	3	32	51	79	62
	Sentenced[2]	—	2	2	17	17	23
Hollesley Bay	Sentenced[2]	—	—	3	36	61	72
Holme House	Remand	3	7	8	24	21	17
	Sentenced[2]	1	1	4	10	18	21
Huntercombe	Sentenced[2]	—	—	1	22	69	55
Lancaster Farms	Remand	—	8	26	52	57	62
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	4	27	40	55
Lewes	Remand	—	—	3	2	9	9
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	1	5
Lincoln	Remand	—	—	10	20	25	21
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	5	10	14
Liverpool	Remand	—	—	—	—	—	1
Low Newton	Remand	8	6	23	52	48	43
	Sentenced[2]	—	2	1	9	11	13
Moorland	Remand	8	18	53	120	91	95
	Sentenced[2]	—	6	18	46	65	84
Northallerton	Sentenced[2]	—	1	1	9	15	14
Norwich	Remand	—	3	4	5	13	16
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	1	1	4	2
Onley	Sentenced[2]	16	25	45	69	123	125
Pentonville	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	—	1
Portland	Sentenced[2]	—	1	11	52	120	115
Reading	Remand	—	—	21	39	35	43
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	8	15	7
Rochester	Remand	—	—	10	24	42	29
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	1	3
Stoke Heath	Remand	—	—	8	22	17	23
	Sentenced[2]	—	2	16	38	57	67
Swansea	Remand	—	—	12	13	22	21
	Sentenced[2]	2	—	—	—	2	2
Swinfen Hall	Sentenced[2]	—	1	10	21	38	62
Thorn Cross	Sentenced[2]	1	7	20	36	64	63
Usk	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	10	23	21
Woodhill	Remand	—	—	9	13	17	10
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	3	2	2
Total		104	269	814	1,609	2,278	2,373
	Remand	34	100	387	734	832	741
	Sentenced[2]	70	169	427	875	1,446	1,632

Establishment	Custody type	Age 15	16	17	18	19	20
Female							
Askham Grange	Sentenced[2]	1	3	—	1	5	7
Bullwood Hall	Sentenced[2]	—	2	—	2	7	7
Drake Hall	Sentenced[2]	—	—	4	2	6	7
Durham	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	1	—	1
East Sutton Park	Sentenced[2]	—	—	—	—	—	2
Holloway	Remand	—	—	3	7	6	8
	Sentenced[2]	1	—	—	6	5	2
Low Newton	Remand	—	—	—	—	—	1
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	1	1	1	—
New Hall	Remand	—	—	5	4	2	5
	Sentenced[2]	2	2	1	3	5	5
Pucklechurch	Remand	—	—	—	1	2	3
	Sentenced[2]	—	—	3	—	—	3
Risley	Remand	—	—	1	4	8	5
Styal	Remand	—	—	—	—	—	1
	Sentenced[2]	—	2	—	5	11	11
Total		4	9	18	37	58	68
	Remand	—	—	9	16	18	23
	Sentenced[2]	4	9	9	21	40	45

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Includes non-criminal prisoners and those sentenced for non-payment of a fine.

WALES

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the amount of housing revenue account subsidy for 1993-94 and 1994-95 for each district council in Wales, and for Wales as a whole, showing the percentage increase or decrease in each case.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The amount of housing revenue account subsidy claimed by each authority in Wales as a whole in 1993-94 is given in the following table. Comparable information for 1994-95 is not yet available as first subsidy claims for that year are not due until April.

Housing revenue account subsidy entitlement

Local authority	
Aberconwy BC	1,613,843
Alyn and Deeside DC	2,566,612
Arfon BC	2,860,306
Blaenau Gwent BC	10,967,070
Brecknock BC	759,755
Cardiff CC	23,291,119
Carmarthen DC	2,348,352
Ceredigion DC	1,932,664
Colwyn BC	2,194,617
Cynon Valley BC	4,914.395
Delyn BC	2,957,483
Dinefwr BC	1,486,992
Dwyfor DC	958,012
Glyndwr DC	803,215
Islwyn BC	5,242,264
Llanelli BC	7,501,220
Lliw Valley BC	4,157,709
Meirionnydd DC	1,238,429
Merthyr Tydfil BC	7,588,053
Monmouth BC	3,815,493
Montgomeryshire DC	496,002
Neath BC	4,921,454
Newport BC	10,363,902
Ogwr BC	7,702,537
Port Talbot BC	4,668,643
Preseli Pembs DC	2,848,229
Radnorshire DC	525,905
Rhondda BC	8,301,654
Rhuddlan BC	1,276,569
Rhymney Valley DC	11,347,929
South Pembs DC	1,427,901
Swansea CC	17,353,927
Taff Ely BC	6,816,221
Torfaen BC	13,076,949
Vale of Glamorgan BC	3,612,705
Wrexham Maelor BC	7,839,056
Ynys Mon BC	4,438,990
Wales	196,216,176

Children (Benefits)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children there were in families receiving supplementary benefit in Wales in 1979; and how many children there were in families receiving supplementary benefit/income support in Wales at the latest available date.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is shown in the following table. The latest available information relates to February 1993.

Children of supplementary benefit/income support recipients in Wales

Year	Number of children[1]
1979	57,000
1993	165,000

Sources:

Supplementary benefit statistics annual enquiries, November 1979.

Income support statistics quarterly enquiry, February 1993.

[1] All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand. Children are defined as being under 16 years of age.

Vehicle Registration Mark

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales further to the Minister of State's letter to the hon. Member for Newport, West of 19 November 1993, when his Department expects to conclude consideration of the possible amendment of the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1987 to allow the use of the "D"—Dysgwr—symbol in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This matter is currently receiving consideration and I will make an announcement when all the implications have been addressed fully. In the meantime, the hon. Member will wish to note that there exists no bar on learner drivers using a D plate in conjunction with an L plate.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Redwood: In 1991, one officer was found in breach of departmental regulations and dismissed. A criminal conviction for fraud followed.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Redwood: All cases of misconduct are investigated and considered on their merits.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency provided a reference for the former chief executive of the Welsh Development Agency to the Further Education Funding Council.

Mr. Redwood: I have arranged for the chairman's office to reply to the hon. Member and for a copy of that letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when a senior official of the Welsh Office provided a reference to the Further Education Funding Council for the former chief executive of the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Redwood: On 29 November 1993.

Council Housing Receipts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the amount of cash *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in each of the accounts of the local authority housing authorities from the sales of council houses.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest local authority estimates of usable capital receipts from the sales of council houses held at 31 March 1993 are given in the following table:

Usable capital receipts from the sales of council houses, at 31 March 1993

	£'000
Alyn and Deeside	0
Colwyn	384
Delyn	0
Glyndwr	285
Rhuddlan	627
Wrexham Maelor	106
Carmarthen	353
Ceredigion	197
Dinefwr	0
Llanelli	0
Preseli Pembrokeshire	1,468
South Pembrokeshire	1,322
Blaenau Gwent	901
Islwyn	458
Monmouth	1,566
Newport	0
Torfaen	1,615
Aberconwy	672
Arfon	141
Dwyfor	144
Meirionnydd	0
Ynys Mon	71
Cynon Valley	0
Merthyr Tydfil	602
Ogwr	702
Rhondda	0
Rhymney Valley	570
Taff Ely	91
Brecknock	791
Montgomeryshire	694
Radnorshire	125
Cardiff	1,450
Vale of Glamorgan	5,659
Port Talbot	1,138
Lliw Valley	1,432
Neath	77
Swansea	95
Total Wales	23,736

Source: Local Authority returns 1994.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Attorney-General how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

The Attorney-General: The following numbers of employees were convicted of offences of fraud or dishonesty in the Departments for which I am responsible:

	Number
1990	One
1991	Nil
1992	Nil
1993	One
[1]1994	One

[1] To date.

Two of these employees were dismissed and the third resigned while suspended from duty.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Attorney-General what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

The Attorney-General: Employees found guilty of fraud or dishonesty are liable to be dismissed under the relevant Department's disciplinary procedures.

Drugs (Unsuccessful Prosecutions)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful prosecutions for drug offences in England and Wales have been launched in each of the past three years.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Information for 1990 to 1992 is given in the table. 1993 data will not be available until the autumn.

Number of successful and unsuccessful prosecutions for drug offences 1990-1992
England and Wales

Year	*Prosecutions [=100 per cent.]*	*Convicted (Successful) Number*	*Convicted (Successful) Per cent.*	*Not convicted (Unsuccessful) Number*	*Not convicted (Unsuccessful) Per cent.*
1990	27,930	24,558	88	3,372	12
1991	28,285	23,455	83	4,830	17
1992	28,308	22,678	80	5,630	20

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision since April 1992.

Mr. David Davis: The amount of statutory sick pay reimbursement due to the Office of Public Service and Science is offset against employer's national insurance contributions payable to the Department of Social Security. The amount offset between 1 April 1992 and December 1993 was £56,300.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the names on the public appointments unit central list are known to be politically active.

Mr. David Davis: Details of political affiliation are not sought by the public appointments unit. From the information made available by candidates, only 13 per cent. of those on the central list are known to have been members of a political party.

Market Testing

Mr. Mills: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the current savings that have resulted up to January from the introduction of market testing in the civil service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 20 January, *Official Report*, columns 775-76.

EMPLOYMENT

Wages

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average wage of *(a)* a male and *(b)* a female working in Durham for each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested can be found in tables 110 and 113 of part E of the new earnings survey for each year from 1979 to 1993.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no plans to buy or loan any photographs from the Government art collections or elsewhere.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. David Hunt: I have four paintings belonging to the Government art collection in my room. There are 49 photographic portraits of past Secretaries of State for Employment and senior staff in my waiting room; these photographs belong to the Department.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report,* column *1031,* what are the particular qualifications, experience or expertise relating to employment policy of the special adviser, Mr. Michael McManus.

Mr. David Hunt: It is not my practice to comment on the qualifications, expertise or experience of my special adviser.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report,* column *515,* if he is yet in a position to place in the Library a list of the directors of each training and enterprise council and the companies or organisations which they represent;

(2) if he will place in the Library a list of the directors of each training and enterprise council in 1992-93 and the companies or organisations which they represented.

Miss Widdecombe: The list of current directors will be available in the Library from 4 February 1994. It will cover the training and enterprise councils for England and will be updated quarterly.

The information requested for 1992-93 is not held centrally, and the cost of obtaining it would be disproportionate.

Employees (Food)

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the statutory provisions or relevant circulars or guidance from his Department affecting employers' powers to restrict the kinds of food made available to employees at their place of work.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no provisions in employment or health and safety legislation governing this matter; nor has this Department issued any such guidance or circulars.

Maternity Leave

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will supply the figures for the number of weeks, after having their babies, that working women have off before they return to work, for each of the years since 1983.

Miss Widdecombe: The information for each year since 1983 is not available. However, the survey "Maternity Rights in Britain" by the Policy Studies Institute, based on research co-funded by the Department, indicates that in 1988 working women returned to work after a median of 19 weeks absence following child birth.

ILO Conventions

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the number of International Labour Organisation conventions deratified by the United Kingdom; and how many have been ratified by each other EC state.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Over the years, successive United Kingdom Governments have denounced 10 conventions. The United Kingdom is currently bound by 69 conventions. The number of conventions by which other EC states are bound is shown in the table:

Number of ILO conventions to which EC states are currently bound (as at 31 December 1992)

	Number
Belgium	71
Denmark	59
France	102
Germany	64
Greece	58
Ireland	48
Italy	90
Luxembourg	55
Netherlands	76
Portugal	63
Spain	106
United Kingdom	69

Sources: ILO Lists of Ratifications by Convention and by Country; ILO Chart of Ratifications of International Labour Conventions.

Stansted Airport

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many representations he has received to date about the effect of the transatlantic air travel bilateral restrictions on employment at and around London's Stansted airport.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received seven representations on this matter.

Redundant People

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has concerning schemes administered by the North Derbyshire training and enterprise council which offer subsidies to employers to take on redundant people; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The North Derbyshire training and enterprise council offers a wide range of support to unemployed people to help them acquire the skills they need to get and keep jobs. This includes encouraging employers to recruit unemployed people by assisting with the cost of training.

Redundancies

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many requests he has received for information regarding notification procedures for impending redundancies as required under section 193 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992;

(2) how many requests for information regarding notification procedures for impending redundancies under section 193 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 have been denied on the grounds of confidentiality; to what type of information confidentiality applies; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what criteria he uses when deciding that confidentiality applies to the operation of parts of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department receives requests from time to time for information about individual notifications of redundancies made by employers under section 193 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. Records are not kept of such requests. The Department's policy, based on legal advice, is that such information is given and treated in confidence. The Department is not able to comment on individual notifications unless details of those notifications have already been made publicly available by the employer.

GCHQ

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances the Government would allow unions to represent again employees at GCHQ.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government have made it clear that their overriding objective remains to ensure the maintenance of continuous operations at GCHQ for the protection of national security. It is necessary to ensure that the staff are not subject to potential conflicts of loyalty. The Government are willing to consider any proposals which are consistent with that objective. All staff at GCHQ are free to join the Government Communications Staff Federation which is listed as a trade union under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. More than 50 per cent. have done so.

DEFENCE

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) of 11 January, *Official Report*, column 7, if he will place in the Library the paper his Department submitted to the joint Department of the Environment—Ministry of Agriculture assessment of THORP for the consultation exercise; and if he will set out the basis of his statement that conversion of nuclear material to military purpose can be achieved only with extreme difficulty.

Mr. Aitken: My Department participated in the preparation of the statement of Government policy on reprocessing and the operation of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield, which was made public on 4 August 1993. No submissions have been made since then by my Department in respect of the consultation or decision on the new Sellafield discharge authorisation. A copy of the statement of Government policy has been placed in the Library of the House.

I have nothing to add to the position set out in paragraph 51 of that statement, on the usefulness of plutonium from THORP for weapons purposes.

Vickers Armoured Vehicle

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his intention to acquire the Vickers mark II armoured vehicle for the British Army.

Mr. Aitken: No.

Horizon Programme

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Horizon programme.

Mr. Aitken: Following the signing of a memorandum of understanding in July last year, a joint project office was established in London in November of last year, to manage Project Horizon, the common new generation frigate, on behalf of the United Kingdom, France and Italy. Two international consortia are now being formed to conduct competitive project definition for the combat management system to be contracted later this year. And a competition is underway for the selection of the United Kingdom member for the international joint venture company which will design and build the three first of class ships, which we currently plan to enter service around the turn of the century.

Departmental Dwellings

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number and location of *(a)* dwellings and *(b)* vacant dwellings owned by his Department in (i) each district of Hampshire and (ii) Hampshire as a whole.

Mr. Hanley: Statistics on Ministry of Defence dwellings are not maintained by local authority districts and such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

As at 31 December 1993, the Ministry of Defence owned 8,288 dwellings in Hampshire, of which 1,051 were vacant, located as follows:

	Stock	*Vacant*
Aldershot	2,405	390
Bordon	673	77
Farnborough	104	9
Middle Wallop	509	61
Oakhanger	92	4
Odiham	581	11
Portsmouth area	3,446	386
Worthy Down	478	113

Many of the vacant properties were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or already allocated to service families who were due to move in shortly.

In addition, 1,003 properties, of which 188 were vacant, were in the process of being sold.

South Citadel Building, Whitehall

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts were placed for refurbishment of the command centre under the south citadel building in Whitehall between 1979 and 1985; who were the main contractors; and what was the value of each contract.

Mr. Aitken: Four main contracts were placed for the refurbishment of the command centre under the south citadel building in Whitehall between 1979 and 1985. The contractors were Griffiths McGee Demolition Co Ltd, Mirrless Blackstone Stamford Ltd, Taylor Woodrow Construction Ltd and Hayward Tyler Ltd. The total value of the four contracts when let was approximately £700,000.

Nimrod Aircraft

Dr. David Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF Nimrod aircraft are allocated to royal duties.

Mr. Hanley: No Nimrod aircraft are specifically allocated to royal duties, although aircraft can be made available in the search and rescue role should it be considered necessary on any occasion.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Nimrod aircraft were on royal duty in Australia on 26 January.

Mr. Hanley: None.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Nimrod aircraft there are in the RAF.

Mr. Hanley: The Royal Air Force currently has 33 Nimrod aircraft.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF Nimrod aircraft are located overseas.

Mr. Hanley: Two Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft are scheduled to depart the United Kingdom to conduct routine training in the Mediterranean on Tuesday 1 February. In addition to routine training deployments, Nimrod aircraft do deploy from time to time to Sicily from where they contribute to the NATO and Western European Union forces conducting maritine operations in the Adriatic; the next deployment is due to begin on Friday 4 February.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to alter the numbers of search-and-rescue helicopters based at the royal naval bases at *(a)* Portland and *(b)* Culdrose.

Mr. Hanley: There are no current plans to alter the numbers of search and rescue helicopters at the royal naval air stations at Portland and Culdrose.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current number of SAR helicopters based at the royal naval bases at *(a)* Portland and *(b)* Culdrose.

Mr. Hanley: Currently, three of the Sea King Mk4 helicopters held at the royal naval air station Portland are equipped for search and rescue operations. One duty aircraft provides day time cover with another held on standby. The royal naval air station Culdrose has a squadron of five Sea King Mk5 helicopters, all of which are capable of search and rescue operations. One aircraft is on duty at all times while another is held on standby.

Malaysian Arms Deal

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many files marked "Not for NAO eyes" relating to the Malaysian arms deal are held in his Department.

Mr. Aitken: None.

SSN Flotilla

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the modernisation of the SSN flotilla.

Mr. Aitken: I am pleased to announce that we have today placed a contract with Ferranti Thomson Sonar Systems—FTSS—for the full development and initial production of sonar 2076 which will be fitted to Trafalgar class fleet submarines.

The contract has been awarded following competition and covers the provision of four boat sets and supporting shore equipment. At a price in excess of £180 million it is the largest single sonar order placed for some time and will continue to keep the Royal Navy at the forefront of sonar technology and capability into the foreseeable future.

The contract is likely to create a number of new jobs and will safeguard hundreds of others at FTSS and at many sub-contractors, and will be welcomed by British industry.

EDUCATION

Technology College Status

7. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools have now expressed an interest in obtaining technology college status.

Mr. Patten: There has been a very encouraging level of interest from schools and businesses. More than 200 schools have made inquiries to my Department or the City Technology Colleges Trust on the technology college initiative.

Grant-maintained Schools

11. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement about the progress of the scheme for grant-maintained schools in Northumberland.

Mr. Robin Squire: There is only one self-governing school in Northumberland at present—a much smaller proportion than in the country as a whole. But there is considerable interest at other schools, representatives from 50 of which attended one of the Department's conferences about grant-maintained status last year.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to establish freephone lines to advise the public on grant-maintained school status on a national and regional basis; how long he expects such lines to be in operation; if they will offer a 24-hour a day service; and what is the estimate of cost.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the cost of the recent press advertisements promoting the availability of information concerning grant-maintained school status.

Mr. Robin Squire: The cost of the present series of advertisements, designed to provide factual information on grant-maintained status to parents, governors and schools, will be about £200,000.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils are now being educated in self-governing grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Patten: Over 530,000 pupils are now being educated in 814 self-governing schools. This represents 16 per cent. of England's secondary school population, and a significant and growing proportion of all primary school pupils.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools within Greater London have opted out of local education authority control; and how many have applications being considered by his Department.

Mr. Robin Squire: By 31 January, 145 schools were operating with grant-maintained status in the Greater London area, and two more had been approved for incorporation on 1 April. In addition, 14 schools had applications for grant-maintained status under consideration, and another six had voted in favour but had not yet published proposals.

Nursery Education

13. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many state-funded nursery school places are available in south Liverpool; and what is the annual demand for them.

Mr. Forth: Figures for south Liverpool are not held centrally. Nor is information collected on the demand for or supply of nursery school places as such. The Department's statistics relate to pupils attending maintained schools in whole local education authority areas.

16. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what calculation he has made of the percentage of three and four-year-olds that could be provided for by local education authorities if the element in the standard spending assessment for nursery education was used fully for this purpose.

Mr. Forth: It is for local education authorities to determine what type and level of educational provision to make for under-fives. The number of under-fives who could be supported with a given level of expenditure would depend on the type of provision, mode of attendance and take up of places. Many parents choose to make use of the many and varied alternative provisions made by the significant voluntary and private sector.

23. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list those local education authorities which spend more than the element in the standard spending assessment for nursery education on providing places in nursery schools, units or classes.

Mr. Forth: This information is not held centrally.

25. **Ms Estelle Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received on recent policy announcements on the availability of nursery education.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has received a large number of representations on nursery education in recent months.

Truancy

15. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the correlation between truancy rates and teaching standards.

Mr. Forth: Many factors contribute to truancy, some of them outside the immediate control of schools. However, evidence from Office for Standards in Education inspections and other research suggests that there may be factors in pupils' classroom experience which contribute to the disaffection of some pupils and encourage them to stay away from school.

26. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to cut down truancy.

Mr. Forth: The Department is currently supporting expenditure of some £9·6 million in 71 English local education authorities under the reducing truancy programme of the grants for education support and training —GEST—scheme 1993-94. The programme will be extended in 1994-95 to include a "Truancy Watch" component as a means of promoting community involvement. Approved projects will be announced shortly.

Ministerial Visits

17. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he will next be visiting Rochdale to discuss the educational needs of its population.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to visit Rochdale.

Performance Tables

18. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools improved their performance in the school performance tables last year over that of the previous year.

Mr. Robin Squire: The tables show that, on the most widely used measure of school performance—the percentage of 15-year-old pupils gaining five or more A to C grades at GCSE—62 per cent. of schools improved their performance in 1993 as compared with 1992. This is a most creditable performance by the schools concerned.

Capital Expenditure

19. **Mr. Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received from Cornwall county council about the level of its financial allocation for capital expenditure projects for 1994-95; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: None. Local education authority bids for capital are dealt with consistently and fairly, in line with published criteria. Cornwall's annual capital guidelines are a reflection of the extent to which its plans for spending matched these criteria.

Education Policies, Redbridge

21. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received in the last year about the education policies of the London borough of Redbridge.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has received several representations, including from the hon. Member, about the admission of pupils to schools in Redbridge.

Religious Education

22. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimates have been made of the adequacy of the supply of teachers of religious education.

Mr. Robin Squire: Our target intakes for initial teacher training provide for a 31 per cent. increase in recruitment to RE courses up to 1996-97—well above the average for secondary subjects. We review these targets annually.

Capital Works

24. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current estimate of outstanding capital works in schools in England.

Mr. Forth: Information from the 1991 National Audit Office report on school buildings suggests that some £2 billion, at 1990 prices, was required to deal with the outstanding capital needs of school buildings. In 1994-95, Government support for capital and repair work at maintained schools will total over £600 million, much of which will go towards improving the school stock.

Special Educational Needs

27. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to reduce the amount of time it takes local education authorities to produce statements of special educational needs.

Mr. Forth: Subject to Parliament's approval, from September this year regulations will set time limits within which statements must be made and a code of practice will provide guidance on how those limits should be met. Normally, the process should take no more than 26 weeks from start to finish.

Dearing Report

28. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the response of the teacher unions and associations following the publication of the Dearing report on the national curriculum and testing.

Mr. Robin Squire: All the teacher unions have recognised the improvements to the national curriculum and testing embodied in the Dearing report. I welcome the subsequent action of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers in calling off their boycott of national tests. I hope that the National Union of Teachers will follow suit so that we can continue to raise standards in our schools in the interests of pupils.

Training Targets

29. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent representations he has had from employers about national education and training targets.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend welcomes the continuing support from employers for the national education and training targets. He shares the view expressed to him by employers that the challenge presented by the targets must be met if the country is to remain competitive in the international marketplace.

Surplus Places

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will reconsider the formulae by which he calculates surplus places in small schools in rural areas.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department assesses surplus places in the same way for all schools based on their physical capacity. We have always made it clear, however, that whether surplus places can be removed will depend on the type of school concerned and where it is.

Further Education

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of secondary school pupils taking post-16 education remain in the same school rather than transferring to sixth-form colleges or other educational institutions.

Mr. Robin Squire: Of the 16-year-olds who remained in full-time education in 1992-93, the proportion in school was 50·5 per cent.; 46·5 per cent. were in the same secondary school as when they were 15 years old, and 4 per cent. had transferred to another school. The proportion in sixth-form colleges was 12·2 per cent., while 37·3 per cent. went to other colleges of further education.

School Discipline

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has to *(a)* improve discipline in schools and *(b)* reduce the number of exclusions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend recently issued for consultation draft guidance on behaviour and discipline and on exclusions from school. The aim of the guidance is to help schools to improve standards of behaviour and to reduce the need to exclude pupils. Consultation lasts until 11 March, with a view to issuing guidance in final form in May.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Boswell: No employees of this Department have been found guilty of fraud since 1989.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Boswell: The Department's policy is to dismiss any employee who is convicted by the courts of fraud.

Education Expenditure (Cornwall)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much central Government money was spent per head of the population on education in Cornwall in each year since 1979.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Regional Offices (Training)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give details of the training to be given to civil servants who will staff the proposed regional offices within the Department for Education.

Mr. Boswell: With effect from 1 May 1994, a group of staff working at the Department for Education will be given specific responsibility for regional links and for ensuring proper co-ordination with those Departments represented in the Government's integrated regional offices. Staff will be provided with training as appropriate to their individual needs.

Student Publications

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the effect of his policy on student unions on the charitable work carried out by student rags.

Mr. Boswell: The Government are determined to reform student unions and to secure that the principles of choice, democracy and accountability are universally observed in their activities. It is not our intention to jeopardise student services, for which funding will remain available in institutions' budgets.

Office for Standards in Education

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of the setting up of the Office for Standards in Education.

Mr. Robin Squire: When Ofsted was created on 1 September 1992, it incurred gross expenditure for the remainder of the financial year of £7·7 million.

Regional Offices

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated cost of setting up regional offices within his Department.

Mr. Boswell: The Department has no plans to set up regional offices.

Dance and Drama

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many local education authorities made full discretionary awards for accredited courses for dance and drama in 1987 and in 1993; and if he will estimate the total population in the authorities that now make no discretionary awards at all.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Music and Arts Advisory Services

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which local education authorities still have *(a)* a music advisory service and *(b)* an arts advisory service.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information on these discretionary services is not collected by the Department. It is the Government's policy that, wherever possible, decisions about the need for such services and how best to obtain them should rest with the schools. Local education authorities may provide them if there is sufficient demand locally.

SCOTLAND

Glenlight Shipping

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the criteria used by the Scottish Office in deciding the level of subsidies to shipping companies for general cargo and timber transportation; which Scottish companies are currently in receipt of these subsidies for general cargo and timber transportation; how much these subsidies have amounted to during each of the last five years for *(a)* general cargo and *(b)* timber transportation; and how much the Glenlight Shipping Company has received in respect of its transportation of timber for Caledonian Paper plc.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Each shipping operator's tariff rebate subsidy—TRS—allocation is based on the operator's estimates of traffic to be carried within the specified period and on previous years' actual traffic carried as compared with forecasts. The companies currently operating within the TRS scheme are listed in the table. All companies within the TRS scheme are eligible to receive subsidy on both general cargo and timber transportation. It is up to each individual company to decide on a commercial basis which commodities they wish to carry. Information is not available in the form requested for subsidy disaggregated between different commodities. The total amount of TRS paid during the last five years is also listed.

Companies operating within the TRS scheme:

P&O Scottish Ferries
Orcargo
Orkney Line Ltd.
Shetland Line Ltd.
Dennison (Shipping) Ltd.
Easdale Island Shipping Line
Gardner Shipping (Scotland) Ltd.
Glenlight Shipping Ltd.
Hay & Company (Lerwick) Ltd.
Roderick Cunningham (Scalpay) Ltd.

P&O and bulk shippers' tariff rebate subsidy 1989-90 to 1993-94

	P&O	*Bulk Shippers*
1989-90	4·3	1·0
1990-91	5·0	1·6
1991-92	4·2	2·0
1992-93	4·3	2·2
[1]1993-94	6·8	3·1

[1] Provision.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contact there has been between the Scottish Office and Caledonian Paper plc concerning the recent closure of the Glenlight Shipping Company and the implications for the operation of Caledonian Paper plc; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Glenlight Shipping Ltd. has not closed. The company is still operating, but has taken the commercial decision to discontinue bulk shipping operations in the highlands and islands area apart from the carriage of timber. The Scottish Office is continuing to provide tariff rebate subsidy to the company on the basis of eligible cargoes carried. There has been no contact between the Scottish Office and Caledonian Paper plc regarding this matter.

Timber Barges

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the public subsidies payable by the Scottish Office to companies operating timber barges; and if he will retain the level of subsidy at the current levels.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are currently 10 shipping companies operating within the tariff rebate subsidy scheme and each of them is eligible for subsidy for the transportation of timber. Currently only one company, Glenlight Shipping Ltd., operates timber barges. The bulk transport of timber currently attracts a TRS rate of 40 per cent. Arrangements for the operation of the TRS scheme in 1994-95 have not yet been finalised.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria he uses to determine that a trunk road should be detrunked.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Whether or not a road should cease to be a trunk road is a question of whether it should form part of a national system of routes for through traffic. Where a road ceases to fulfil a significant role in serving long-distance traffic, it will, therefore, be appropriate to detrunk it.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultation is carried out before a trunk road is detrunked.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As a matter of practice, consultations take place with all the local authorities for the area through which a road passes prior to publication of a notice by the Secretary of State of his intention to detrunk the road.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many roads or sections of roads in north-east Fife have been detrunked in the last five years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: One. A Section of the A91 road at Petheram roundabout, St. Andrews was detrunked on 1 April 1993.

Mr. Menzies-Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by region the roads or sections of roads that have been detrunked in the last five years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table.

Region and route number	*Section detrunked*	*Date*
Borders		
A68	That superseded by new section north of Packman's bridge to north of Drygrange bridge	2 March 1989
A7	Ladhope Vale	1 April 1991
A68	That superseded by Newtown St. Boswells bypass	1 April 1991
A1	That superseded by Dunglass diversion	1 April 1993
Central		
A9	That superseded by Dunblane bypass	1 April 1991
Dumfries and Galloway		
A75	That superseded by Rinford bypass	1 April 1989
A75	That superseded by Castle Douglas bypass	1 April 1989
A75	That superseded by Glenluce bypass	1 April 1990
A75	That superseded by Annan bypass	1 April 1990
A701/75	That superseded by Dumfries bypass	1 April 1991
A701	That superseded by Ae bridge diversion	1 April 1991
A75	That superseded by Blackcraig improvement	1 April 1992
A75	That superseded by Carrutherston to Hetland improvement	1 April 1992
A74	Small sections of slip road to Kirkpatrick Fleming to Gretna special road	1 April 1993
Fife		
A92/987/907	Admiralty interchange to Kirkcaldy	1 April 1991
A91	Petheram roundabout, St. Andrews	1 April 1993

Region and route number	Section detrunked	Date
Grampian		
A96	That superseded by Forres bypass	1 April 1989
A92	That superseded by Murcar to Balmedie improvement	1 April 1989
A92	That superseded by Ellon bypass and Tipperty diversion	1 April 1990
A96	That superseded by Inverurie bypass	1 April 1991
Highland		
A9	That superseded by Mound bridges, Sutherland	1 April 1989
A830	That superseded by Lochailort to Polnish bridge diversion	1 April 1989
A830	That superseded by Mallaig to Glasmacardoch Bay diversion	1 April 1989
A9	That superseded by Dunbeath bridge diversion	1 April 1990
A835	That superseded by Garve railway bridge improvement	1 April 1990
A9	That superseded by Dornoch Firth crossing	1 April 1992
A87	That superseded by Dornie bypass	1 April 1992
Lothian		
M8	Newbridge to Dechmont connecting roads	31 March 1989
A68	That superseded by Sherriffhall roundabout	1 April 1989
A7	That superseded by north Middleton diversion	1 April 1990
A7	That superseded by Dalkeith western bypass	1 April 1992
Strathclyde		
A82	That superseded by Arden to Auchentulloch diversion	1 April 1989
A82	That superseded by Auchendennan to Arden bypass	1 April 1989
A82	That superseded by Luss to Camus nan Clais improvement	1 April 1990
A76	That superseded by Cumnock and Auchinleck bypass	1 April 1992
A74	That superseded by Millbank to Nether Abington special road	1 April 1992
A82	That superseded by Luss bypass	1 April 1992
A77	That superseded by Bennane Hill bypass	1 April 1992
A74	That superseded by Elvanfoot to Paddy's Rickle bridge special road	1 April 1993
A80	City of Glasgow district boundary to Crow Wood superseded by Stepps bypass	1 April 1993
Tayside		
A972/929	That superseded by Kingsway to Powrie improvement	1 April 1989

A91

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the future of the A91 road from the M90 to Cupar.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are at present no plans which would affect the future of the A91 from the M90 to Cupar. The question whether the whole of the A91 should be retained as a trunk road is one which we shall consider as part of an examination of the whole of the trunk and primary route network consequent upon reorganisation of local government.

Rose McCormack

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to examine the circumstances surrounding the death of Rose McCormack and her baby in Grangemouth.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate is fully aware of the circumstances of these tragic deaths, since their circumstances were reported by the police to the procurator fiscal at Falkirk, who in the normal way examined in detail what had occurred.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed;

(2) what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Lang: Staff who are involved in fraud are dealt with under departmental disciplinary proceedings. A range of disciplinary penalties is available, including dismissal. Depending on the circumstances of the case criminal proceedings may also be brought against the member of staff concerned.

The number of financial frauds which have been recorded since 1989 are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1989	2
1990	1
1991	5
1992	2
1993	[illegible]

Eight of the cases have resulted in dismissal.

NHS Trusts (Pay)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cars each national health service trust and health board has bought as part of a payment package for senior personnel in the last year; and what is the average value of such cars.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *74*, on the percentage rise of national health service trust chief executives' pay between 1992 and 1993, how many chief executives exceeded the 1·5 per cent. norm for settlements; and by how much in each case.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Dounreay

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has received from Atomic Energy Authority Technology in regard to its imminent plans to increase radioactive discharges from its Dounreay reprocessing plant in Caithness.

Sir Hector Monro: Following an application by AEA Technology for revised limits Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate is currently reviewing the AEA Technology authorisations to dispose of solid, liquid and gaseous wastes. The applications for revised certificates of authorisation have been placed on public registers where they are available for inspection, at the offices of the inspectorate and at the offices of Caithness district and Highland regional councils.

Public Appointments

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many appointments he has made within his responsibilities as Secretary of State for Scotland for each year since June 1987.

Mr. Lang: The information held centrally by my Department does not show the number of appointments made in any given year. The total number of appointees at 1 September 1993 to non-departmental public bodies, NHS bodies and nationalised industries which are the responsibility of my Department is shown in the summary tables in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1993", copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House. Information about the total numbers of appointees in earlier years is available in previous editions of this annual publication.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many relatives of Conservative hon. Members have been appointed to public bodies in Scotland since 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The relationship of those appointed to non-departmental bodies sponsored by my Department is neither sought nor recorded.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all public body appointments made by him where the current annual salary is *(a)* over and *(b)* under £10,000.

Mr. Lang: The remuneration of those appointed to non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department is listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1993", copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the local councillors appointed to Scottish hospital trusts, giving the political affiliation in each case.

Mr. Stewart: On the basis of the information held centrally the position is as follows:—

	Party
Angus Community NHS Trust	
Mr. G. Norrie	Independent
Caithness and Sutherland Hospitals NHS Trust	
Rev. A. Murray	Independent
Mr. J. Rosie	Independent
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trusts	
Mr. E. Gibson	SNP
Mr. G. Willacy	Labour
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	
Mr. I. Borthwick	Independent
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	
Mr. P. Fawcett	Labour
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	
Mr. J. M. Humphrey	Conservative
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hosptials NHS Trust	
Mrs. M. Mitchell	Conservative
Perth and Kinross NHS Trust	
Mr. J. Mathieson	Conservative
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	
Mr. B. Baird	Conservative
West Lothian NHS Trust	
Mr. P. Johnston	SNP
Yorkhill NHS Trust	
Mrs. J. E. Cameron	Conservative

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the members of political parties appointed by him to public bodies each year since 1987; and if he will give the political affiliation of each.

Mr. Lang: Appointments are made on the basis of aptitude and merit. I do not make appointments of members of political parties in that capacity and no central record is kept of the political affiliation of those appointed to public bodies.

Scottish Homes

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if Scottish Homes is seeking revenue subsidy for housing associations from local authorities in all parts of Scotland; and what such grants have already been made.

Mr. Lang: Scottish Homes does not seek revenue subsidy for housing association from local authorities. If associations undertake activities jointly with local authorities, the funding of such activities is for negotiation between the parties concerned.

Criminals (Employment Status)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the employment status of persons convicted of crimes in Scotland in the last five years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The only information collected centrally on the employment status of persons convicted of crime relates to crimes of homicide and can be found in the statistical bulletin, "Homicide in Scotland 1983-1992".

Highlands and Islands Objective 1 Plan

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he expects to announce the location of the secretariat for the administration of the highlands and islands objective 1 plan; how many personnel he expects to be employed within the secretariat; and when the appointment of the head of administration will be announced;

(2) what representations his Department has received regarding the location of the secretariat for the administration of the highlands and islands objective 1 plan; if he will give details of any submissions which have suggested locating the venture outwith Inverness district; and if he will give details of the submissions which have suggested locating the venture on an island.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* As part of the process of drawing up the highlands and islands objective 1 plan, the Scottish Office has had discussions with the various agencies involved about the possibility of establishing a programme executive within the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area. Those discussions have focused on locating the executive in the Inverness area, although not necessarily within Inverness district. There have been no formal submissions on the location, but in responding to the draft plan, the following suggestions were made:

Organisation	*Proposed location*
Sutherland District Council	Sutherland
Argyll and Bute District Council	Oban
Ross and Cromarty District Council	Ross and Cromarty
Western Isles Islands Council	Western Isles/Stornoway
Shetland Islands Council	Shetland
Strathclyde Regional Council	Argyll and Bute
Lewis Council of Social Service	Western Isles
Western Isles Objective 1 Group	Western Isles

An announcement about the appointment of the programme director will be made shortly. Under the terms of an interim agreement with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the director will be employed by HIE and his office will be located in their headquarters in Inverness. One of his initial tasks will be to prepare more detailed proposals for the functioning of the executive including staff numbers and their location.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he will take to ensure that assistance from the European structural funds, under objective 1, will be channelled into crofting.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Crofters already benefit from a range of national and EC structural support measures which will continue under objective 1. In addition, the objective 1 plan which was recently submitted to the European Commission allows for consideration to be given to additional measures to help crofters to increase efficiency and improve the quality of their produce.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the general practitioner fundholders operating within the Ayrshire and Arran health board area; what is the size of the budgets under their control; and if he will make a statement on the criteria which GP practices have to fulfil in order to gain fund holding status.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Three fund-holding practices have been operating within the board area from 1 April 1993: Dr. Richardson and partner, Institute avenue, Catrine combined with Dr. Cleland and partners, High street, Mauchline; Dr. Thomson and partners, 8 Cathcart street, Ayr and Dr. McSherry and partners, 9 Frew terrace, Irvine.

Details of the allotted sums, or funds, determined by the health board and deployed by a GP fundholding practice are published annually in each individual practice's audited annual accounts. Such audited accounts are not yet available for 1993-94.

The health board is required to determine each application according to the National Health Service (Fundholding Practices) (Scotland) Regulations 1993—SI 1993 No. 488. The main criteria to be fulfilled to gain GP fundholding status are that the practice, or group of practices, must have a list size of at least 6,000 patients; the fundholding application must be made by all members of the practice partnership; the practice must demonstrate that it has the managerial capability and resource plans necessary to manage a fund effectively and efficiently; and it must have a computer system to support the effective and efficient management of the fund.

Dental Practices

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dental practices accepted national health service patients in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* No information is held on dental practices. The number of individual dentists registered on health board dental lists to provide national health service general dental services in each of the four health board areas within Strathclyde region and the total number of dentists registered in

Scotland is contained in the table. Information for individual local government districts and regional areas is not available.

Number of dentists on health board dental lists in Scotland at 31 December

Year	Argyll and Clyde	Ayrshire and Arran	Greater Glasgow	Lanarkshire	Scotland
1978	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1,188
1979	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1,207
1980	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1,251
1981	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1,294
1982	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1,334
1983	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1,379
1984	113	110	263	131	1,360
1985	115	112	263	133	1,392
1986	122	114	282	137	1,456
1987	132	122	289	142	1,511
1988	133	113	299	137	1,528
1989	137	112	328	140	1,587
1990	141	118	337	142	1,626
1991	157	118	340	147	1,666
1992	160	120	348	141	1,680
1993	165	126	358	147	1,774

[1] Information before December 1984 is not available for the number of dentists registered with individual health boards.

Prescriptions

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of prescriptions dealt with in each year since 1978-79; and, of this total, how many were *(a)* free of charge, *(b)* covered by a pre-payment certificate, *(c)* paid for as a straightforward commercial transaction and *(d)* paid for in some other way.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* The available information is as shown in the table.

No breakdown is available between those prescription items which were free from charges and those covered by a pre-payment certificate. Column 5 shows, where available, the value of the pre-payment certificates issued in the respective years. No information is available regarding prescriptions paid for in some other way.

NHS prescriptions (Scotland)

1 Year	2 Number of prescription items Million	3 Number dispensed free of charge Million	4 Number paid for directly Million	5 Value of pre-payment certificates £ million
1978-79	35·78	22·35	13·43	N/A
1979-80	35·61	23·16	12·45	N/A
1980-81	35·49	24·88	10·61	N/A
1981-82	35·46	26·23	9·23	0·85
1982-83	36·50	27·69	8·81	1·00
1983-84	37·24	28·77	8·47	1·10
1984-85	37·77	29·75	8·02	1·27
1985-86	37·87	30·53	7·34	1·45
1986-87	38·51	31·56	6·95	1·64
1987-88	40·05	33·27	6·78	1·81
1988-89	41·12	34·41	6·71	2·02
1989-90	43·25	36·36	6·89	2·27
1990-91	44·37	37·70	6·67	2·63
1991-92	46·48	39·89	6·59	3·07
1992-93	48·30	41·79	6·51	3·50

Dental Treatment

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pregnant women received free dental treatment in each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* All pregnant women and women who have had a child within the previous 12 months are exempt from NHS dental charges and receive free dental treatment. Information is recorded on courses of treatment rather than individual patients treated. The total number of courses of dental treatment received by pregnant women and nursing mothers is contained in the table.

Number of courses of dental treatment for pregnant and nursing women in Scotland

Year (calendar)	Number of courses of treatment
1978	80,009
1979	82,830
1980	89,207
1981	92,253
1982	93,947
1983	93,066
1984	92,608
1985	95,162
1986	98,565
1987	98,390
1988	98,796
1989	107,981
1990	103,873
1991	118,000
1992	118,060
1993	115,436

Council House Sales

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local authority houses have been sold since the introduction of right-to-buy legislation in each district council area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

Right to buy sales of local authority dwellings

Area	[2]*Number*
Scotland	201,485
Fife	
Berwickshire	821
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1,412
Roxburgh	1,527
Tweeddale	451
Central	
Clackmannan	2,307
Falkirk	8,201
Stirling	3,534
Dumfries and Galloway	
Annandale and Eskdale	1,688
Nithsdale	2,524
Stewartry	907
Wigtown	1,428
Fife	
Dunfermline[1]	6,878
Kirkcaldy	7,340
North East Fife	3,153
Grampian	
Aberdeen	7,716
Banff and Buchan	3,695
Gordon	1,932
Kincardine and Deeside	1,009
Moray	3,547
Highland	
Badenoch and Strathspey	454
Caithness	998
Inverness	1,996
Lochaber	963
Nairn	327
Ross and Cromarty	1,364
Skye and Lochalsh	241
Sutherland	401
Lothian	
East Lothian	4,989
Edinburgh	15,611
Midlothian	4,132
West Lothian	4,944
Strathclyde	
Argyll and Bute	2,063
Bearsden and Milngavie	439
Clydebank	2,940
Clydesdale	1,849
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	1,143
Cumnock and Doon Valley	1,881
Cunninghame	5,079
Dumbarton	2,321
East Kilbride	588
Eastwood	600
Glasgow	25,297
Hamilton	5,684
Inverclyde	2,875
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	3,588
Kyle and Carrick	5,518
Monklands	5,586
Motherwell	6,351
Renfrew	9,027
Strathkelvin	3,135
Tayside	
Angus	3,681
Dundee	8,704
Perth and Kinross	4,918
Islands Councils	
Orkney Islands	533
Shetland Islands	503
Western Isles	692

[1] Return outstanding for quarter 2 1993.

[2] Sales from October 1980 to June 1993.

Milk

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secetary of State for Scotland how many gallons of milk were consumed in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available; and how many gallons of milk were produced in Scotland in that year.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* The volume of milk produced and sold through milk marketing schemes in Scotland in 1992 was 1,156 million litres. The volume used for consumption as liquid milk was 662 million litres.

Meigle Cottage Hospital

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the representations his Department has received regarding the future of Meigle cottage hospital.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Since March 1991, the Scottish Office Home and Health Department has received 37 letters from 29 individuals regarding the future of Meigle cottage hospital.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what details of population growth for the Blairgowrie cottage hospital and the Meigle cottage hospital which were used to determine the hospital needs for both these catchment areas.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Tayside health board has responsibility to assess the needs of the local population and to obtain appropriate services to meet these needs. In doing so, it takes into account a wide range of factors including predicted changes in the size and composition of the local population. In the particular case of Meigle and Blairgowrie, I understand that the health board used the population projections of the General Registrar's office.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the report by the Forestry Commission on the review of access to Forestry Commission woodlands after sale.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* I shall arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library shortly.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Goode Report

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he proposes to reform the law on pensions in the light of the Goode report.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 31 January.

Rhinitis

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council regarding its proposed inquiry into occupational rhinitis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I wrote to the chairman of the council, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 23 September 1993, asking the council to consider and advise on whether the present prescription of the prescribed disease D4—inflamation of the mucous membrane of the upper respiratory passages or mouth—should be changed and, if the council concludes that it should, for recommendations on revised terms of prescription.

Housing Benefit

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if a person enrolled on a full-time training course supported by *(a)* training for work or *(b)* the European social fund and attending an educational establishment, is eligible for (i) housing benefit or (ii) council tax benefit; how their training allowance is taken into account in assessing the amount of benefit they should receive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: A person attending a full-time training for work course is eligible for housing benefit and council tax benefit, subject to normal rules. The training allowance is taken into account in assessing benefit entitlement, but any payment reimbursing travelling expenses, any training premium and, in certain circumstances, any living away from home allowance is disregarded.

A person attending a full-time training course supported by the European social fund, which does not fall within the definition of a training allowance, is ineligible for housing benefit and council tax benefit unless he or she is a member of the vulnerable groups, including disabled people and lone parents.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide full details of the arrangements for awarding performance-related pay to staff employed by the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) by the chief executive of the Child Support Agency on 19 January 1994, at column 797.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the estimated reduction in yield to the Child Support Agency arising in a full year from the reduction in extra maintenance payments from 25p in every additional pound of assessable income to 15p and 20p if there are two children;

(2) what is the estimated reduction in yield in a full year to the Child Support Agency arising from the reduction of one quarter in the care element of the maintenance requirement for a child over 11 years and of a further quarter when the youngest child reaches 14 years;

(3) what is his estimate of the total sum forgone by the Child Support Agency as a result of the changes to the child support system announced by his Department on 22 December;

(4) if he will estimate the reduction in yield to the Child Support Agency of the phasing proposals set out in the Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 1994;

(5) what is the estimated reduction in yield to the Child Support Agency arising in a full year from the increase in the level of protected income above income support from £8 to £30 and the 10p in the pound to 15p.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money he has made available for the cost of the modifications announced on 22 December 1993 to the Child Support Act 1991.

Mr. Burt: The estimated costs of the changes to the assessment formula and of the extension to the provisions for phasing in new amounts of maintenance are in the table.

These estimates are derived using the assumptions about volume of cases, taking account of factors such as time taken, throughput and compliance rates underlying the figures published in the agency's business plan, and do not, at this stage, make any allowance for changes in these variables in response to this package of changes.

Total cost of DSS proposals for 1993-94 and PES period

£ million, cash

	1993-94	*1994-95*	*1995-96*	*1996-97*
Phasing	5	35	20	15
Increase in protected income margins to £30 and 15 per cent.	5	35	50	60
Reduction in additional deduction rate	Negligible	5	5	5
Reduction of 25 per cent. in the amount of maintenance for caring parent once child 11, and again at 14	Negligible	10	10	15
TOTAL cost of proposals	15	85	85	95
Effect of rescheduling of work to accommodate implementation of changes	30	15	—	—
TOTAL effect of programme costs	45	100	85	95

Note: Figures have been rounded to the nearest £5 million. Amounts less than £2·5 million are treated as negligible. Totals may not sum because of rounding.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost to the Child Support Agency of the withdrawal of the collection fee in cases where maintenance is being paid direct to the parent with care.

Mr. Burt: It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the cases affected. The number is likely to be small, so it is anticipated that the cost will therefore be minimal.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest estimate of the Child Support Agency's administrative budget for 1993-94 and for the next three financial years.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

	£ million
1993-94	120
1994-95	135
1995-96	136

Sources:

1993-94 Winter Supplementary Estimate, November 1993.

1994-96 DSS Departmental Report 1993.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Child Support Agency will be publishing an annual report; and how the public will be able to obtain it.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 31 January 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's annual report.

As stated in its Business Plan for 1993-94, the Agency intends to publish an Annual Report in the summer of 1994. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House, and will also be available from the Agency's headquarters at Millbank Tower.

I hope you find this letter helpful.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of successful claims for invalidity benefit for each year since inception of the scheme broken down by sex; and what proportion of claims by each sex represented the total.

Invalidity benefit spells commencing by period

Period	*Total spells commencing (ii)*	*Total spells*		*Total spells*	
		All men	*Per cent.*	*All women*	*Per cent.*
7 June 1971 to 3 June 1972	636,000	526,000	83	110,000	17
5 June 1972 to 2 June 1973	416,000	365,000	88	51,000	12
4 June 1973 to 1 June 1974	453,000	400,000	88	53,000	12
3 June 1974 to 31 May 1975	459,000	403,000	88	56,000	12
1 September 1975 to 6 June 1976	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
7 June 1976 to 4 June 1977	520,000	440,000	85	79,000	15
6 June 1977 to 3 June 1978	562,000	473,000	84	89,000	16
5 June 1978 to 2 June 1979	621,000	518,000	83	103,000	17
4 June 1979 to 31 May 1980	543,000	439,000	81	103,000	19
2 June 1980 to 30 May 1981	365,000	283,000	78	81,000	22
1 June 1981 to 29 May 1982	303,000	229,000	76	74,000	24
5 April 1982 to 2 April 1983	305,000	225,000	74	80,000	26
4 April 1983 to 31 March 1984	278,000	205,000	74	72,000	26
2 April 1984 to 30 March 1985	272,000	199,000	73	73,000	27
1 April 1985 to 5 April 1986	285,000	207,000	73	78,000	27
7 April 1986 to 4 April 1987	284,000	202,000	71	83,000	29
6 April 1987 to 2 April 1988	282,000	201,000	71	81,000	29
4 April 1988 to 1 April 1989	280,000	199,000	71	81,000	29
3 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	284,000	208,000	73	76,000	27
2 April 1990 to 30 March 1991	288,000	204,000	71	83,000	29
1 April 1991 to 4 April 1992	323,000	233,000	72	90,000	28

Notes:

(i) All figures are for Great Britain and are based on a 2·5 per cent. sample up to 1974-75; a 2 per cent. sample up to 1977-78; and a 1 per cent. sample thereafter. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand and percentages are rounded to the nearest whole per cent.

(ii) May include two or more spells commencing for the same person.

(iii) Figures include spells where benefit is not paid because of entitlement to overlapping benefits.

(ix) There are no figures available for 1975-76 as this was an incomplete statistical year.

Invalidity Pension

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to make to people whose entitlement to earnings-related invalidity pension based on contributions paid since 1978 is to be abolished will receive a refund of the contributions proportionate to the reduction in benefit.

Mr. Scott: National insurance contributions correctly paid at the time of payment are not refundable. We have no plans to change this position.

Social Fund Loans

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families were refused loans from the social fund because they were too poor to repay them or because they were considered of insufficient priority within the budget.

Mr. Scott: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. General information on refused loan applications is published in my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State's annual report on the social fund for 1992-93, which is in the Library.

Hearing Loss

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many representations he has received on the increasing of minimum assessment to 20 per cent. in cases of hearing loss among ex-service men; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many representations he has received from associations representing ex-service men and women on the proposed increase to 20 per cent. of the minimum assessment figure of those suffering from hearing loss; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available on how many further representations have been made since the change became effective.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of ex-service men and women receiving war service and disability pensions suffer from hearing defects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefits (Calculation)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reduce the nominal amount of income assumed on savings for calculation of benefits.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 16 December, at column *837*.

Bronchitis and Emphysema (Compensation)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will extend the recent arrangements to compensate former mineworkers who suffer from severe bronchitis and emphysema as a result of their employment to make similar provision for workers in the steel industry who suffer from these diseases as a result of the conditions of their employment.

Mr. Scott: We have no such plans. The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council concluded in its report "Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema", Cm 2091, that, on present evidence, it could not recommend prescription of the diseases in relation to metal production workers.

Income Support Personal Allowance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if a step-child living with a parent with care is taken into account for the purposes of deciding if the absent parent's liability for the income support personal allowance is reduced to 50 per cent.

Mr. Burt: No.

Child Support Act 1991

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how much it will cost to implement the modifications announced on 22 December 1993 to the Child Support Act 1991.

Mr. Burt: The final cost of implementing the changes is difficult to estimate as the impact extends over several years, until all phasing cases are dealt with. Initial indications suggest that the total work involved would cost in the region of £3 million, which it is intended to absorb within current estimates.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the cost of the modifications announced on 22 December 1993 to the Child Support Act is being made available from the budget for *(a)* 1993-94 or *(b)* 1994-95.

Mr. Burt: The changes will have some effect on expenditure in the current financial year: this will be met from the Reserve and will not add to the planned total of public expenditure. A supplementary estimate will be sought shortly. The main financial impact of the changes will be in 1994-95 and subsequent years.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether the assessment forms issued to absent parents under the terms of the Child Support Act 1991 indicate that any information disclosed in the assessment forms will be disclosed to the other parties directly involved in that assessment;

(2) whether the assessment forms issued to absent parents under the terms of the Child Support Act 1991 indicate that any information disclosed in the form is confidential and for the use of the Child Support Agency only.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 31 January 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security requesting information about the maintenance enquiry forms used by the Child Support Agency.

When the Agency takes on a case, the absent parent is sent a maintenace enquiry pack. In this pack, the absent parent is advised that, as part of the Department of Social Security, the Agency is bound by very strict rules of confidentiality. The pack also makes clear that, unless ordered to do so by Court Order, the Agency will not normally disclose an address or telephone number to the other party without the absent parent's specific permission.

In addition, the Child Support Agency Charter states that, like the courts, the Agency is required by law to let both parents know what financial information was used to make the maintenance assessment.

I hope that you find this reply useful.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed;

(2) what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Hague: Allegations of internal fraud are investigated under the Department's disciplinary procedures. Where an employee is considered, on the balance of probabilities, to have committed such an offence, dismissal would be appropriate.

Since 1989, a total of 68 officers have been dismissed in such circumstances or have resigned during the course of an investigation. The yearly breakdown is as follows:

	Number
1989	9
1990	6
1991	13
1992	18
1993	21
1994 to date	1

Pensions

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report,* columns *424-25,* if he will list the organisations and individuals which have been issued with a copy of the consultation document on age-related benefits.

Mr. Hague *[pursuant to his reply, 24 January 1994, columns 20-22]:* The following organisation also received copies of the consultation document on age-related rebates: Confederation of British Industry.

Industrial Injury Claims

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what amount was recovered, under section 22 of the Social Security Act 1989, from the damages paid to victims of industrial injury for Durham for each year since 1989.

Mr. Scott: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 31 January 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about the amount recovered, under Section 22 of the Social Security Act 1989, from damages paid to victims of industrial injury in Durham since 1989.

Firstly, I should explain that the information is not available in the precise format requested. This is because information held is by Benefits Agency (BA) Districts whose boundaries do not correspond exactly with those of counties. I have, however, provide below information relating to the BA Districts of North and South Durham which most closely cover the Durham area.

The Recovery Scheme did not begin to operate until September 1990 and the amount recovered for the period September 1990 to March 1991 is £862·00

From April 1991 to March 1992 the amount was in the region of £30,000; from April 1992 to March 1993 it was £558,000.

The total amount recouped for the period April 1993 to the latest date that figures are available, December 1993, is in the region of £733,000.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Compensation Payments

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total number of benefits claimants who have been awarded compensation for injury or disease and who have repaid benefits to the compensation recovery unit under the Social Security Act 1990, in each year since 1990;

(2) what was the total sum of money claimed back under the Social Security Act 1990 by the compensation recovery unit from benefit claimants who have been awarded compensation for injury or disease in each year since 1990.

Mr. Scott: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. John Denham, dated 31 January 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking about the numbers of benefit claimants who have been awarded compensation for injury or disease and have repaid benefits to Compensation Recovery Unit in each year since 1990; and the total recovered in these cases.

I have provided the information you require in the table below. It should be noted, however, that figures are only available from the Recovery Scheme's inception in September 1990 up to December 1993, the latest date for which figures are available.

	September 1990 to March 1991	*April 1991 to March 1992*	*April 1992 to March 1993*	*April 1993 to December 1993*
Number of benefit claimants who have repaid benefits to the CRU	3,390	19,181	44,398	25,888
Sum of money recouped by the CRU from benefit claimants	£3·6 million	£25·4 million	£51·3 million	£56 million

I hope my reply has been helpful.

Pensioners (Benefits)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give his Department's estimate of the number of people in receipt of state old-age pensions who are also in receipt of *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* income support for each year since 1980; and what he estimates the figure will be for 1994-95.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the table.

Estimated number (000s) of cases where state retirement pension is received

Year	*With housing benefit only*	*With both housing benefit and income support*	*With income support only*
1988	1,040	920	692
1989	1,070	810	538
1990	1,051	788	629
1991	1,048	682	620
1992	1,049	626	721

Sources:

Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiries May 1988 to May 1992.

Housing Benefit Statistics Annual Eqnuiries May 1988 to May 1992.

Notes:

1. Average figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand and are per benefit unit and not per individual. A benefit unit may be a single person or a couple.
2. For all years, Housing Benefit has been defined as rent rebate and rent allowance.
3. The Income Support scheme was not introduced until April 1988; Housing Benefit information prior to this date in the form requested is not held.
4. There will be an element of double counting in the 1988 figure for those on Income Support only, as this includes both claimants and partners where both are in receipt of a state Retirement Pension.
5. Estimates for 1993-94 and projected figures for 1994-95 are not available.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what is his estimate of the payments per employed worker into occupational or private pensions schemes for each year since 1980; and what he estimates the figure will be for 1994-95.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table. Estimates for 1994-95 are not available.

Year	*Workforce*[1] *(millions)*	*Aggregate payments*[2] *(£ billions)*	*Payments per employed worker (£)*
1980	25·301	13,350	527·60
1981	24·323	16,490	677·90
1982	23·888	16,954	709·73
1983	23·595	17,763	752·80
1984	24·051	18,542	770·90
1985	24·354	19,059	782·60
1986	24·354	19,540	803·00
1987	24·774	20,304	819·60
1988	25·580	21,401	836·60
1989	26·231	24,537	935·40
1990	26·514	25,289	953·80
1991	25·691	28,294	1,103·30
1992	25·119	29,152	1,160·60

[1] Size of the employed workforce in June of each year, 1980 to 1992 (United Kingdom seasonally adjusted to include those in full-time and part-time employment, self-employment, and the armed forces).

[2] Aggregate payments into occupational and personal pensions by employees and employers at current prices. The information relates only to current payments into occupational or personal pensions by both employers and employees. The data does not give a full picture of total pension rights being accrued as these will continue to increase during any contribution holidays.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 2 February 1994

NORTHERN IRELAND

Supergrass Evidence

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the use of supergrass evidence in securing the conviction of terrorist suspects.

Sir John Wheeler: There are no cases currently pending which would result in the reintroduction of so-called "supergrass trials". If the police in Northern Ireland should come across accomplice evidence that could be used to assist in the prosecution of individuals who have committed acts of terrorism it is, however, right and proper for the Director of Public Prosecutions to consider the use of that evidence in any subsequent proceedings.

Training and Employment Agency

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the cost per job outcome delivered by the Training and Employment Agency in 1992-93;

(2) what was the cost per non-vocational qualification delivery by the Training and Employment Agency in 1992-93.

Mr. Tim Smith: Responsibility for the subject matter in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Mr. Andrew Hunter, dated 2 February 1994:

Parliamentary questions Nos. 84 & 91:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your questions about the cost per job outcome delivered by the Training & Employment Agency (No. 84) and the cost per non-vocational qualification delivery by the Training & Employment Agency (No. 91).

Question No. 84

I set out below the average programme cost per job outcome associated with the various Agency services and programmes. All figures relate to 1992/93.

Placements into employment

The Agency was able to place 33,590 people into jobs advertised through its local offices. The average cost was £56 per placing.

Action for Community Employment

The average cost per place on the Action for Community Employment (ACE) programme, which provides temporary employment opportunities for long-term unemployed adults, was £5,277.

Training programmes and qualifications

The Agency's main training programmes are the Youth Training Programme (YTP) and the Job Training Programme (JTP). The main aim of the Agency's training programmes is to provide participants with training leading to qualifications. This is fully reflected in the Agency's targets. While the objective of training is to assist people to find employment, job availability on the Northern Ireland labour market is an ever-present constraint. The Agency's response to this constraint is to push for better qualifications to enhance job opportunities.

Youth Training Programme

The average cost per job outcome of the YTP is £9,190. This average relates to training providers in the Community, Employer-led and Further Education sectors. The programme guarantees young people under 18 two years full-time training with work experience or employment.

Training Centres

The average cost per job outcome for young people attending Training Centres is £10,926. The Centres provide training mainly leading to NVQ Level 3 and above.

Job Training Programme

The average cost per job outcome of the JTP is £7,901. This one-year programme is designed to help unemployed adults to improve their job prospects.

Costs per job outcome: comment

The number of jobs used to arrive at the above average costs per job is derived from the first destinations of trainees after leaving the YTP and JTP programmes. Relating expenditure on these programmes to immediate job outcomes can only partially reflect the worthwhileness of the training. We cannot take account of how successful trainees will subsequently be in obtaining employment.

Question No. 91

Non-Vocational Qualifications

You also inquired about the cost of non-vocational qualifications delivered by the Agency. Non-vocational qualifications form an insignificant part of the Agency's overall programme delivery which is almost exclusively vocational. It is not therefore possible to segregate out the costs attributable to non-vocational qualifications.

Less-favoured Areas

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cattle and sheep farms are wholly or mainly in the less-favoured areas.

Mr. Ancram: In the Northern Ireland agricultural census, a farm is classified to the less-favoured area if any of the land which is owned by the farmer is within that area. Any land which the farmer may take under the short-term leasing system known as conacre is disregarded.

On this definition, there were 15,279 cattle and sheep farms in the LFA at the June 1992 agricultural census and 15,241 in 1993. In each year, the figure includes an estimated 600 to 700 farms with less than half their owned land in the LFA.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the total subsidy to be paid on cattle and sheep in the less-favoured areas in 1994.

Mr. Ancram: The total subsidy to be paid on cattle and sheep in the less-favoured areas in Northern Ireland under the suckler cow premium, sheep annual premium and hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme is estimated to be at least £70 million in 1994.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts Committees

Mr. Heald: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals his Department has for magistrates courts committees and the employment of their staff as set out in the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill [*Lords*].

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has considered carefully the points raised during the debate on the House of Lords Second Reading of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill, and in particular the fears that the Bill's provisions could give central Government an inappropriate level of control over the management of the magistrates court service and may undermine the independence of the advice received by magistrates when dealing with individual cases. The Lord Chancellor has also, since the Second Reading debate, met representatives of the Magistrates Association, the Central Council of Magistrates Courts Committees, the Justices' Clerks Society, the Association of Magisterial Officers, and the Standing Conference of Clerks to Magistrates Courts Committees.

The Government are entirely committed to a locally managed magistrates courts service and to the protection of the judicial independence of the magistracy. We do not believe that these principles are in any way undermined by the Bill. However, in order to place these matters beyond doubt, the Lord Chancellor will table amendments to the Bill at the Lords Committee stage.

The effect of these amendments will be:

(a) that the chairman of a magistrates courts committee would be appointed by members of the committee without requiring the approval of the Lord Chancellor;

(b) that the terms of the contract of employment between chief justices' clerks or justices' clerks and their magistrates court committees should be left entirely to local discretion. The Lord Chancellor would accordingly have no power to require that contracts be for a fixed term or that remuneration be related to performance;

(c) the renewal of appointments as a chief justices' clerk or justices' clerk would not require the approval of the Lord Chancellor.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has no plans to buy or borrow photographs.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Nelson: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has 13 paintings and no photographs on the walls of his rooms in the Treasury.

National Average Income

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what statistics he bases his calculation of the national average income.

Mr. Nelson: National accounts estimates are derived from a wide variety of statistics collected by the Central Statistical Office, other Government Departments and other organisations. Details are given in *"United Kingdom National Accounts: Sources and Methods"*, which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how often during the course of a year the official national average income is recalculated.

Mr. Nelson: Quarterly national accounts, including revisions, are published four times each year, in March, June, September and December.

Budget Consultation

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the meetings he has had with hon. Members to discuss representations by their constituents during the Budget consultation process.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and his ministerial colleagues held a large number of formal and informal meetings with hon. Members in advance of the Budget, at which they had an opportunity to make representations on behalf of their constituents. In addition, Treasury Ministers received and considered a substantial body of correspondence about the Budget from hon. Members on behalf of their constituents.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which particular areas of public sector employment *(a)* are and *(b)* are not covered by the recommendation that public sector pay bills should not increase.

Mr. Portillo: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his statement of 14 September 1993 and confirmed in the Financial Statement and Budget Report, in 1994-95 Government Departments will be expected to keep their running costs, including pay budgets, to their 1993-94 level in cash terms, except where, there are significant changes in activity. This is not a freeze on pay settlements and does not pre-empt forthcoming pay negotiations. However, pay increases will need to be funded by efficiency improvements. The Government expect a similar approach to be applied to all other public sector pay groups.

Departmental Interest Payments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what are the consequences of the decision in Esso Petroleum Company Limited *v.* Ministry of Defence for the tax treatment of interest paid by Government Departments.

Mr. Dorrell: The effect of this decision is that the provisions of schedule C of the Taxes Acts apply only to interest on Government securities and do not extend to other types of interest payments made by Government Departments. In accordance with this view, payments of interest, other than on Government securities, made by Government Departments after the decision, have not been subject to deduction of tax at source under schedule C. In the light of legal advice, the Inland Revenue and the Government Departments concerned are not taking any steps to seek out, nor make further payments to, the recipients of earlier payments of interest. An Inland Revenue press release which is being issued today provides further details; a copy has been placed in the Library.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rise in the basic rate of income tax a household on average income with an average mortgage would have to pay in 1994-95 and 1995-96 to yield the equivalent of the reduction in their mortgage interest relief resulting from measures announced in the March and November 1993 Budgets.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* The cost of the reduction in mortgage interest relief will be £115·50 a year in 1994-95 and a further £115·50 a year in 1995-96 for individual taxpayers in the category described. A person with an average mortgage is benefiting by £1,920 a year as a result of the reduction in interest rates since 1990. It is not sensible to try to make the comparison with other tax rates that the question invites.

Earnings

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update to April 1994 the information on net earnings provided in his answer to the hon. Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) of 10 February 1987, *Official Report,* columns *177-78.*

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Estimates of the levels of earnings for the top 5 per cent. of earners are not published. The information in the table is based on estimates of these levels derived from distributions of earnings published in the relevant New Earnings Survey for April 1993. Earnings levels are for men or women as appropriate paid at adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. Taxpayers are assumed to have no reliefs or allowances other than the appropriate personal allowance.

Earnings after Income Tax, National Insurance Contributions[1] and Child Benefit, April 1993

	£ per week
Single man	485·80
Married man	499·00
Married man with two children under 11	517·10
Single woman	335·30

[1] At the contracted-in rate.

Taxation

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report,* column *777,* on tax liability by region, if he will provide comparable information for total tax liability by quartile group in each region.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* Available information on the annual reduction in income tax liability by region for the years 1989-90 to 1991-92, compared with the 1978-79 indexed regime is given in the tables. The 1978-79 regime has been indexed by reference to the statutory formula and allowing for independent taxation for 1990-91 and 1991-92. For 1989-90 married couples are counted as one unit. For the purposes of these calculations the indexed regime of 1978-79 is applied directly to the later income base. In practice, retention of the regime, indexed as appropriate, for the intervening years would have led to changes in the income base. In view of the length of the tables, I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Members' Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Sustainable Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister when the press release accompanying his speech launching Her Majesty's Government's sustainable development strategy at the Banqueting house on 25 January was made available to hon. Members.

The Prime Minister: The press release was delivered to the House of Commons Library on 25 January.

THORP

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if the latest round of Anglo-Irish talks in Dublin covered the security implications for Northern Ireland and the Republic of plans for increased nuclear reprocessing at Sellafield.

The Prime Minister: A communiqué was released after the intergovernmental conference and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Otherwise details of matters discussed at the intergovernmental conference are confidential between the two Governments.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what further information Her Majesty's Government have officially been asked to supply to the European Commission, pursuant to complaint No. P4695/92 regarding the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield; and what is the timetable for complying with the request.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The United Kingdom has recently received an informal inquiry from the European Commission. It is the convention that the contents of such correspondence between member states and the Commission are treated in confidence.

Regional Airports

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has had from the chief executive of Manchester Airport plc in regard to liberalising access to regional airports; what reply he is sending; what action he will take; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received a letter from the chief executive. A reply will be sent as soon as possible.

Councils of Ministers

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East of 17 January, *Official Report,* columns *366-67,* if he will deposit in the Library videos and transcripts of the televised Councils of Ministers.

The Prime Minister: Yes. Videos, dubbed in English where English was not used in the Council, and verbatim records, in the original languages only, are available for televised sessions of Council meetings and will be placed in the Library.

Interactive Telephone Services Group

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the appointment as chairman of the Interactive Telephone Services Group of the right hon.

Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) in respect of the terms of paragraph 105 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers"; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no information which would lead me to believe that this appointment contravenes paragraph 105.

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Alliance of Women's Organisations

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what core funding he is providing for the National Alliance of Women's Organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Insufficient resources are available in 1994-95 to core-fund the National Alliance of Women's Organisations.

European Elections

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that students of other European Union states studying in the United Kingdom are able to vote in the European elections in June.

Mr. Maclean: Students from other member states of the Community will be eligible to apply to be included in the electoral register on the same basis as other Community nationals once Parliament has given its approval to the regulations to extend the franchise.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to launch the advertising campaign relating to the rights of European Union citizens resident in the United Kingdom to vote in the European elections in June.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information about the arrangements for exercising the rights of Community nationals to vote and to stand as a candidate at European parliamentary elections will be distributed once Parliament has approved the regulations to give effect to those rights.

Community Charge

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report,* column *275,* relating to imprisonment for non-payment of outstanding community charge, if he will now publish the table to which reference was made.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Walley, dated 2 February 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking pursuant to his answer on 13 January, *Official Report,* column 275, relating to imprisonment for non-payment of outstanding community charge, if he will now publish the table to which reference was made.

The information you have requested is given in the attached table.

Receptions into prison service establishments in England and Wales for non-payment of community charge[1]
April-October 1993

Month	*Number*
April	25
May	28
June	21
July	36
August	35
September	27
October	35
TOTAL	207

[1] Includes small numbers recorded as non-payment of rates.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report,* column *150,* if he will outline the particular qualifications, expertise or experience relating to his departmental responsibilities of each special adviser listed.

Mr. Howard: It is not my practice to comment on the qualifications, expertise or experience of my Department's special advisers.

Probation and Bail Hostels

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the need for places in probation and bail hostels.

Mr. Maclean: Before concluding that 10 per cent. of approved hostel capacity should be reduced, I took account of a number of factors, including the need for places as reflected in levels of occupancy and the cost of maintaining those places to an acceptable standard.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of occupancy is assumed in the development of funding allocations to probation and bail hostels.

Mr. Maclean: The revenue grant funding formula for approved hostels assumes a normal minimum occupancy level of 80 per cent., which may be temporarily reduced in individual cases of newly opened hostels or hostels being refurbished.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whom he has consulted about his proposals to close 11 probation and bail hostels.

Mr. Maclean: The chief probation officers and managing committees whose hostels were affected were notified on 1 December of our closure proposals and given the opportunity to comment.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of stay in probation and bail hostels.

Mr. Maclean: The information is not readily available in the form requested.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide occupancy figures for each probation and bail hostel in each region of the country for each of the last four quarters for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not readily available in the form requested. The occupancy figures for each probation and bail hostel for September 1993, the most recent month available, and for April 1992 to March 1993 as a whole, are as follows:

Average occupancy in approved hostels

Area and hostel	*1992-93 (per cent.)*	*September 1993 (per cent.)*
Avon		
Ashley House	71	75
Brigstocke Road	64	80
Bridge House	68	84
Bedfordshire		
Bedford Bail	43	41
Napier Road	68	60
Berkshire		
Manor Lodge	43	53
Elizabeth Fry	53	47
St. Leonards	48	46
Wellesley House	52	58
Buckinghamshire		
Milton Keynes	74	84
Cambridgeshire		
Peterborough	70	78
Cheshire		
Bewsey Street	66	91
Bunbury House	60	64
Linden Bank	79	70
Cleveland		
The Crescent	59	38
South Bank	72	59
Cornwall		
Meneghy House	62	58
Cumbria		
Bowling Green	59	69
Derbyshire		
Burdett Lodge	51	79
Devon		
Lawson House	—	59
Dudley Centre	43	52
Dorset		
Bournemouth	68	47
Weston	61	86
Durham		
Fir Tree Grange	40	50
East Sussex		
Brighton	50	75
Essex		
Windyridge	60	38
Basildon	65	55
Gloucestershire		
Ryecroft	39	76
Greater Manchester		
Hopwood House	72	70
Wilton Place	70	85
Chorlton	65	67
Withington Road	68	69
Ascot House	59	80
Parkfield	42	—
Bradshaw House	52	64
St. Josephs	68	74
Hampshire		
Southampton Bail	52	77
Carlisle House	60	—
Dickson House	48	68
The Grange	55	64
Hereford and Worcestershire		
Braley House	68	88
Hertfordshire		
St. Albans	45	67
Humberside		
Queens Road	55	54
Inner London		
St. Edmunds	42	64
KPH	84	95
Ellison House	53	70
Tulse Hill	59	51
St. Vincents	46	48
St. Mungos	62	84
Bedford/Shenley	64	66
Kelley House	48	68
Canadian Avenue	82	89
West Park	57	78
Camden House	35	71
Kent		
Hollywood Manor	57	—
Fleming House	67	78
Dover Bail	57	45
Lancashire		
Highfield House	75	65
Blackburn	74	41
Hoole House	68	76
Leicestershire		
Charnwood Lodge	59	85
Kirk Lodge	47	75
Howard House	73	78
Lincolnshire		
Wordsworth House	70	70
Merseyside		
Southwood	75	82
Merseybank	42	74
Canning House	64	58
Adelaide House	54	54
Middlesex		
Corfton Road	44	83
Seafield Lodge	67	88
North East London		
Westbourne	73	74
Norfolk		
John Boag	74	70
Northamptonshire		
Bridgewood	72	83
Stone House	69	36
Northumbria		
Ozanam House	66	82
St. Christophers	48	90
Pennywell	74	76
Cuthbert House	73	87

Area and hostel	*1992-93 (per cent.)*	*September 1993 (per cent.)*
North Wales		
Plas-y-wern	96	94
Ty Newydd	94	87
Nottinghamshire		
Astral Grove	64	79
Southwell	57	81
Trent House	50	70
Oxfordshire		
Abingdon Road	74	43
Clark's House	72	73
Somerset		
Glogan House	69	54
South East London		
Beckenham Road	54	85
South Glamorgan		
Mandeville House	31	63
South West London		
Kew	52	87
South Yorkshire		
Rookwood	61	56
Norfolk Park	67	52
Centre 45	86	81
Town Moor	72	53
Staffordshire		
Wenger House	65	82
Stafford Bail	65	81
Suffolk		
Lightfoot House	61	55
The Cottage	75	85
Surrey		
St. Catherines	58	60
Warwickshire		
McIntyre House	80	90
Kenilworth Road	49	71
West Glamorgan		
Emroch House	81	90
West Midlands		
Sycamore Lodge	77	75
Crowley House	46	61
Bilston	94	98
Stoke Green	79	68
Stonnall Road	[1]—	96
Welford House	69	64
Marshall House	86	91
Carpenter House	81	81
West Yorkshire		
Howden House	79	78
Walmer Villas	78	86
Albion Street	33	85
Ripon House	76	91
Elm Bank	90	80
St. Johns	78	94
Cardigan House	69	91

[1] Denotes hostel which is either closed or has yet to be opened.

Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have no plans to buy or borrow any photographs.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Howard: There are five paintings and one print on the walls of my office and five photographic reproductions of paintings on the walls of the ministerial conference room. They are all part of the Government art collection. There are no photographs on the walls of either room.

Reoffending Rate

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the reoffending rate for convicted persons leaving probation hostels.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available.

Police (Child Maintenance)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in relation to the numbers of police officers threatened with termination of their careers due to indebtedness resulting from assessments of liability as absent parents by the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Some Members of Parliament have written to Home Office Ministers on behalf of their constituents about the Child Support Agency's dealings with police officers. They have been informed that the Department of Social Security has responsibility for the Child Support Agency and that it would be for a police officer's senior officer to decide whether and, if so, what management action was appropriate in response to the officer's indebtedness.

Offenders, Newham

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of offenders appearing before the courts in the borough of Newham were aged under 21 years in each year since 1988;

(2) what percentage of offenders appearing before the courts in the borough of Newham were unemployed in each year since 1988.

Mr. Maclean: Information is not collected centrally on the employment status of defendants appearing before the courts. The table shows the number and percentage of offenders by age convicted at the Stratford and West Ham petty sessional divisions and at the Crown court who were committed by the above two petty sessional divisions 1988 to 1992. Information on cautioning is available only for police force areas.

Number and percentage of offenders aged under 21 and all ages found guilty at Stratford and West Ham petty sessional divisions and at the Crown Court by committing Stratford and West Ham petty sessional divisions and type of offence 1988-92

	Stratford			*West Ham*		
	Under 21			*Under 21*		
Year/Type of offence	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*All Ages (=100 per cent.)*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*All Ages (=100 per cent.)*
1988						
Indictable offences	345	47	728	346	33	1,048
Summary non-motoring offences	177	12	1,528	86	28	311
Summary motoring offences	62	11	573	77	11	689
All offences	584	21	2,829	509	25	2,048
1989						
Indictable offences	373	47	802	165	29	561
Summary non-motoring offences	323	19	1,657	51	19	275
Summary motoring offences	79	10	761	45	15	292
All offences	775	24	3,220	261	23	1,128
1990						
Indictable offences	138	37	369	269	28	957
Summary non-motoring offences	123	15	832	169	10	1,730
Summary motoring offences	33	13	258	70	9	777
All offences	294	20	1,459	608	18	3,464
1991						
Indictable offences	80	39	207	296	27	1,096
Summary non-motoring offences	55	6	937	111	18	633
Summary motoring offences	64	6	1,029	82	11	714
All offences	199	9	2,173	489	20	2,443
1992						
Indictable offences	168	34	492	165	24	681
Summary non-motoring offences	93	6	1,656	66	19	347
Summary motoring offences	106	6	1,757	41	11	381
All offences	367	9	3,905	272	19	1,409

Ms Gillian Taylforth

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Metropolitan Commissioner on the manner in which information which was the subject of the Taylforth/Knight libel action was made available by the police to a *Sun* reporter in the first instance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand from the Commissioner that the *Sun* did not obtain this information from the police in the first instance.

Electoral Register

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how his Department measures the accuracy of the electoral register.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys provides an annual comparison of parliamentary electorates with corresponding estimates of the resident population in the publication "Electoral Statistics (Series EL)", copies of which are in the Library. In addition, following the 1991 census, OPCS conducted research on behalf of the Home Office and the Scottish Office to check the coverage and quality of the 1991 electoral register. Copies of the survey, "Electoral Registration in 1991", are also in the Library.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought each year since 1978 by each local authority against individuals failing to complete electoral registration forms; and what percentage of the total number of registrations in each authority this represents.

Mr. Maclean: Information given in the table shows the number of prosecutions for failing to complete electoral registration forms for the years 1979 to 1989 by petty sessional division within police force areas. The prosecuting local authority cannot be identified from the centrally collected records. Data for 1978 and 1990 to 1992 are not available.

Data on the total number of electors included in the register in each local authority area can be found in the annual OPCS publication "Electoral Statistics Series EL", published by HMSO, copies of which can be found in the Library.

Number of prosecutions for failing to complete electoral registration forms by Petty Sessional Division within Police Force Areas 1979-89

Year and PFA/PSD	*Prosecutions*
1979	nil
1980	nil
1981	
Hampshire/Basingstcke	2
Suffolk/Mildenhall	1
South Yorkshire/Doncaster	1
England and Wales	4
1982	nil
1983	

Year and PFA/PSD	*Prosecutions*
Essex—Rochford	3
Essex—Southend on Sea	1
England and Wales	4
1984	
Bedfordshire/Biggleswade	2
Essex/Rochford	4
Hampshire/Basingstoke	2
Norfolk/Cromer	2
England and Wales	10
1985	
Northamptonshire/Oundle and Thropston	1
England and Wales	1
1986	nil
1987	
Derbyshire/Chesterfield	4
Essex/Rochford	5
Hampshire/Winchester	1
Wiltshire/Marlborough	2
England and Wales	12
1988	
Bedfordshire/Leighton Buzzard	1
Essex/Rochford	2
England and Wales	3
1989	
Hampshire/Alton	3
Hampshire/Basingstoke	4
Hampshire/Petersfield	1
Leicestershire/Loughborough	2
Suffolk/Newmarket	3
England and Wales	13

Police Authorities

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his proposals for the constitution of police authorities, as set out in the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill *[Lords]*.

Mr. Howard: I have considered carefully the concerns expressed on Second Reading in another place.

The Government want to put beyond doubt their intention that the new police authorities should be indpendent. The Government will therefore table amendments to the Bill in another place, as soon as possible.

The effect of these amendments will be:

- (i) that the chairman of a police authority would be appointed by the members of the authority. We propose that, as now, they should be required to select the chairman annually.
- (ii) the independent members of police authorities will be appointed according to a procedure on the lines of that set out in my reply to the hon. and learned Member for Burton on 17 January, columns *375-77*. But the Bill will be amended to provide a statutory basis for the independent selection procedure, and the scheme under which the statutory procedure will operate will be subject to a parliamentary oversight;
- (iii) there will be a power for the Home Secretary to increase the number of members of police authorities in specific cases where in all the circumstances it seems appropriate to do so. Where the number of members exceeds 16, one half will be councillors and not more than one third will be independent members.

Prisons (Sanitation)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards providing prisoners with 24-hour access to sanitation.

Mr. Michael Howard: The target for the Prison Service for 1993-94 is to provide through the accelerated sanitation programme 24-hour access to sanitation in at least 4,700 existing prison places. In addition a further 2,400 newly constructed and renovated places, which will have integral sanitation, are scheduled for completion in the year. Eighty-nine per cent. of prisoners currently have 24-hour access to sanitation. This compares with 82 per cent. in March 1993 and 46 per cent. in 1981.

By the end of 1994, more than 95 per cent. of prisoners should have access to sanitation at all times, a considerable achievement and one of the key measures of progress in providing decent conditions for all prisoners. The other main measure is the reduction of overcrowding and avoidance of the use of police cells. The percentage of prisoners sharing cells designed for one has been reduced from 38 per cent. in 1987-88 to 16 per cent. at the end of 1993. There has been no significant use of police cells since February 1993. These achievements have been possible as a result of the major prison building programme which has added over 18,000 new places since 1979.

In the face of the forecast increase in the prison population, resources are being directed to providing additional places and the amount of accommodation that it was planned to take out of use for refurbishment during the next two years has been reduced. Although this will preclude completion of the sanitation programme by December 1994, the alternative would have been a return to the prolonged use of police cells and an unacceptable level of overcrowding.

The Prison Service continues to give very high priority to completing the sanitation programme as soon as possible, within the constraints imposed by the prison population. It aims to complete the programme no later than February 1996, the date recommended by Lord Woolf in his report.

Reconviction Rates

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in developing a key performance indicator on reconviction rates as envisaged in the Prison Service business plan for 1993-94.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Statistics of the reconviction rates of prisoners following discharge from prison are already published. The progress of the work on performance measures in relation to reconviction rates will be reported in the Prison Service's business plan for 1994-95.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Michael Howard *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* I have asked the Director General of the Prison Service to write to the hon. and learned Member about Prison Service staff. The information in respect of other Home Office staff is as follows:

1989-90	One member of staff convicted and dismissed.
1990-91	Nil.
1991-92	Three convicted; two dismissed and one resigned prior to dismissal.
1992-93	Three convicted; two dismissed and one decision pending.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Michael Howard *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* A member of staff convicted of fraud would normally be dismissed.

DEFENCE

Gulf War (Soldier's Children)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from Gulf war veterans concerning the health of children fathered by soldiers who had served in Operation Granby.

Mr. Hanley: I have received no such representations.

Allivane International Group

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts his Department placed with Allivane International Group in 1988 for the storage on behalf of Royal Ordnance of explosives and magazine cartridges.

Mr. Aitken: No contracts were placed with Allivane International Group in 1988 for the storage of explosives and magazine cartridges on behalf of Royal Ordnance.

Desert Storm Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will seek from the United States Department of Defence information submitted by United States service men on Desert Storm syndrome.

Mr. Hanley: The medical and scientific staffs of my Department are in close and continual contact with their United States Department of Defense counterparts and have made clear the United Kingdom desire to receive all relevant available evidence.

Artillery Shells (Fuses)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which United Kingdom companies his Department has purchased M739A1 and M131 fuses for artillery shells since 1984.

Mr. Aitken: My Department has not purchased any of these fuses since 1984.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of service men and women, as to *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks who are threatened with discharge due to indebtedness arising from assessments made by the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Hanley: Service personnel can be liable for discharge where their persistent indebtedness has caused inefficiency or led to indiscipline; however, I am not aware of any instance where this has occurred as a consequence of an increased liability for child maintenance resulting from an assessment made by the Child Support Agency. Counselling is available to those who experience difficulty in managing debts and guidance will be given in dealing with creditors.

Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence curently has no plans, but would be willing to consult the hon. Member.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Hanley: There are four paintings, three photographs and a print on the walls of the office in MOD main building of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

RAF Machrihanish

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current functions of Royal Air Force Machrihanish; and if he will make a statement on those functions which are being withdrawn under his recently announced plans.

Mr. Hanley: The primary role of RAF Machrihanish is as a forward operating base available for activation at short notice for United States Navy maritime patrol aircraft assigned to SACLANT. Additionally, the station is used occasionally for training and exercises. The FOB role will remain but the activation time has been extended which will allow the introduction of a care and maintenance regime.

RAF Honington

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the intended functions of Royal Air Force Honington after the transfer of No. 13 Squadron to Royal Air Force Marham.

Mr. Hanley: RAF Honington will beecome the RAF Regiment depot when the RAF Regiment units relocate there from RAF Catterick and RAF West Drayton. It is planned that the airfield will be activated for use in exercises once or twice a year.

Policy Developments

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what policy developments there have been over the past decade for the time scale as respects the information of Parliament on detailed policy developments within his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 8 December 1993, *Official Report*, column *296*. It remains our practice to inform Parliament of policy and other relevant developments as soon as is practicable.

Territorial Army

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the Territorial Army in north London.

Mr. Hanley: We are continuing to re-examine the operational requirement for, and hence the size and shape of, the Territorial Army. We will make an announcement as soon as our proposals are formulated.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 December, *Official Report*, column *899*, what are the particular qualifications, expertise or experience in the defence area of his special adviser Mr. Crispin Blunt.

Mr. Hanley: It is not our practice to comment on the qualifications, expertise or experience of my right hon. and learned Friend's special adviser.

Defence Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what amount *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of gross national product was spent on defence in the last year for which figures are available by (i) each NATO country, (ii) Japan, (iii) Switzerland, (iv) Finland and (v) Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Details of NATO countries' defence expenditure in 1992 both in total, and as a proportion of gross domestic product, are contained in the 1993 Statement on the Defence Estimates (Cm 2270). Comparable information based on estimates published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies for Japan, Switzerland, Finland and the Republic of Ireland is set out in the table.

	Budget	*Per cent. of GDP*
Japan	35,900,000,000	1·0
Switzerland	3,700,000,000	1·5
Finland	2,080,000,000	1·9
Republic of Ireland	560,000,000	1·2

For consistency with data in the SDE, non-NATO defence expenditures are shown in US Dollars.

Mutual Weapons Development Programme

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Britain and the United States of America set up the mutual weapons development programme; what was the range of the programme; why it was set up; which United Kingdom Ministry of Defence establishments were involved; and what is the current status of the programme.

Mr. Aitken *[pursuant to his answer, 26 January, Official Report, c. 307]:* Additional research has now produced some information on the mutual weapons development programme. This was a collaborative programme that arose from the authorisation by the US Congress in 1956 under the mutual security programme of financial support for R and D programmes of friendly countries. Information about this programme is limited, but investigation is continuing and I will write to the honourable Member as soon as this is complete.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

D-Day Landings

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what will be the role of Lowe Bell in arranging the programme of events to commemorate the D-Day landings on 6 June 1994; what consideration has been given to carrying out the work in-house; what proportion of the total public expenditure on the programme of events is being paid to Lowe Bell; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: The D-Day programme is primarily to commemorate the landings by the armed services. But, through a series of appropriate nationwide events, it will also mark the important involvement of the wider civilian population.

Lowe Bell was chosen, in open competition, to assist the DNH to co-ordinate and publicise these events, to stimulate new ideas for other events and to help organise them, and to raise private sponsorship. Through the DNH it will complement the work done by the MoD and the tourist board.

The public expenditure on the D-Day commemorations will be affected by the extent of private sponsorship, and by activities which the tourist boards, local authorities and other public bodies undertake. The proportion of this activity represented by Lowe Bell's fee is not yet known. Its fee, as has already been made public, is £62,500.

Arts (Business Sponsorship)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will estimate the real levels of business sponsorship of the arts, and the percentage change, in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Brooke: The Department of National Heritage relies on the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts to provide information on business support for the arts in the United Kingdom. To date, ABSA have carried out three annual national surveys which have identified the following expenditure by business on arts sponsorship:

	£ million[1]	*Increase/ decrease (Per cent.)*	*£ million (real terms)*[2]	*Increase/ decrease (Per cent.)*
1990-91	57·1	—	63·05	—
1991-92	[3]65·4	+14·5	67·91	+7·70
1992-93	57·7	−11·8	57·70	−15·03

[1] These figures include business support through corporate membership.

[2] Calculated to reflect the effects of general inflation as measured by the GDP deflator.

[3] Includes sponsorship of two exceptional initiatives: the Japan Festival and the rebuilding of Glyndebourne opera house.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what further proposals are being considered in public consultation on English heritage's forward strategy, which could involve a change in current responsibilities for grade II listed buildings outside London.

Mr. Brooke: No change is proposed in current responsibilities for grade II listed building casework outside London. Various changes in notification procedures were, however, proposed in annex 8 of the consultation draft of Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 *"Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas"*, copies of which are in the Library. The responses to the consultation are being considered.

HEALTH

Health Service Managers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the salary of the general manager/chief executive of each health authority and hospital trust in each year since 1990-91;

(2) if she will collect and publish the salary of the chief executive of each health authority and trust in England on 1 October 1993 and give the percentage increase over the preceding four years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on the individual salaries of health authority general managers and trust chief executives is not available centrally. General managers in regional, district and special health authorities and family health services authorities are paid on centrally-determined salary ranges. Their individual salaries are dependent on a variety of factors including personal performance against locally set targets. The current salary ranges are set out in "National Health Service Guidelines (HSG(93)58)", a copy of which is available in the Library. The salaries of trust chief executives are matters for trust boards; information on their emoluments is included in annual accounts available locally. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 13 January that from 1 April 1994 each NHS authority and trust will be required to publish an annual report which includes information on the total emoluments of their general manager or chief executive.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the employment conditions and the security of employment for nurses affected by the decision of fundholding general practitioners practices purchasing services from provider units many miles from normal catchment areas.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is a matter for local contractual arrangements between individual nurses and their employers.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the purchasing patterns of fundholding practices in the Macclesfield parliamentary constituency.

Dr. Mawhinney: In Macclesfield, as elsewhere, fundholders are using their purchasing power to achieve the highest standards of patient care whilst obtaining value for money for the national health service. Service improvements include the establishment of in-house clinics for dermatology and physiotherapy.

Community Services

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about GPs obtaining community services for their patients from a considerable distance from their catchment area.

Dr. Mawhinney: General practitioner fundholders have the freedom to purchase the best possible health care for their patients from whichever provider unit they judge best. Fundholders must be able to satisfy the regional health authority that the contract offers value for money and a high-quality service for patients.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the latest details of response times by ambulances to 999 calls for each of the health authorities or trust areas within England, and for England as a whole.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) on 1 February at columns *601-2*.

Clinical Effectiveness

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how her policy of basing practice on clinical effectiveness will be implemented in those areas where knowledge of clinical effectiveness is of poor quality or lacking; what steps she is taking to fill these gaps in knowledge; and what efforts are being made to recruit, train and retain the staff needed to do this health service research.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is the responsibility of clinicians, in the first instance, to provide the most clinically effective interventions. The national health service research and development strategy aims to promote research into areas where there is a paucity of information and results should have greatest benefits. The research councils and universities take the lead in recruiting, training and retaining staff to carry out health services research, together with professional organisations and charities. The health departments work closely with these bodies with the aim of ensuring that there are sufficient trained researchers to meet the needs of the NHS.

Clothier Report

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when she expects to receive the findings of the Clothier report;

(2) if she will list the names of each individual giving evidence to the Clothier inquiry; and if she will list the capacity in which each of them is taking part.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have now received Sir Cecil Clothier's independent inquiry report, which contains names and details of witnesses. The report will be published shortly and in full.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the terms of reference of the Clothier inquiry; what are the names and qualifications of those holding the Clothier inquiry; and which parts of the Clothier report she will be placing in the public domain.

Dr. Mawhinney: Sir Cecil Clothier QC, a former health service commissioner, has chaired the independent inquiry into incidents on ward 4 at Grantham and Kesteven general hospital between February and April 1991. He has been assisted by Anne McDonald, RSCN, RGN, DipN (London), who is director of quality at the Royal Manchester Children's Hospitals and Professor David Shaw, CBE, FRCP, FRCP (Edin), Emeritus Professor of Clinical Neurology at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

The report of the inquiry team will be published in full.

The inquiry's terms of reference were:

1. To inquire into the circumstances leading to the deaths of four children and injuries to nine others on Ward 4 at Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital during the months February to April 1991 (inclusive).
2. To consider the speed and appropriateness of the clinical and managerial response within the hospital to the incidents, and to make recommendations.
3. To examine the appointment procedures, systems of assessment and supervision within the Hospital and Mid Trent College of Nursing and Midwifery respectively, including an examination of the occupational health services available to both the College and the Hospital, and to make recommendations.
4. To review the recommendations of the regional fact finding inquiry (July 1992) into paediatric services at the hospital and to advise whether any additions or amendments to those recommendations are necessary.
5. In the light of the events on Ward 4 at Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital between February and April 1991 (inclusive):
    - 5.1 to advise on the most efficient way for health authorities to be informed of serious untoward incidents and to monitor their handling;
    - 5.2 to consider whether and, if so, how the regional health authority should be informed of serious untoward incidents and the way in which they are handled.
6. To consider such matters relating to the said incidents as the public interest may require.

NHS Management Executive

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all information held by the NHS Management Executive is regarded as information held centrally.

Mr. Sackville: All validated information held by the National Health Service Management Executive is regarded as information that is available centrally. Validated information is that which has been checked by the Department for accuracy, consistency and statistical reliability. The NHS Management Executive also holds a disparate range of administrative and management data obtained from a number of sources which may not be compiled on a comparable basis or use common definitions, or which may contain subjective judgments.

Psychogeriatricians

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for the last four years the number of psychogeriatricians employed by the NHS.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table.

Hospital doctors in old age psychiatry in England as at 30 September each year, in whole time equivalents

Year	Old age psychiatry
1989	78·6
1990	103·3
1991	154·2
1992	170·1

Notes:

These data include doctors in the following grades: consultants, associate specialists, staff grades, senior registrars, hospital practitioners and clinical assistants.

Until recently, old age psychiatry was covered by general psychiatrists, but it is now a specialty in its own right. Some general psychiatrists have sub-specialty interest in psychogeriatrics, but these are not collected in the data.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those district health authorities which do not employ a psychogeriatrician.

Dr. Mawhinney: Psychogeriatric services are purchased on behalf of patients by purchasing and commissioning agencies, and they are responsible for ensuring that these services are available to the local population. They may purchase these services across different district or regional boundaries. At 30 September 1992, 63 of the 252 employing authorities in England employed old age psychiatrists.

Until recently, old age psychiatry was covered by general psychiatrists, but it is now a specialty in its own right. Some general psychiatrists have sub-specialty interest in psychogeriatrics, but these are not collected in the data.

Health Authorities

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what were the names and qualifications of the district general manager and the chairman and district health authority members of the South Lincolnshire district health authority in each of the last three years;

(2) what were the names and qualifications of the Trent regional general manager and the chairman and members of the regional health authority in each of the last three years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Chairmen and non-executive members of the health authorities are appointed for their personal qualities, knowledge and skills and for the contribution they can bring to the strategic leadership of their authority. The selection of both executive and non-executive members of health authorities is a matter for each individual body. The names of the chairman and non-executive members of Trent regional health authority in each of the last three years are:

Year	*Chairman*	*Non-executive members*
1991 and 1992	Sir Michael Carlisle	Mr. M Dessau Mrs. P. Wildgoose Dr. K. Edwards Mr. G. Clemons Mr. D. Bertram
1993	Sir Michael Carlisle	Mr. M. Dessau Mrs. P. Wildgoose Dr. K. Edwards (until 31 October 1993)

Year	*Chairman*	*Non-executive members*
		Mr. G. Clemons
		Mr. D. Bertram
		Professor C. Campbell (from 1 November 1993)

The chairman of the South Lincolnshire health authority in each of the years 1991 to 1993 was Dr. J. D. Brackenridge.

Drug Abuse, Manchester

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people *(a)* under 16 years of age and *(b)* under 18 years of age were treated for drug abuse in the Greater Manchester regional health authority area in each of the past three years;

(2) how many hospital admissions took place in each of the last three years in each of the Greater Manchester regional health authorities from causes associated with drug abuse.

Mr. Bowis: These are matters for the North Western regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Sir Bruce Martin, for details.

Consultants, Trent

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants have been suspended in the Trent region in each of the last 10 years; and how many consultants in the region are under suspension at present.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is a matter for Trent regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Michael Carlisle, chairman of Trent RHA, for details.

Research Units

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, columns *242-44*, what discussions her Department has had with research unit directors about the adequacy of the review procedure.

Dr. Mawhinney: As stated in the previous reply to the hon. Member, expert peer review of long-term research contracts is well established and unit directors are given the opportunity to comment fully on the text of reports. The present round of site visits was discussed with unit directors when they met with the Department's director of research and development on 27 November 1992.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, columns *242-44*, which of the reports of site visits of her Department's research units which have already taken place have been discussed with the relevant unit director; and how soon her Department will be initiating discussions about site visit reports with directors of other units which have alredy been reviewed.

Dr. Mawhinney: Directors have had an opportunity to comment on reports of site visits to the following units:

Childhood Cancer Research Group
National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit
Medical Care Research Unit
Centre for Primary Care Research
Social Medicine and Health Services Research Unit
National Institute for Social Work Training

Site visit reports are in preparation for:

Cancer Screening Evaluation Unit
Clinical Operation Research Unit
Social Policy Research Unit

Dates for visits to the remaining four units have yet to be arranged. In keeping with established review practice, directors will have an opportunity to comment on all reports still outstanding as soon as they become available from the review teams.

Paediatricians

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines have been issued as to the distance a consultant covering a paediatric unit can live or work away from that unit when on call for that unit.

Dr. Mawhinney: Employing bodies are encouraged, when drawing up consultants' contracts of employment, to include a requirement to live within a 10-mile radius of their place of work.

Pinderfields Hospital

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to review the quality, standard and practices of senior management at Pinderfields hospital.

Dr. Mawhinney: Officials have conducted a rigorous review of the trust's five-year strategic direction and its annual business plan. We have every confidence in the newly appointed trust board and its management team.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her latest information about the current incidence of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease; and what information she has as to the ages of persons so suffering.

Mr. Sackville: Figures for the total number of definite and probable cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease are produced on a yearly basis by Dr. R. G. Will, consultant neurologist at the national CJD surveillance unit, Edinburgh. His reports are available in the Library.

Forty-eight definite and probable cases of CJD were identified by the surveillance unit between 1 May 1992 and 30 April 1993. Their ages range from 30 to 86.

Private Beds

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many private pay beds there were in the East London and City health authority in each year since 1986;

(2) how many private pay beds there were in the North East Thames regional health authority in each year since 1986, and at the latest available date.

Mr. Sackville: Information has not been collected centrally since 1 April 1991. The information that is available is shown in the tables.

Private pay beds-East London and the City health authority

	The City and Hackney
1986	6
1987-88	2
1988-89	4
1989-90	4
1990-91	4

Private pay beds—North East Thames regional health authority

	Total
1986	43
1987-88	103
1988-89	129
1989-90	133
1990-91	129

Source: SD2A SBH 211 Return (1986) KH02 Return 1987-88 to 1990-91.

Ambulance Service (Channel Tunnel)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision has been made for special training for the ambulance service personnel likely to provide service in the channel tunnel; how many such personnel have received specialist training; whether such training has included paramedic instruction; what is the expected reaction time for the ambulance service in the event of an emergency; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Talks are currently taking place between East Kent Commissioning Agency, Kent Ambulance Service and Eurotunnel. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Mark Outhwaite, chief executive of East Kent Commissioning Agency at 7-9 Cambridge terrace, Dover for details.

Hospital Capital Trusts

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent in cash terms at current prices, and how much per head of population has been spent, on capital projects in the Anglian Harbours hospital trust and the James Paget hospital, Gorleston, in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The available information is shown in the table.

Year	*Great Yarmouth and Waveney District Health Authority £'000s*	*Anglian Harbours National Health Service Trust £'000s*	*Total spend in District Health Authority area £'000s*	*District Health Authority population*	*Spend per head £*
1986-87	1,149	—	1,149	194,872	5·89
1987-88	1,947	—	1,947	197,641	9·85
1988-89	753	—	753	200,091	3·76
1989-90	1,209	—	1,209	201,950	5·98
1990-91	3,388	—	3,388	202,149	16·75
1991-92	2,493	2,625	5,118	202,047	25·33
1992-93	2,617	4,267	6,884	202,255	34·03

Notes:

1. Population figures for 1986-90 based on 1981 census, 1991 and 1992 figures based on 1991 census.
2. All figures are historic cash spending.
3. Records of individual DHAs prior to 1986 are no longer available centrally.
4. Anglian Harbours NHS Trust was established 1 April 1991, James Paget Hospital NHS Trust was established 1 April 1993 and figures are not separately identifiable from Great Yarmouth and Waveney DHA figures.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish details for each standard region of the United Kingdom of the numbers and proportion of the unemployed who possess academic or vocational qualifications.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest estimates from the Labour Force Survey for summer—June to August—1993 of the numbers and proportion of the ILO unemployed who possess academic or vocational qualifications, for each region of the United Kingdom, are given in the following table—estimate for Northern Ireland is based on spring 1993 data.

The Labour Force Survey shows that the ILO unemployment rate for people with no qualifications is about 50 per cent. higher than the rate for qualified people. People qualified to A-level standard or higher have the lowest ILO unemployment rates.

Numbers and proportions of ILO unemployed who possess academic or vocational qualifications. Not seasonally adjusted.

Standard regions	*ILO unemployed with qualifications (Thousands)*	*Proportion of all ILO unemployed (Percentage)*
South East	693	72
Greater London	342	72
Rest of South East	352	72
East Anglia	71	74
South West	147	74
West Midlands	186	62
East Midlands	116	64
Yorkshire and Humberside	190	71
North West	217	68
North	129	70
Wales	90	69
Scotland	180	70
Northern Ireland (Spring 1993)	50	58
United Kingdom	2,070	69

Source: Labour Force Survey, summer 1993 and spring 1993.

Unfair Dismissal

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the maximum level of the award for unfair dismissal in the year that it was first introduced; what is the equivalent amount upgraded for inflation since that time; and what is the current maximum award.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Compensation for unfair dismissal usually consists of a basic and a compensatory award. The compensatory award, introduced in 1972, was then limited to 104 weeks' pay or £4,160, equivalent to £27,606 today when uprated by the retail prices index, whichever was the less. The current limit is £11,000. The basic award, introduced in 1976, was subject to a maximum limit of £2,400, equivalent to £8,611 today. The current limit is £6,150.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to increase the maximum level of the award for unfair dismissal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering the results of the consultation exercise in connection with the annual review of these awards and will announce the outcome in due course.

European Council Meetings

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to make available to Parliament transcripts of European Council meetings.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Meetings of the European Council are not normally held in public. However, some parts of some Council of Ministers meetings are open sessions which are televised. Arrangements are being made to supply videos of open televised sessions to the Library.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's Office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointments.

European Social Policy

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will respond to the European Union's Green Paper on European Social Policy before 31 March.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Yes.

Parental Leave

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what provision is made for parental leave in each other EC state.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Table 5.8 on page 144 of "OECD Employment Outlook July 1990" gives information about general legislative provisions for maternity and parental leave in OECD countries.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figures set out show the Department's recoveries from the Department of Social Security in respect of financial years 1991-92 and 1992-93 and forecast recoveries for 1993-94.

	£ million
(i) 1991-92 Outturn	2·5
(ii) 1992-93 Outturn	2·8
(iii) 1993-94 Estimated Outturn	3·1

Earnings

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the proportions of full-time female manual workers, full-time female non-manual workers and all full-time female workers with earnings, including overtime, of less than *(a)* £100, *(b)* £120, *(c)* £140, *(d)* £160, *(e)* £180, *(f)* £200 and *(g)* £220 per week in the parliamentary constituency of Newham, North-West;

(2) if he will list the proportions of full-time male manual workers, full-time male non-manual workers and all full-time male workers with earnings, including overtime, of less than *(a)* £100, *(b)* £120, *(c)* £140, *(d)* £160, *(e)* £180, *(f)* £200 and *(g)* £220 per week in the parliamentary constituency of Newham, North-West;

(3) if he will list the proportions of full-time adult manual workers, full-time adult non-manual workers and all full-time adult workers with earnings, including overtime, of less than *(a)* £100, *(b)* £120, *(c)* £140, *(d)* £160, *(e)* £180, *(f)* £200 and *(g)* £220 per week in the parliamentary constituency of Newham, North-West.

Miss Widdecombe: The information available from the New Earnings Survey is provided in the following tables:

Full time employees in the London Borough of Newham on adult rates—pay unaffected by absence
Proportion with gross weekly earnings below the following amounts: at April 1993

£	*Manual women Per cent.*	*Non-manual women Per cent.*	*All women Per cent.*
100	..	..	..
120	..	..	..
140	..	..	4·0
160	..	..	7·1
180	..	6·0	12·1
200	..	9·6	16·2
220	..	15·7	22·2

£	*Manual men Per cent.*	*Non-manual men Per cent.*	*All men Per cent.*
100	..	..	..
120	..	..	..
140	..	..	..
160	..	..	1·5
180	..	..	2·0
200	6·5	6·7	6·6
220	13·0	9·5	11·2

£	*Manual adults Per cent.*	*Non-manual adults Per cent.*	*All adults Per cent.*
100	..	..	..
120	..	..	..
140	..	1·6	1·7
160	6·5	1·6	3·4
180	8·3	3·7	5·4
200	13·0	8·0	9·8
220	19·4	12·2	14·9

Note: " .. " denotes sample number too small or standard error too large for reliable estimate, or information not available.

Source: New Earnings Survey.

Redundancies

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on how many occasions employers failed to provide his Department with the required notice of impending redundancies under section 193 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1992 in each of the last five years; how many of these employers were prosecuted under section 194 of that Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The following table shows the number who have notified the Department but who failed to do so within the time limits. In each case an explanation is sought. Section 193(7) provides that where it is not reasonably practicable for the employer to comply with the full requirements, he shall take all reasonable steps to comply as far as possible. Taking account of this, it has not so far been considered appropriate by successive Governments since 1975 to prosecute an employer for failure to meet the notice requirements. The figures include many notifications by insolvent companies.

	Number
1989	1,855
1990	2,828
1991	4,021
1992	4,724
1993	2,630

GCHQ

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what response the Government will make to the International Labour Organisation's concern over the ban on union membership at GCHQ; and when the last correspondence took place over this matter between the ILO and Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The Government made it clear to the ILO when it last reported in February 1993, and will continue to make it clear in future reports, that their overriding objective remains to safeguard national security, but that they are willing to consider any proposals which are consistent with that objective.

Pyrotechnic Articles

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which EC legislation affects the issue of import licences for pyrotechnic articles.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* To avoid barriers to trade, EC directive 93/15/EEC on explosives for civil uses required the removal of import licensing for those explosives within its scope. It was implemented in Great Britain by the Placing on the Market and Supervision of Transfers of Explosives Regulations 1993 which removed import licence controls for all explosives including pyrotechnic articles.

The new regulations require explosives, including all pyrotechnic articles, supplied in the United Kingdom whatever their place of manufacture to be authorised by the Health and Safety Executive, and in the case of fireworks, compliance with British Standard 7114 or an equivalent standard. The Government believe that these new provisions will effectively maintain safety standards.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Passported Benefits

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the main passported benefits to which recipients of *(a)* income support and *(b)* family credit are eligible; and if he will estimate the average weekly value of each benefit in each year since April 1988.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Passported Benefits from Income Support

Average weekly value	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £
Housing Benefit[1]	19·01	21·06	24·74	29·35	34·19
Community Charge Benefit[2]	n.a.	n.a.	6·13	3·83	4·60
Cold Weather Payments[3]	5·00	5·00	5·00	6·00	6·00
Free School Meals				See note 4	
Free milk and vitamins for pregnant women and children under				See note 5	

Passported Benefits from Income Support and Family Credit

Average weekly value	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £
Social Fund Maternity Payments[6]	86·00	86·00	100·00	101·00	101·00
Social Fund Funeral Payments[6]	497·00	545·00	612·00	706·00	789·00
NHS Benefits				See note 7	

Notes:

1. Housing Benefit (HB)—the award of Income Support allows the award of maximum HB. Average weekly value relates HB (rent rebates and rent allowances) payable to eligible IS recipients.
2. Community Charge Benefit (CCB)—the award of Income Support allowed the award of maximum (80%) of CCB. In England and Wales CCB, existed for three years from April 1990 to March 1993. Figures for the average amount of CCB in 1988-89 and 1989-90 are not available. CCB was replaced by Council Tax Benefit (CTB) in April 1993. The award of IS allows the award of maximum (100%) CTB. Information on the average amount of CTB payable is not yet available.
3. The weekly amount of Cold Weather Payments increased from £5·00 to £6·00 in February 1991. It is only paid for weeks in which the weather forecast is for the temperature to fall to an average equal to, or below, 0 degrees celsius for the period of the forecast. It is payable to Income Support recipients either (a) whose applicable amount includes one or more of the premiums specified in paragraphs 9 to 14 of Part III of Schedule 2 to the General Regulations (pensioner premiums and various premiums paid in respect of a disability), or (b) whose family include a child aged less than 5.
4. Free School Meals—the responsibility for the provision of school meals rests with local education authorities and with governing bodies of self-governing (grant-maintained) schools. It is for them to decide the prices they charge for all school meals and as a result prices vary throughout

the country. It is not therefore possible to provide a national average figure.

5. Information about the average weekly value of free milk and vitamins available to recipients of Income Support and Family Credit and their dependents is not available centrally.
6. The amounts shown are the average awards. Social Fund funeral and maternity payments are made as one-off payments for particular events.
7. NHS Benefits are not cash benefits. People receiving IS and FC are entitled to full remission of NHS charges for prescriptions, dental treatment and wigs and fabric supports. They are also entitled to free sight tests and the full value of optical vouchers towards the cost of their glasses. They may also have help with the cost of travelling to hospital for NHS treatment. The statistical information collected centrally by the Department of Health does not separate the prescriptions etc provided free of charge to IS and FC recipients from those provided to other beneficiaries of the NHS Low Income Scheme.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of administering unemployment benefit for Durham in 1993.

Mr. Burt: Information in the form requested is not available. The cost to the Employment Service of administering unemployment benefit and income support for Durham in the financial year 1992-93 was £3·8 million.

War Pension Entitlement

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes he has agreed to make following the review of war pension entitlements.

Mr. Hague: None. There has been no such review.

Social Fund, Lewisham

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the budget for the Lewisham district office social fund for the current year as set at 1 April 1993; whether the budget was subsequently increased; how much remains in the budget; how many applicants have been refused a grant, giving the reasons for refusal; how many applicants have been refused a loan, giving the reason for refusal; how many applicants refused went on to appeal; and how many of these appeals were successful.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 1 February 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Social Fund (SF) in the Benefits Agency's (BA) Lewisham and Brixton District.

Details of the initial budget allocations for Lewisham and Brixton District for the 1993-94 financial year are in the Library. There has not been any subsequent additional budget allocation this year. The balance outstanding as at 31 December 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, was £252,848 for grants and £778,676 for loans.

With regard to the number of applicants refused a grant or loan in the District, information on the SF is not kept by SF applicant but by SF application. At 31 December 1993 the numbers of grant and loan applications refused were 6,714 and 5,589 respectively. The reasons for refusal are given at Annex A.

The new Social Fund Computer System (SFCS), introduced to Lewisham and Brixton in July 1993, collects additional statistics which were not collected under the old system. Many statistical items are collected differently and are not directly comparable with previous years. The old system recorded reasons for refusal per application whereas SFCS records reasons for refusal per item requested. In cases where a partial award is made a reason for refusal will also be appropriate. Therefore, the sum of all reasons for refusal will not equal the number of application refusals.

There is no right of appeal against discretionary SF decisions. Applicants dissatisfied with a decision may seek a review of the decision and this is initially conducted within the District. If still dissatisfied, the applicant can ask for a review by the Independent Review Service (IRS) which is independent of the BA. For the period 1 April 1993 to 31 December 1993, 3,014 review applications were received by Lewisham and Brixton District. These figures include those that requested a review by the IRS. Overall, 873 resulted in a changed decision.

I hope that you find this reply helpful.

Appendix A

Details of grant and loan refusals for the Lewisham and Brixton District 1 April 1993 to 31 December 1993 (latest available data)

Reason for refusal	*Grants*	*Loans*
Not in receipt of Income Support (IS)	1,541	1,385
In receipt of IS for less than 26 weeks	—	3,316
Direction 4 not satisfied	15,553	—
Applicant excluded by Direction	—	19
No serious risk to health or safety	—	1,400
Requested amount below minimum allowable	9	162
Repeat allocation	381	989
Item excluded by Direction	239	999
Alternative item available	17	164
Help available from another source	43	247
Grant awarded on loan request	—	862
Savings over £500 meet cost	5	2
Savings over £1000 meet cost (customer or partner over 60)	7	1
Enough money available to meet crisis	—	17
Total debt exceeds £1000	—	57
Inability to repay	—	998
Insufficient priority	385	938
Other reasons	50	319

Child Support Agency

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much of its target million the Child Support Agency has collected to date; and of that amount how much has been paid as maintenance net of reductions in payments of welfare benefits.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 31 January 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how much of the Child Support Agency's target has been collected to date.

The Agency was set a target for benefit savings. No separate target has been set for collection of maintenance. For the period from April 1993 to December 1993, benefit savings of £214·5 million have so far been reported. This figure does not represent the total amount of savings achieved because some will be scored retrospectively.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual salary of the chief executive of the Child Support Agency; and what are the weekly hours of work she is contracted to undertake.

Mr. Burt: The current basic salary of Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive of the Child Support Agency, is

£48,520 plus London weighting of £1,776. Her contract requires at least 36 hours per week, but there is no upper limit.

Pension Books

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the considerations which led him to give prominence to the title "Social Security" on new pension books; and if he will consider changing the term "Social Security" to "Pension".

Mr. Hague: The administration of benefit payments is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 1 February 1994:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to respond to your recent Parliamentary Question about the wording on the cover of the new Pension Books.

Firstly, it may be helpful if I explain that the design of the cover of order books is constant across all types of social security benefit, as was the case with old style order books. The reason for this is that the cover does not automatically identify which type of benefit a person is receiving, so that a casual observer cannot identify which social security benefit an individual is in receipt of simply by looking at the cover of an order book. This allows an individual's financial affairs to remain confidential.

There are also practical considerations if separate covers were required for individual benefits. Perhaps the most significant would be at the printing and assembly stage. Print runs would have to be stopped to allow different covers to be loaded to reflect the type of benefit being paid which would mean additional cost implications. Consideration would also have to be given as to how a book containing a number of benefits combined would be reflected on a cover—order books are issued by benefit groups and a number of different benefits are within each group. This would only add to the difficulty in identifying which cover should be assembled to the foils.

The design of the order book is constantly under review, and the cover design is a component of many considerations. The last change was introduced primarily as an anti-fraud measure and it may interest you to learn that since the introduction of the new design no counterfeits have been found to be cashed. This is a major achievement which should result in significant savings by reducing order book fraud. It is, however, too early to estimate how great these savings will be.

For the reasons stated above there are no plans to replace the term Social Security with that of Pension.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Housing Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of *(a)* council tenants, *(b)* housing association tenants, *(c)* private tenants and *(d)* owner occupiers were in receipt of housing benefit in (i) Inverclyde, (ii) Strathclyde and (iii) Scotland as a whole at the latest available date.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the table.

	Percentage of local authority tenants receiving Housing Benefit	*Percentage of private tenants receiving Housing Benefit*
Inverclyde	55	50
Strathclyde	60	55
Scotland	60	50

Sources: Housing Benefit Management Information System quarterly caseload returns for 1991 and the 1991 Scottish Office tenancy statistics.

Notes:

(i) Information on the number of Housing Association tenancies is not available, therefore, the information is included with the private tenants.

(ii) Owner Occupiers in Scotland have not been eligible for Housing Benefit (rate rebates) since April 1989 when the Community Charge Benefit was introduced.

(iii) The caseload data is an average of four point in time counts and includes estimates for non-responding authorities, therefore, the information should be regarded only as a general indication.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for the United Kingdom in total, and by standard region including Greater London, the number of households claiming housing benefit for each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 21 January 1994]:* The available information is in the table.

Housing benefit cases by region

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
South East (excluding London)	473,100	465,000	490,200	533,700	590,800
London	553,100	523,800	553,700	594,800	640,100
North (including Cumbria)	308,900	302,100	296,800	297,500	294,200
Wales	205,000	204,000	204,000	210,000	235,000
Scotland	565,000	557,000	542,000	541,000	624,200
Yorkshire and Humberside	402,300	391,400	388,200	398,100	388,500
East Midlands	237,300	232,300	241,800	247,500	265,800
East Anglia	111,400	105,100	111,800	118,000	129,900
South West	233,300	234,000	248,400	267,600	288,000
West Midlands	383,800	361,400	368,800	387,800	386,500
North West (excluding Cumbria)	524,400	507,200	514,400	522,600	526,400
Total	3,997,600	3,883,300	3,960,100	4,118,600	4,369,500

Source:

The Housing Benefit Management Information System quarterly caseload data.

Notes:

1. Information prior to 1988-89 is not available.
2. The data relates to Great Britain; figures for the United Kingdom are not available.
3. The figures are averages, rounded to the nearest 100, and include estimates for non-responding authorities.
4. The numbers are in benefit units, a benefit unit may be a couple or a single person.
5. The data is from a later source than that used for "Social Security Statistics".

Benefits, Newham

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his current estimate of the number of eligible persons in the borough of Newham who do not claim income support;

(2) what is his current estimate of the number of eligible persons in the borough of Newham who do not claim housing benefit;

(3) what is his current estimate of the number of eligible persons in the borough of Newham who do not claim family credit.

Mr. Burt: Estimates of take-up of income-related benefits are not available on a regional or local basis. Take-up estimates for Great Britain as a whole can be found in "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take-up in 1989" published in January 1993, a copy of which is in the Library.

Spending Power

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report,* columns *899-902,* if he will publish tables, similar to those in his Department's tax benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for a lone mother with two children aged four and six years under the benefit system as uprated *(a)* in April 1993 and *(b)* in April 1994 who is (i) not working, after one year on benefits, (ii) earning £20 a week from part-time working and (iii) working full time and earning (1) £60, (2) £70, (3) £80, (4) £90, (5) £100, (6) £110 and (7) £120 per week.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables. We have assumed for the purposes of the question that part-time work is less than 16 hours a week.

Lone parent with two children aged 4 and 6
Earnings and benefits as at April 1994

Gross earnings (£)	*Tax* (£)	*National insurance contributions* (£)	*Take home pay* (£)	*Income support* (£)	*Free welfare foods* (£)	*Family credit* (£)	*Child benefit* (£)	*Rent* (£)	*Rent rebate* (£)	*Council tax* (£)	*Council tax benefit* (£)	*Total net income* (£)	*Net income after rent and council tax* (£)
(a) Not working after one year on benefits													
0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	67·55	6·54	0·00	24·60	32·54	32·54	7·65	7·65	138·88	98·69
(b) Earning £20 per week from part-time working													
20·00	0·00	0·00	20·00	62·55	6·54	0·00	24·60	32·54	32·54	7·65	7·65	153·88	113·69
(c) Working full-time													
60·00	0·00	1·44	58·56	0·00	0·00	66·70	24·60	32·54	15·28	7·65	2·34	167·48	127·29
70·00	0·00	2·44	67·56	0·00	0·00	66·70	24·60	32·54	9·43	7·65	0·54	168·83	128·64
80·00	0·00	3·44	76·56	0·00	0·00	63·30	24·60	32·54	5·79	7·65	0·00	170·25	130·06
90·00	0·00	4·44	85·56	0·00	0·00	57·00	24·60	32·54	4·03	7·65	0·00	171·19	131·00
100·00	0·13	5·44	94·43	0·00	0·00	50·79	24·60	32·54	2·30	7·65	0·00	172·12	131·93
110·00	2·13	6·44	101·43	0·00	0·00	45·89	24·60	32·54	0·94	7·65	0·00	172·86	132·67
120·00	4·13	7·44	108·43	0·00	0·00	40·99	24·60	32·54	0·00	7·65	0·00	174·02	133·83

Note: April 1993 values have been used for rent, council tax, free school meals and welfare foods as the 1994 values are not yet available.

Lone parent with two children aged 4 and 6
Earnings and benefits as at April 1993

Gross earnings (£)	*Tax* (£)	*National insurance contributions* (£)	*Take home pay* (£)	*Income support* (£)	*Free welfare foods* (£)	*Family credit* (£)	*Child benefit* (£)	*Rent* (£)	*Rent rebate* (£)	*Community charge* (£)	*Community charge benefit* (£)	*Total net income* (£)	*Net income after rent and community charge* (£)
(a) Not working after one year on benefits													
0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	64·50	6·54	0·00	24·15	32·54	32·54	7·65	7·65	135·38	95·19
(b) Earning £20 per week from part-time working													
20·00	0·00	0·00	20·00	59·50	6·54	0·00	24·15	32·54	32·54	7·65	7·65	150·38	110·19
(c) Working full-time													
60·00	0·00	1·48	58·52	0·00	0·00	64·00	24·15	32·54	15·01	7·65	2·26	163·94	123·75
70·00	0·00	2·38	67·62	0·00	0·00	64·00	24·15	32·54	9·09	7·65	0·44	165·30	125·11
80·00	0·00	3·28	76·72	0·00	0·00	58·60	24·15	32·54	6·69	7·65	0·00	166·16	125·97
90·00	0·00	4·18	85·82	0·00	0·00	52·23	24·15	32·54	4·92	7·65	0·00	167·12	126·93
100·00	0·13	5·08	94·79	0·00	0·00	45·95	24·15	32·54	3·17	7·65	0·00	168·06	127·87
110·00	2·13	5·98	101·89	0·00	0·00	40·98	24·15	32·54	1·78	7·65	0·00	168·80	128·61
120·00	4·13	6·88	108·99	0·00	0·00	36·01	24·15	32·54	0·00	7·65	0·00	169·15	128·96

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, Official Record, columns *899-902,* if he will publish tables, similar to those in his Department's tax benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for each of a single waged married couple *(a)* with two children aged four and six years and *(b)* with three children aged three, eight and 11 years earning (i) £60, (ii) £70, (iii) £80, (iv) £90, (v) £100, (vi) £110, (vii) £120, (viii) £130, (ix) £140, (x) £150, (xi) £160 and (xii) £170 per week under the benefit system as per its uprating in 1993.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is provided in "Tax/Benefit Model Tables 1993", published in October 1993, copies of which are available in the Library.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many payments have been made under the special compensation scheme for claimants who claimed *(a)* disability living allowance or *(b)* attendance allowance after February 1993; and what is the total amount paid.

Mr. Scott: *[pursuant to his reply, 24 January 1994, col. 18]:* The answer should have read as follows: No claims to disability living allowance or attendance allowance made after February 1993 have attracted a payment under the special compensation scheme. This is because all claims considered under that scheme must have been received on or after 3 February 1992 and had payment issued prior to 1 April 1993. Additionally, any claim must have suffered a delay of more than eight months, or more than six months in special rules cases.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farmers Charter

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if her Department has considered initiating a farmers charter in the light of the Chancellor's reference in the Budget speech to the effects of late payment on small business; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Department has already set out targets for dealing with grant, subsidy and licence applications in "Commitment to Service", which was published in December 1992. In a number of cases, EC legislation determines the dates which apply.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the terms of reference of the research being undertaken by the national poisons unit into the toxicity of dietary supplements, sponsored by her Department; what information she has concerning the number of cases of *(a)* minor and *(b)* serious medical problems as a result of the consumption of such dietary supplements; what comparative assessment has been made with information of which she is aware, relating to poisoning as a result of organophosphorus or organochlorine pesticide ingestion or absorption over a comparable period of time; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The project currently being carried out at the national poisons unit is commissioned to follow up both clinically and analytically any case reports notified to the unit in which dietary supplements or traditional remedies are implicated. The project is still under way, but interim results show a link between exposure to dietary supplements or traditional remedies and clinical effects in 49 cases out of 5,568 investigated. The interim nature of these results makes comparison with any similar data on pesticides unreliable. The Ministry will use the final results of this project to aid in the formulation of policy on dietary supplements and traditional remedies.

Intervention Beef

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will inquire into the circumstances under which beef was released by the Intervention Board free of charge to Mr. Ray Woolford, of Lambeth council.

Mr. Jack: Yes. I would be grateful if the hon. Member would let me have further details of the circumstances.

Fishing (Drift Nets)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what rules have been agreed to allow fishing vessels the use of drift nets over 2·5 km in length.

Mr. Jack: Since 31 December 1993 the use by Community vessels of drift nets over 2·5 km in length has been prohibited under the provisions of EC regulation 3094/86.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. Jack: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointments.

Polwhele Veterinary Investigation Centre

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has for the future of the Polwhele veterinary investigation centre; what assessment he has made of its performance over the past two and a half years; how she has taken into account the implications for livestock movements following the introduction of the European single market; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The review of the Polwhele veterinary investigation unit has been postponed until the outcome of the review of the animal health and veterinary group, which includes the state veterinary service, is known.

Forestry

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) in respect of how many forest parks in England she has given an assurance that they will not be privatised; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will list the precise criteria which led the Government to exempt the New Forest from privatisation; how those criteria have been applied to other Forestry Commission lands in England; and if she will list the land affected in each case.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In giving the assurance that the New Forest will not be privatised, full account was taken of its place in the nation's history and heritage. Ministers will await the advice of the Forestry Review Group before considering what action, if any, should be taken in respect of the ownership and management of other Forestry Commission woodlands, including forest parks.

Less-favoured Areas

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle and sheep farms are wholly or mainly in the less-favoured areas.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: As at the June 1992 agricultural census there were 11,842 farms in England which had at least half their land in the less-favoured areas and were classified as cattle and sheep farms.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is her estimate of the total subsidy to be paid on cattle and sheep in the less-favoured areas in 1994.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The total direct subsidies paid under the hill livestock compensatory allowances, sheep annual premium and suckler cow premium schemes in 1994 on cattle and sheep in the less-favoured areas in England is estimated to be at least £144 million.

EDUCATION

National Curriculum Council

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much the carpets incorporating the initials NCC in the National Curriculum Council's York office cost to purchase; when they were purchased; and what has happened to them.

Mr. Robin Squire: The carpet was purchased in 1990, when the National Curriculum Council was fitting out its offices in York. No information on the cost of the carpet is held centrally, and the cost is not separately identifiable from the published accounts of the NCC. The council was dissolved on 1 January 1994 and its former York office, with the carpet still in place, has been transferred to the Secretary of State. It will become the headquarters of the new Funding Agency for Schools from April this year.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Boswell: In the calendar year 1993 the amount reimbursed was £97,283. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Funding Agency for Schools

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what rent the Funding Agency for Schools will pay for its office accommodation in York; and what rent the National Curriculum Council paid.

Mr. Robin Squire: The annual rent for Albion Wharf is £280,724 excluding VAT, which is the sum previously paid by National Curriculum Council. Under the terms of the lease the rent is subject to review every five years with the next review due in June 1995.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what will be the cost of refurbishing premises in York for use by the Funding Agency for Schools; and which organisation will meet the cost of refurbishment.

Mr. Robin Squire: The cost of refurbishing Albion Wharf will be around £650,000 excluding VAT, to be met by the Department out of the budget set aside for the establishment of the Funding Agency for Schools.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. Boswell: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointments.

LEA Schools (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the capital allocation for North Yorkshire local education authority maintained schools in 1993-94.

Mr. Forth: North Yorkshire LEA's annual capital guideline for 1993-94 is £5·296 million. In addition, the authority has received two supplementary credit approvals totalling £710,000 in the course of this financial year. Voluntary aided and special agreement schools in North Yorkshire have been allocated grant totalling £949,000.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member on Tuesday 1 February, *Official Report,* column *611.*

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many new applications have been received from secondary and primary schools to change to grant-maintained status since his answer of 25 October 1993, *Official Report,* column *436.*

Mr. Robin Squire: Since the answer of 25th October 1993, applications for grant maintained status have been received from 38 primary and 27 secondary schools.

Secondary Schools (Performance)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many copies of the secondary school performance tables were published by his Department.

Mr. Robin Squire: A total of 109 separate booklets containing secondary school performance tables were published in November 1993, of which some 1,087,600 copies have so far been distributed.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many copies of the secondary school performance tables were sent to primary schools in each local education authority; what criteria were used in determining how many copies would be sent; and for what purpose the tables were provided.

Mr. Robin Squire: Every primary and middle school in England with 10-year-old pupils on roll was sent 50 copies of the performance tables booklet for their local education authority area. The decision to send a standard number of booklets to each primary and middle school was taken on the grounds of overall economy and efficiency. The tables contain useful information for parents considering which secondary schools would best suit their children, and help parents and others to be better informed about the standards being achieved in schools in their area.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the budgeted expenditure for *(a)* publication and *(b)* distribution of the secondary school performance tables.

Mr. Robin Squire: The total budget for the 1993 performance tables exercise, covering secondary, 16 to 18, and national unauthorised absence tables, was £1·9 million. The production of the secondary and 16 to 18 tables has cost £864,800 to date, and the cost of distributing the tables amounts to some £386,100; requests for the tables are still being received. It is not possible to separate the production and distribution costs as between the secondary and the 16 to 18 tables.

Year Six Pupils

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many year six pupils there are in each local education authority.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information is collected from schools in England on the number of pupils in each age group rather than year group. The numbers of pupils in January 1993 who were aged 10 at the beginning of that school year—most of whom were in year group six—are shown in the table.

Pupils aged 10(1) in maintained and non-maintained schools in each Local Education Authority in England January 1993

LEA	*Pupils in maintained schools primary, middle secondary and special*	*Pupils in non-maintained schools*		*All pupils aged 10*
		Special	*Independent*	
Corporation of London	25	0	69	94
Camden	1,315	0	485	1,800
Greenwich	2,611	0	105	2,716
Hackney	2,080	0	283	2,363
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,112	0	152	1,264
Islington	1,837	0	12	1,849
Kensington and Chelsea	767	0	690	1,457
Lambeth	2,387	0	93	2,480
Lewisham	2,569	0	129	2,698
Southwark	2,571	0	211	2,782
Tower Hamlets	2,626	0	14	2,640
Wandsworth	2,014	0	243	2,257
Westminster	1,160	0	335	1,495
Barking and Dagenham	1,836	0	0	1,836
Barnet	3,032	0	385	3,417
Bexley	2,487	0	56	2,543
Brent	2,733	0	212	2,945
Bromley	2,787	1	359	3,147
Croydon	3,395	0	548	3,943
Ealing	2,971	0	466	3,437
Enfield	2,894	0	118	3,012
Haringey	2,211	0	145	2,356
Harrow	2,288	0	231	2,519
Havering	2,686	0	62	2,748
Hillingdon	2,561	1	279	2,841
Hounslow	2,276	0	63	2,339
Kingston upon Thames	1,251	0	223	1,474
Merton	1,617	0	256	1,873
Newham	3,113	0	14	3,127
Redbridge	2,519	0	301	2,820
Richmond upon Thames	1,261	0	455	1,716
Sutton	1,687	0	148	1,835
Waltham Forest	2,542	0	67	2,609
Birmingham	13,527	0	434	13,961
Coventry	3,791	0	146	3,937
Dudley	3,619	0	21	3,640
Sandwell	3,710	0	21	3,731
Solihull	2,484	0	154	2,638
Walsall	3,344	0	62	3,406
Wolverhampton	3,106	0	102	3,208
Knowsley	2,134	0	20	2,154
Liverpool	6,217	10	140	6,367
St. Helens	2,311	0	52	2,363
Sefton	3,497	10	219	3,726
Wirral	4,092	6	246	4,344
Bolton	3,378	3	128	3,509

		Pupils in non-maintained schools		
LEA	***Pupils in maintained schools primary, middle secondary and special***	***Special***	***Independent***	***All pupils aged 10***
Bury	**2,099**	**0**	**128**	**2,227**
Manchester	**5,611**	**0**	**238**	**5,849**
Oldham	**3,015**	**0**	**102**	**3,117**
Rochdale	**2,725**	**0**	**36**	**2,761**
Salford	**2,657**	**0**	**144**	**2,801**
Stockport	**3,320**	**29**	**261**	**3,610**
Tameside	**2,809**	**0**	**13**	**2,822**
Trafford	**2,457**	**0**	**192**	**2,649**
Wigan	**3,888**	**0**	**0**	**3,888**
Barnsley	**2,717**	**0**	**12**	**2,729**
Doncaster	**3,796**	**5**	**62**	**3,863**
Rotherham	**3,208**	**0**	**24**	**3,232**
Sheffield	**5,395**	**0**	**153**	**5,548**
Bradford	**6,655**	**0**	**236**	**6,891**
Calderdale	**2,422**	**0**	**62**	**2,484**
Kirklees	**4,877**	**3**	**67**	**4,947**
Leeds	**8,103**	**7**	**400**	**8,510**
Wakefield	**3,800**	**0**	**156**	**3,956**
Gateshead	**2,314**	**0**	**79**	**2,393**
Newcastle upon Tyne	**2,950**	**17**	**367**	**3,334**
North Tyneside	**2,287**	**9**	**79**	**2,375**
South Tyneside	**1,912**	**0**	**8**	**1,920**
Sunderland	**3,834**	**0**	**80**	**3,914**
Isles of Scilly	**26**	**0**	**0**	**26**
Avon	**10,331**	**0**	**863**	**11,194**
Bedfordshire	**6,788**	**0**	**434**	**7,222**
Berkshire	**8,336**	**2**	**1,095**	**9,433**
Buckinghamshire	**7,476**	**0**	**787**	**8,263**
Cambridgeshire	**7,769**	**0**	**487**	**8,256**
Cheshire	**11,594**	**8**	**519**	**12,121**
Cleveland	**7,624**	**0**	**162**	**7,786**
Cornwall	**5,479**	**0**	**162**	**5,641**
Cumbria	**5,642**	**0**	**192**	**5,834**
Derbyshire	**10,842**	**7**	**332**	**11,181**
Devon	**11,098**	**14**	**814**	**11,926**
Dorset	**6,523**	**8**	**637**	**7,168**
Durham	**7,209**	**0**	**183**	**7,392**
East Sussex	**6,633**	**9**	**880**	**7,522**
Essex	**17,628**	**8**	**1,007**	**18,643**
Gloucestershire	**6,013**	**6**	**516**	**6,535**
Hampshire	**17,442**	**13**	**1,462**	**18,917**
Hereford and Worcester	**7,669**	**11**	**703**	**8,383**
Hertfordshire	**11,211**	**2**	**1,207**	**12,420**
Humberside	**10,711**	**0**	**251**	**10,962**
Isle of Wight	**1,344**	**6**	**61**	**1,411**
Kent	**17,272**	**42**	**1,377**	**18,691**
Lancashire	**17,226**	**15**	**579**	**17,820**
Leicestershire	**10,891**	**0**	**466**	**11,357**
Lincolnshire	**6,744**	**0**	**338**	**7,082**
Norfolk	**7,945**	**0**	**487**	**8,432**
North Yorkshire	**7,610**	**5**	**698**	**8,313**
Northamptonshire	**7,197**	**6**	**364**	**7,567**
Northumberland	**3,779**	**0**	**77**	**3,856**
Nottinghamshire	**11,833**	**9**	**417**	**12,259**
Oxfordshire	**5,899**	**11**	**836**	**6,746**
Shropshire	**4,870**	**2**	**403**	**5,275**
Somerset	**5,022**	**2**	**591**	**5,615**
Staffordshire	**12,597**	**0**	**350**	**12,947**
Suffolk	**7,099**	**0**	**532**	**7,631**
Surrey	**9,385**	**41**	**2,438**	**11,864**
Warwickshire	**5,532**	**0**	**410**	**5,942**
West Sussex	**7,326**	**6**	**806**	**8,138**
Wiltshire	**6,495**	**0**	**434**	**6,929**
England	**549,392**	**334**	**36,210**	**585,936**

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[1] **Ages as at 31 August 1992**

Chief Inspector of Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will place in the Library a copy of every letter to hon. Members from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 24 January 1994]:* Professor Sutherland has agreed to make available in the Library any letter which he sends to an hon. Member on a matter raised in a parliamentary question which has been referred to him for reply by my right hon. Friend or other Ministers.

WALES

Diesel Fuel Duties

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will discuss with bus operators in Wales and other involved parties the impact of the increase in diesel fuel duties on local bus services in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No. The effect on operators' costs will be minimal—as little as 1 per cent. of their total operating costs. Services in Wales should not be greatly affected.

Cwmcarn Secondary School

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) when the headteacher of Cwmcarn grant-maintained secondary school in Gwent retired;

(2) how the early retirement of the headteacher of Cwmcarn grant-maintained school, Gwent, was financed.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply of 17 December 1993, columns *1078-79*, to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor).

Uplands Acidification

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what strategy is being considered by the Welsh Office to combat the effects of uplands acidification; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A significant programme of action is under way in the United Kingdom to reduce the emissions which cause acid rain. This includes measures to reduce emissions from the power industry, the fitting of catalytic converters to all new cars and the implementation of pollution controls under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

In addition, the Welsh Office, in conjunction with the National Rivers Authority and the Countryside Council for Wales, is promoting research and monitoring on the environmental impact of acid deposition in upland Wales.

Development Agency

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what Welsh Office scrutiny there is of the working of the Welsh Development Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Development Agency, like other non-departmental public bodies, is subject to a range of controls, directions and monitoring as required by the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975. Targets, objectives and performance measures are set in the context of the corporate planning cycle. The agency's finances are monitored on a monthly basis and its accounts are audited by the National Audit Office.

House Condition Survey

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who conducted the interim house condition survey; what was the date originally scheduled for publication; what is the date currently scheduled for publication; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The 1993 Welsh House Condition Survey has been conducted in two stages. The first stage was a social survey undertaken by Research and Marketing Ltd. The second stage included a physical survey which was carried out by Bailey Widnell. Both contracts were placed after competitive tendering.

Our provisional intention was that the results of the surveys be available early this year. We now expect them to be published in the spring.

Magor-Castleton Motorway

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish the submissions received on the consultation exercise on the proposed Magor to Castleton motorway.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Relevant details will be announced when a decision is taken on whether or not to proceed with any of the published routes. This is currently anticipated by the summer of 1994.

Emergency Highway Works

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if arrangements similar to the special arrangements for emergency work referred to by the Secretary of State for Transport in respect of the introduction of full competition for local authority highway works in England will apply in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Yes. The implementation date is 1 October 1997, which takes account of proposals for local government reorganisation.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions since 1982 in Wales a potentially damaging operation to a site of special scientific interest has been carried out following the failure to reach a management agreement as set out in section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested by the hon. Member about potentially damaging operations is not available in the form requested. Available data on damage to SSSIs up to 31 March 1991 can be found in the Nature Conservancy Council's annual reports. Damage since 1 April 1991 can be found in the Countryside Council for Wales annual reports. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Less-favoured Areas

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cattle and sheep farms are wholly or mainly in the less-favoured areas.

Mr. Redwood: In June 1992 there were 13,715 cattle and sheep farms wholly or mainly within the less-favoured areas in Wales.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the total subsidy to be paid on cattle and sheep in the less-favoured areas in 1994.

Mr. Redwood: The total direct subsidies paid under hill livestock compensatory allowances, sheep annual premium, and suckler cow premium schemes in 1994 on cattle and sheep in the less-favoured areas in Wales is estimated to be £157 million.

Farm Accidents

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many accidents were reported on farms in Wales in 1992-93; and what measures were taken to increase awareness of accident prevention.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have been asked to reply.

In the agriculture and horticulture industry in Wales in 1992-93 a provisional total of 65 occupational injuries were reported to enforcing authorities. Information on the number of injuries which occurred on farms cannot be separately identified.

The Health and Safety Executive is carrying out an extensive programme of measures aimed at helping to reduce the numbers of injuries and to increase awareness of health and safety in the agricultural industry. These measures include targeting inspection at those workplaces that present the greatest risk, extensive advisory and publicity work, and liaison with the industry to improve the safety of agricultural equipment.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Pergau Hydro-electric Project

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many files marked, "Not for NAO Eyes" relating to the Pergau hydro-electric project there are within his Department; and how many are at the British high commission in Malaysia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Six. The high commission in Malaysia does not hold any such files.

The marking "Not for NAO Eyes" is used in accordance with long-established practice. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's internal audit unit regularly checks to ensure that the marking is not abused.

Correspondence

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the instruction from the Foreign Secretary to the permanent secretary of the Overseas Development Administration dated 4 July 1989.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The document to which the hon. Member refers is dated 4 July 1991. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 31 January 1994 at column *493*.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the memorandum to the Minister for Overseas Development from the permanent secretary of the Overseas Development Administration dated 7 February 1989.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Permanent Secretary's memorandum to which the hon. Member refers is dated 7 February 1991. The Public Accounts Committee was informed that, in accordance with usual practice, this internal document would not be released. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will prepare a full memorandum in response to the request now expected from the Foreign Affairs Committee following their decision of 26 January.

Special Adviser

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Afairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report,* column *961*, if he will outline the particular qualifications, expertise or experience relating to the Overseas Development portfolio of the special adviser, Mr. Maurice Fraser.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is not my practice to comment on the qualifications, expertise or experience of special advisers.

Horn of Africa

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet his counterparts in the European Union to discuss a joint response to forecast food deficits in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The food aid needs of countries in the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia and Eritrea, were discussed by officials of the European Community and its member states on 13 January. The European Commission indicated that they expect to provide some 250,000 tonnes of food to Ethiopia and Eritrea through various channels during 1994. Member states are considering their individual responses. A further meeting on 3 March will review the position.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the supply of emergency food aid following forecasts of crop deficits in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have allocated 10,000 tonnes of relief food aid for Eritrea and 15,000 tonnes for Ethiopia since 1 November 1993 from our 1993-94 national food aid programme. This food is being channelled through various NGOs. We will shortly be considering the possibility of further allocations from our 1994-95 programme.

Crop Deficits

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received regarding forecasts of crop deficits in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have received reports of joint FAO/WFP crop and food supply assessment missions carried out in November and December 1993 for both Ethiopia and Eritrea. Additional information has been received from the British embassy in Addis Ababa and various NGOs.

Environmental Appraisal Manual

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes the Overseas Development Administration has made to the "Manual of Environmental Appraisal" since April 1992.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There have been no changes. We plan to review the manual on a three-year cycle, but sections can be amended in the interim if there are key developments.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Correspondence

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Lord President of the Council what proportion of correspondence received by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each of his Department's agencies receives (i) an acknowledgement within five days and (ii) a substantive reply within 15 days.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 17 December 1993]:* Current practice is for acknowledgements of correspondence to be sent immediately in cases where it is clear that a substantive reply cannot be given without consultation or research. Substantive replies are sent to correspondence as quickly as possible, but detailed analysis of response times could not be prepared except at disproportionate cost. The Privy Council Office has no responsibility for any agencies.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* None.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* Employees suspected of fraud would be dealt with under disciplinary procedures and, where appropriate, the criminal code. An employee subsequently found guilty would normally be dismissed.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Brazil

15. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with Brazil.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We enjoy excellent relations with Brazil.

Honduras

16. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Honduras concerning human rights.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Our ambassador in Tegucigalpa regularly reminds the Honduran authorities of the concern in this country over human rights and is in frequent contact with the Honduran human rights ombudsman. European Union ambassadors discussed human rights with the presidential candidates before the November elections.

Poland

17. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Poland in relation to the applications by Poland to join the European Union and NATO.

Mr. Hurd: We strongly support Poland's wish to join the European Union.

We welcome Poland's intention to take part in the "Partnership for Peace" programme, which indicates its willingness eventually to take on the responsibilities of NATO membership.

Far East (Exports)

18. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department is doing to encourage exports to the far east.

Mr. Goodlad: All FCO posts in the far east have export promotion as a top priority. They seek out export opportunities, advise British companies on the business to be won in their markets, lobby on their behalf for major contracts and against discrimination, organise visits by Ministers and trade missions with the specific object of winning business amongst other tasks. I am happy to say, for example, that our exports to China were 72 per cent. up in the first 11 months of 1993 compared to 1992, to the Philippines 50 per cent., to Thailand 39 per cent., to South Korea 21 per cent., to Malaysia 50 per cent., to Hong Kong 32 per cent., to Singapore 24 per cent., to Japan 17 per cent. and to Taiwan 20 per cent.

Middle East

19. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had about the middle east peace process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Lebanon, Israel, the Occupied Territories and Jordan from 3-6 January. The Prime Minister met Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan in London on 11 January. The Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I held discussions with the Lebanese Prime Minister in London on 25 and 26 January. I am encouraged by the determination of all the parties to make progress towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Western European Union (Membership)

20. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place concerning the widening of Western European Union membership by the inclusion of countries in eastern and central Europe.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Western European Union Council of Ministers of 22 November requested the WEU

Permanent Council to study the possibility of an enhanced status for the countries of central and eastern Europe to allow them to participate to a greater extent in WEU activities.

21. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future relationships between the Western European Union and the countries of central and eastern Europe, in the light of the adoption of the "Partnership for Peace" policy at the recent NATO summit.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Discussions have taken place between the Western European Union Permanent Council and representatives from central and eastern Europe, following on from the agreement reached at the 22 November WEU ministerial meeting, regarding the possibility of an enhanced relationship with the WEU for these countries. Any such enhanced relationship would be complementary to and compatible with the links developed through NATO's "Partnership for Peace".

Malaysia

22. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with Malaysia.

Mr. Goodlad: Our relations with Malaysia are excellent. We have close links in many fields, especially trade, defence and education. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited Kuala Lumpur last September, and the King of Malaysia paid a state visit to this country in November.

Social Policy (European Community)

23. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the European Commission to discuss EC social policy.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I have contacts over a wide range of issues with representatives of the European Commission. On special social policy issues, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, who has responsibility for this area, is in regular contact with Commissioner Padraig Flynn.

China

24. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with China.

Mr. Goodlad: We attach importance to the United Kingdom's relations with China, which cover a broad range of issues. We have a shared responsibility under the Joint Declaration for the future of Hong Kong. We have a good working relationship in the UN Security Council. Our commercial relationship is expanding rapidly, with United Kingdom exports up by 72 per cent. in the first 11 months of last year.

Belize

25. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Belize.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Our relations with Belize remain close and warm.

Russian Parliament

26. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to establish firm links and lines of communication with the new Russian Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We look forward to regular contacts with the new Russian Parliament. The Speaker of the House has invited the Chairman of the State Duma, Mr. Rybkin, to visit the United Kingdom later this year. We have established the £500,000 British programme for democracy financed by the know-how fund to help foster, among other things, interparliamentary contacts and provide training for new parliamentarians and officials.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

27. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet representatives of the United States Government to discuss the implementations of the GATT agreement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will be discussing GATT implications again with the Americans in the near future.

Japan

28. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Japan to discuss trade links; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed our trade links with a number of Japanese Ministers including the Prime Minister, during his visit to Japan in April 1993. I did so too during my visit in November. Our commercial relationship is making good progress. Despite continuing recession in Japan, British exports during the first 11 months of 1993 rose by 17 per cent. compared with the same period in 1992.

Foreign Policy (Co-operation)

29. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he proposes to have discussions with his European Union partners concerning the strengthening of intergovernmental co-operation on foreign policy.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs meets his European Union partners regularly to discuss the strengthening of intergovernmental co-operation on foreign policy.

South Africa

30. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests he has received concerning assistance with the process of the election in South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 14 January the UN Security Council approved the Secretary-General's report containing his proposals for international assistance for the South African elections. These provide for an international contingent of 2,840 observers, of which 1,778 will be provided by the UN. The United Kingdom will contribute to the UN, EU and Commonwealth observer operations.

36. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions Her Majesty's Government are planning to make to the groups monitoring the planned South African elections in April.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Britain is contributing to the UN, EU and Commonwealth observer operations. The exact number of British observers has yet to be finalised.

Paraguay

31. **Mr. Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with Paraguay.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Relations with Paraguay are good. There were several high-level British visitors to Asuncion in 1993. We hope that President Wasmosy can visit Britain later this year.

European Union (Enlargement)

32. **Mr. Cann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding progress towards European Union enlargement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Significant progress has been made towards the enlargement of the European Community and we look forward to the early accession of the four EFTA applicants. We remain committed to the target date for accession of 1 January 1995.

Bosnia

33. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what agreements have been made with other EC states and the United Nations on policy on the use of air strikes to protect *(a)* Bosnian Muslims and *(b)* humanitarian aid.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At the NATO summit on 10-11 January, allies reaffirmed their readiness, in accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions, to carry out air strikes to prevent the strangulation of Sarajevo and other threatened areas. NATO is also prepared to use air power, if requested, in support of UNPROFOR operations, including the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Soviet Republics

34. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the current conflicts within certain of the republics of the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are concerned at the growing human toll and humanitarian problems resulting from the conflicts in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Tajikistan. We continue to work for resolutions through the international bodies involved, notably the CSCE and the UN.

Sudan

35. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will initiate a debate on Sudan in the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no plans to do so at this stage. We have to be sure that recourse to the Security Council would achieve the right outcome.

Hong Kong

37. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current position of negotiations with China over the future of Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: We seek co-operation with China for a smooth transition in Hong Kong. On arrangements for the 1994 and 1995 elections, despite 17 rounds of talks, we have so far been unable to reach agreement. It was necessary for the Governor to begin the legislative process on the more urgent issues in December. We wish to continue discussion with China on the remaining electoral issues in the time available. We will also continue to seek rapid solutions, through the joint liaison group, to the many other outstanding issues related to the transition, not least those concerning Hong Kong's new airport.

Yugoslavia

38. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had recently to encourage the peace process in former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 27 January my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Lord Owen in London. On 31 January he met the United Nations Secretary-General and the Canadian Foreign Minister in New York and on 1 February he met the American Secretary of State in Washington. Next week he shall meet his European Union counterparts in Brussels.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what physical assistance has been offered to the United Nations commission of inquiry into alleged war crimes in former Yugoslavia to excavate alleged mass burial sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom has offered no physical assistance to the excavation of alleged mass graves. Instead the United Kingdom has concentrated its efforts on the collation of substantiated evidence on war crimes by the MOD's defence debriefing team. Three batches of evidence have so far been submitted to the United Nations commission of experts.

Land Mines

39. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what international agreements cover the provision of assistance for clearing land mines.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Article 9 of protocol II to the 1981 UN weaponry convention provides that at the end of a conflict "the parties shall endeavour to reach agreement, both among themselves and, where appropriate, with other States and with international organizations"

on assistance to remove or render ineffective minefields and mines.

Latin America

40. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to boost trade links with Latin America.

Mr. Goodlad: All Foreign and Commonwealth Office posts in Latin America have export promotion as a top priority. They seek out export opportunities, advise British companies on the business to be won in their markets, lobby on their behalf for major contracts and against discrimination, organise visits by trade missions and Ministers with the specific object of winning business amongst other tasks. I am happy to say that our exports to Latin America have increased by 26 per cent. over the past 12 months.

Somalia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the cost of the military operation in Somalia in 1993.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The total cost to the United Nations of UNOSOM in 1993 was $487,363,740. The United Kingdom pays 6·373 per cent. of peacekeeping costs on the United Nations scale of assessment. The United Kingdom contribution to UNOSOM in 1993 was therefore $30,982,123.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. Goodlad: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointments.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Goodlad: The DSS has reimbursed the following amounts to the FCO and the ODA in respect of statutory sick pay provision over the past three financial years:

Financial year	*FCO* £	*ODA* £
1991-92	142,550·24	41,683·55
1992-93	167,586·00	50,137·02
[1]1993-94	111,067·08	36,655·78

[1] April to December 1993.

Liberia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal provisions govern the British Government in contributing to the ECOMOG initiative in Liberia and other regional peace-keeping troops.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom made a $1 million contribution to the United Nations trust fund for Liberia, and this contribution was restricted to humanitarian relief purposes. It is a long-standing policy of successive Administrations that overseas aid is not used for defence purposes.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made to the United Kingdom's relations with Liberia following the passage of Security Council resolution 788.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have given strong support in the United Nations Security Council to the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, to bring about a ceasefire in Liberia. We look forward to the establishment of a Liberian national transitional government.

Nigeria

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent changes have been made to United Kingdom sanctions against the military Government of Nigeria.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the written reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 2 December 1993, at column *680.*

North Atlantic Assembly

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will replace the Earl of Kimberley as a Lords member of the United Kingdom delegation to the North Atlantic Assembly.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My noble Friend Lord Lyell has been approached and has indicated that he would be content to do so.

TRANSPORT

Market Testing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 15 December, *Official Report,* column *709,* if consultants from the firm Touche Ross have talked to any vehicle registration office staff as part of the advice of the agency on its overall marketing testing strategy.

Mr. Key: In advising DVLA on its market testing strategy Touche Ross consultants interviewed the senior management of the vehicle registration offices.

M1

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the contractors to complete their current work around junction 9 on the M1; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The contractors expect the work to widen the M1 between junctions 9 and 10 to be substantially complete by the middle of February, but this date could be affected by adverse weather conditions. Minor operations will continue beyond then but should not cause delays to traffic.

Road-widening Schemes

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all proposed road-widening schemes in England with the year when he expects the work to begin and be completed together with the estimated cost of each scheme.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend will announce, in the near future, the national road schemes on which works are planned to start in 1994-95, and the results of the current review of road programme priorities.

A6(M)

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest cost of the A6(M) Stockport north-south bypass.

Mr. Key: The estimated cost of the published proposals for A6(M) Stockport north-south bypass is £113 million.

Rail Regulator

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the rail regulator's statutory powers under the Railways Act 1993 come into force.

Mr. Freeman: Section 1 of and schedule 1 to the Railways Act 1993, which provide for the appointment of the Rail Regulator and for remuneration, staff and other procedural matters arising from his appointment, came into force on the passing of the Act on 5 November 1993. The remaining statutory powers of the regulator are expected to come into force at the beginning of April 1994 when the main provisions of the Railways Act are due to be commenced.

Trunk Roads (Underbridges)

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *600*, if he will list each of the three underbridges on motorways and the 65 underbridges on all-purpose trunk roads.

Mr. Key: The list is as follows:

Motorways

Road	*Bridge name*
M4	Cutbridge No. 2
M54	Queensway
M621 (S)	South Leeds I/C 13 Railway

All Purpose Trunk Roads

Road	*Bridge name*	*Road*	*Bridge name*
A1	Ease Drain extension	A11	Bourne
A11	Barton Mills five ways	A140	Thwaite
A16	Lucks	A16	Surfleet
A16	Kelsey	A17	Beckingham
A31	Malwood farm CC South		
A33	Itchen No. 1	A33	Compton flyover north
A34	Strongford O/A widening	A4	Henley branch railway
A4	Loddon (Tyford)	A4	Old river (north)
A40	Wilton east bound extension	A41	Stone
A41	Heath	A41	Nell railway
A41	Greenfield lock canal	A417	Abbey way
A423	Henley	A423	Kidlington Canal
A423	Duchess	A446	Railway flood No. 17A
A45	Sowe	A465	Wormbridge
A47	Constitution hill	A483	Llynclys
A49	Wayford	A49	Beeston canal
A5	Caves Inn N/B extension	A5	Montford
A50	Dove flood culvert No. 3	A500	Hough railway
A51	Wardle canal	A51	Henhull canal
A556	Heyeswood railway main line	A556	Allens west
A556	Nether Tabley	A57	Tom Otter's
A590	Yarl (Orig M/Arch)	A595	Loop road No. 1
A596	Micklethwaite 2	A596	Micklethwaite 3
A6	Leicester road railway	A6	Clophill
A61	A61 interchange west	A61	A61 interchange east
A61	Alfreton brook (M/Arch)	A61	Sowell A railway
A629	Eastburn works (M/Arch)	A269	Mill Ing
A630	Railway bridge No. 71	A638	Rossington south
A638	Rossington north	A646	Hepton new
A646	Luddenden foot extension	A646	Mytholmyroyd canal
A65	Townend Hellifield	A65	Coniston Aire
A650	Hard Ings road	A66	Eden
A696	Ponteland	A7	Longtown

Principal Roads (Maintenance)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been allocated by his Department to each local highway authority in transport supplementary grant and credit approvals for the maintenance of principal roads of more than local importance in each year since 1989.

Mr. Key: Transport supplementary grant and credit approvals were first allocated for structural maintenance of principal roads forming part of the primary route network in 1992-93. This was extended to cover all principal roads in 1993-94. The figures are:

Structural maintenance—accepted expenditure in £k

Authority	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*
City of London	0	0	0
Barking and Dagenham	0	867	399
Barnet	0	140	175
Bexley	0	847	1,103
Brent	0	287	828
Bromley	212	420	432
Camden	1,617	1,566	1,139
Croydon	0	1,480	1,144
Ealing	0	285	386
Enfield	0	270	309
Greenwich	379	510	477
Hackney	185	385	600
Hammersmith and Fulham	0	420	761
Haringey	255	1,270	1,012
Harrow	0	0	318
Havering	0	90	69
Hillingdon	0	170	278
Hounslow	0	215	414
Islington	900	730	935
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0	142
Kingston upon Thames	820	563	472
Lambeth	145	255	537
Lewisham	100	50	231
Merton	250	140	189
Newham	30	140	204

Authority	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*
Redbridge	0	765	535
Richmond upon Thames	41	111	200
Southwark	0	0	381
Sutton	150	170	180
Tower Hamlets	1,847	6,995	3,440
Waltham Forest	170	415	251
Wandsworth	275	503	664
Westminster	570	480	336
Bolton	550	1,015	722
Bury	300	630	688
Manchester	779	1,330	1,363
Oldham	200	775	779
Rochdale	500	315	686
Salford	970	940	964
Stockport	222	350	955
Tameside	431	1,285	938
Trafford	140	290	251
Wigan	435	370	536
Knowsley	456	860	953
Liverpool	1,400	1,500	2,200
St. Helens	95	160	142
Sefton	378	550	185
Wirral	190	360	259
Barnsley	536	565	750
Doncaster	1,445	1,421	1,129
Rotherham	219	522	478
Sheffield	1,000	2,711	2,773
Gateshead	185	275	300
Newcastle upon Tyne	541	736	1,300
North Tyneside	200	840	650
South Tyneside	93	385	560
Sunderland	1,044	2,006	1,482
Birmingham	2,000	4,392	3,196
Coventry	854	825	406
Dudley	670	1,400	1,256
Sandwell	1,555	1,740	1,644
Solihull	125	120	151
Walsall	110	770	755
Wolverhampton	460	880	791
Bradford	1,000	2,100	1,454
Calderdale	352	1,277	2,262
Kirklees	1,795	3,510	2,609
Leeds	1,000	6,086	3,271
Wakefield	827	1,686	1,300
Avon	2,530	2,470	1,660
Bedfordshire	777	1,210	1,041
Berkshire	1,370	2,150	1,346
Buckinghamshire	1,350	2,190	1,412
Cambridgeshire	1,410	2,555	1,801
Cheshire	4,480	7,520	5,429
Cleveland	856	1,940	1,715
Cornwall	1,490	2,340	2,008
Cumbria	1,916	2,100	1,426
Derbyshire	1,592	1,810	1,394
Devon	2,570	4,040	3,893
Dorset	400	1,295	926
Durham	1,106	1,255	1,252
East Sussex	890	1,963	1,913
Essex	1,652	2,588	2,949
Gloucestershire	1,054	1,500	1,409
Hampshire	1,200	4,985	4,183
Hereford and Worcester	1,332	2,030	1,744
Hertfordshire	500	2,870	1,954
Humberside	2,342	3,856	3,035
Isle of Wight	0	600	594
Kent	4,340	7,879	7,273
Lancashire	2,004	2,160	3,381
Leicestershire	2,240	1,915	2,011
Lincolnshire	1,360	2,027	2,146
Norfolk	2,616	3,542	2,730
Northamptonshire	3,431	3,800	2,076
Northumberland	1,007	2,210	1,998
North Yorkshire	2,332	4,575	3,752
Nottinghamshire	1,733	3,530	2,990
Oxfordshire	1,789	1,833	1,791
Shropshire	1,109	1,750	1,680
Somerset	710	1,733	1,390
Staffordshire	4,000	5,420	4,323
Suffolk	2,411	3,050	3,075
Surrey	443	2,712	3,484
Warwickshire	560	1,050	1,710
West Sussex	1,375	1,738	1,859
Wiltshire	0	1,292	1,348

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. MacGregor: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointments.

Citizens Charter

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the amount of money paid to the travelling public by British Rail under the terms of the citizens charter.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail launched the passengers charter in March 1992. I understand that between April 1992 and November 1993 it paid £4·4 million in compensation to passengers under the terms of the charter.

Highway Works (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the amount of money for contract administration and monitoring that will be added to client costs under the proposed full competition for local authority highway works in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I expect that any additional costs incurred by local authorities will, on average, be more than recouped by the efficiency and financial benefits gained.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the details of the special arrangements for emergency work referred to in the announcement of the introduction of full competition for local authority highway works in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I am consulting the local authority associations on a proposal that emergency works should continue to remain exempt from competition requirements. This would give local authorities maximum flexibility in responding to unpredictable situations.

Drivers (Training)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether training of drivers undertaken under the Road Traffic (Carriage of Dangerous Substances, Packets etc.) Regulation 1986 will be accepted under the Road Traffic (Training of Drivers of Vehicles Carrying Dangerous Goods) Regulations 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Drivers of vehicles over 3·5 tonnes gross weight carrying dangerous goods in packages must undertake approved training and hold a vocational training certificate from 1 January 1995, as required by EC directive 684/89. The training requirements have been well publicised and were introduced after full consultation.

The 1992 regulations allowed a two-and-a-half year transitional period until the end of 1994 for drivers of vehicles carrying dangerous goods in packages to obtain a certificate.

Traffic Cones Hotline

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total cost of the traffic cones hotline to date; and what is the precise purpose of the hotline.

Mr. Key: Separate costs of the cones hotline are not available since they have been met from the existing running costs budget. No staff have been employed exclusively on hotline activity.

The purpose of the hotline is to enable road users to complain to the Department if they see parts of the trunk road and motorway network which appear to have been coned off unnecessarily. The complaint is then followed up within the Department.

In most cases there will be a good reason, although not necessarily an obvious one, for the cones to be in place, and the Department undertakes on request to provide a written explanation of what it is. If there is no good reason, the Department undertakes to get the cones removed.

Motorways

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has commissioned into high speed electronic debiting for urban motorways.

Mr. Key: We are currently putting in hand a programme of research and trials to develop an electronic charging system suitable for use on the British motorway network. We shall shortly be inviting industry to submit proposals and equipment for study and assessment.

Design, Build, Finance Unit

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the design, build, finance unit to commence work; and if he will give details of staffing appointments.

Mr. Key: A reorganisation of the Department's staff has established a small unit to develop design, build, finance and operate contracts. This will put into effect the policy announced by the Secretary of State on 2 December, in response to the results of the consultation paper "Paying for Better Motorways". The units' staffing is building up as the workload increases.

Projects and Contracts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table setting out each contract or project for which his Department is currently inviting bids from *(a)* financial, *(b)* political or *(c)* other consultants, the nature of each contract or project and the bidding time scale for each project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 19 January 1994]:* The information is as follows:

Consultancy contracts or projects for which bids are currently invited

Nature of contract or project	*Bidding timescale (Tender return date)*
(a) Financial consultants	
Insurance advice consultancy	13 December 1993
Channel tunnel rail link: Reporting accountants	4 January 1994
Review of DVOIT Ltd. balance sheet	13 January 1994
Study into DBFO contracts	February 1994
(b) Political consultants	
(c) Other consultants	
Channel tunnel rail link; technical advisers	8 December 1993
The effective sealing of cracks and fissures in pavements	15 December 1993
National roads network assessment system: Software program	4 November 1993
Specialist consultancy support for MSSD	15 October 1993
Coastguard magazine	12 November 1993
DOT newspaper	12 November 1993
Appointment of a consultant to update and survey the network using DOT's high speed road monitor	21 December 1993
Design and supervision of the installation of new national motorway communications system (M1 J24 to J30)	27 January 1993
South London trunk roads: Maintenace and improvement	9 December 1993
River Thames working group—Analysis of transport potential of the River Thames	10 February 1994
Arbitration on user charges at United States airports	10 January 1994
Accident/Incident database	6 January 1994
1991 LATS database appointment of marketing agents	14 January 1994
Recruitment of a property consultant	4 January 1994
Trial audit of free issue equipment	4 January 1994
Investigation into the integrity of transmission stations	February 1994
Investigation into alternative methods of connecting police control offices to the motorway transmission system	February 1994
Market research into the accuracy of the DVLA database	Early February 1994
PACT (Pilot actions for combined transport) study	7 February 1994
Site supervision of installation of new communications equipment (M1 J38 to J42)	17 January 1994
Assignment based technology for modelling within congested areas	20 January 1994
Monitoring of bus priorities	28 January 1994
Exhaust emission testing	21 January 1994
Advice on surveys on use of accessible buses	24 January 1994
Monitor and survey of lighting on trunk roads in London	not available
West London trunk roads: Maintenance and improvement	not available
Birmingham northern relief road: Financial and technical resolution panel	not available

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table setting out each separate contract or project awarded to *(a)* financial, *(b)* political or *(c)* other consultants by his Department in connection with any schemes or proposals for inclusion in the private finance initiative or joint public/private funding, the dates on which each contract or project was commissioned by his Department, the successful company or individual awarded the contract or project and the total amount paid to each company or consultant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 19 January 1994]:* The information is as follows:

Private finance initiative and joint public/private funding contracts and projects

Contract let date	*Project*	*Company*	*Value (£ thousands)*
(a) Financial Consultants			
1986	Dartford-Thurrock Crossing: Assessment of Proposals	J. Henry Schroder Wagg	Not available
13 November 1989	Birmingham Northern Relief Road: Assessment of Proposals and Financial Advice on Concessions Agreement	Coopers & Lybrand	1,374
5 August 1991	Birmingham Western Orbital Route: Assessment of Proposals	West Merchant Bank	276
26 April 1992	Second Severn Crossing: Financial and Technical Disputes Resolution Panel	12 individuals	98
28 January 1992	Independent Review of Union Railways' work on CTRL	Samuel Montagu & Co. Ltd.	223
27 May 1992	Channel Tunnel Rail Link	Samuel Montague	342
27 May 1992	Birmingham Northern Relief Road: Financial Advisers	Coopers Lybrand Deloitte	300
8 August 1993	Project Structure and Competition to appoint private sector participant in CTRL	Hill Samuel Bank	366
(b) Political Consultants			
—	—	—	—
(c) Other Consultants			
16 August 1984 and 17 September 1991	Second Severn Crossing: Development of Requirements, Assessment of Proposals and Government Agent	G. Maunsell & Partners W. S. Atkins	3,624
9 July 1987	Dartford-Thurrock Crossing: Engineering	Mott MacDonald	2,130
13 April 1989	Second Severn Crossing: Drafting of the Concession Agreement	McKenna & Co.	504
10 October 1989	Birmingham Northern Relief Road: Development of Proposals	Sir Owen Williams & Partners	2,199
1990	Birmingham-Manchester Corridor	Sir Owen Williams & Partners	13
19 December 1990	Birmingham Northern Relief Road: Drafting of Concessions Agreement	McKenna & Co.	890
May 1990	Dartford-Thurrock Crossing: Communications and Signals	Mott MacDonald	306
14 August 1991	Severn Crossing: Government Representative for existing bridge	Flint & Neill Partnership	1,190
29 November 1991	New Tamar Crossing: Route identification study	W. S. Atkins	414
August 1991	Mersey Crossing: Route identification study	Oscar Faber TPA	202
June 1991	Birmingham Western Orbital Route: Advice on traffic capacity	Oscar Faber TPA	25
October 1991	Birmingham Western Orbital Route: Development of Proposals	Rendell Palmer Tritton	41
14 May 1992	Lower Thames Crossing: Feasibility Study	Consortium led by G. Maunsell & Partners	785
22 June 1992	Independent Review of Union Railway's work on CTRL: Engineering advice	W. S. Atkins	166
22 June 1992	Channel Tunnel Rail Link; Appointment of Engineering Consultants to Assist Financial Advisers	W. S. Atkins Planning Consultants	90
23 November 1992	Channel Tunnel Risk Assessment Study	Electrowatt Engineering Services Ltd.	Phase 1 = 15 Phase 2 = 550
17 December 1992	Legal advice on competition for private sector partner in CTRL	McKenna & Co.	Not available
15 December 1993	Channel Tunnel Rail Link; Appointment of Engineering Consultants to Assist Financial Advisers (Extn)	W. S. Atkins Planning Consultants	12
27 January 1993	Channel Tunnel Rail Link; Independent Review	W. S. Atkins Planning Consultants	15

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr.Norris *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* Employees convicted of fraud are subject to the Department's disciplinary procedures and are liable to dismissal.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The figures for 1989 are not immediately available.

Since 1990, two employees were judged guilty of fraud in the Department: one in 1992 and one in 1993. On both occasions the individual concerned was dismissed.

In addition, in application of departmental policy, two employees who had been convicted of fraud outside the Department were also dismissed, one in 1991 and one in 1992.

Traffic Cones (Security)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what publicly funded research has taken place into the provision of transparent traffic cones in those situations where security is an important consideration.

Mr. Howard: I have been asked to reply.

Proposals for enhancing public security are always considered with care. In this case the proposal from one of my hon. Friend's constituents for the development of a transparent traffic cone was referred to the Metropolitan police anti-terrorist branch and the police scientific development branch. The police have concluded that transparent cones are unlikely to be of significant security benefit in Great Britain. Publicly funded research on possible designs, and in particular on whether a transparent cone could be produced which conformed to BS standard 873, has not therefore been carried out.

London Stansted Airport

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that airlines should be given specific opportunities to operate from London Stansted airport to the United States of America as part of a new air service bilateral agreement.

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom has already offered the immediate removal of all restrictions on United States and United Kingdom carriers' access to Stansted as part of a proposal made last December for a liberalised United Kingdom/United States air services agreement.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which American airlines have been refused licences to operate from London Stansted airport since 1990 under the transatlantic air travel bilateral restrictions.

Mr. Norris: Several US airlines have expressed interest over this period. Most recently, last June, we turned down a request from TWA for a unilaterial concession. We were disappointed that the United States were not prepared to accept an offer we made at that time which would have allowed this service to go ahead.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent the demand for transatlantic services fromn London Stansted airport has been represented at the negotiations on the air travel bilateral restrictions to date.

Mr. Norris: The Airport Operators Association, of which BAA plc is a member, attends the UOIK/US liberalisation negotiations as part of the United Kingdom's delegation team.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received to date in favour of freeing London Stansted airport from the transatlantic air travel bilaterial restrictions.

Mr. Norris: My officials and I have received a variety of written and oral representations in recent months.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the extent to which air travel bilateral restrictions which frustrate the demand for transatlantic services from London Stansted airport.

Mr. Norris: The UK/US air services bilateral arrangements allow any of the six US carriers currently serving London to operate some or all of their services from Stansted if whey wish to do so. I assess carefully the implications of requests from US carriers for further rights to serve Stansted as they arise.

Microlight Aircraft

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what progress is being made in discussions with the French authorities to raise the overall weight limits of microlight aircraft from 390 kilograms to 450 kg; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what progress is being made towards establishing a European standard to define a microlight aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Responsibility for the safety regulation of civil aviation, including microlights, within the United Kingdom, rests with the Civil Aviation Authority. The Authority also participates fully in discussions, with other national aviation authorities, aimed at developing harmonised aviation requirements. I will therefore ask the chairman of the Authority to write to the hon. Member in response to his questions.

Waste Dumping

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with local government organisations the changes required in International Maritime Organisation regulations following the incident on 30 December 1993 involving the MT Stort Kestrel, to prevent the dumping of noxious substances and other waste by shipping.

Mr. Norris: My Department is indeed prepared to enter into discussion with local government organisations on the International Maritime Organisation's regulations on the discharge of noxious liquids.

Tax Concessions (Germany)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to assist the competitive position of the British shipping industry following the German Government's decision to extend tax concessions for investors in shipping companies.

Mr. Norris: A number of non-fiscal measures have been introduced or are proposed, including those announced on 15 December by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, *Hansard*, column 698-99. Issues of fiscal policy are primarily for my right hon. and learned friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Plutonium Nitrate (Transport)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he has under consideration relating to the transportation of plutonium nitrate.

Mr. Norris: My Department is preparing to implement the code for the safe carriage of irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium and high-level radioactive wastes in flasks on board ships, which was agreed by the assembly of the International Maritime Organisation in November 1993.

MV Iran-Sokan

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions since 1985 the cargo ship MV Iran-Sokan has docked at ports in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norris: The available information indicates that the Iran-Sokan was in port in London in June 1987 and March 1988, and in Immingham in June 1993.

A38

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the A38 trunk road between Exeter and Plymouth meets the necessary criteria to be designated as an A(M) road; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Roads with A(M) and M designations are built to broadly similar engineering standards and are subject to the same legal requirements. The A38 between Exeter and Plymouth does not presently meet the necessary criteria for such roads. However, as my hon. Friend is aware, a study of the future needs of this important but environmentally sensitive route is being carried out as quickly as possible.

Marine Pollution

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he was first notified of the recent marine diesel fuel pollution incident off the coasts of Scotland and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what actions he has taken, and on what dates, to clear up the marine diesel fuel pollutants recently discovered off the coasts of Scotland and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will give full details of the extent of marine diesel pollution in the last 10 days off the coast of Northern Ireland and Scotland; and which parts of the United Kingdom have been affected;

(4) if he will instigate an urgent marine accident investigation branch and marine pollution unit investigation into the circumstances causing marine diesel pollution off the coast of Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Norris *[holding answers 1 February 1994]:* The Department's Marine Pollution Control Unit was first informed of pollution on the east coast of Northern Ireland on 10 January 1994. Oiled birds were reported coming ashore on the east coast of Northern Ireland from Newcastle, Co. Down to Glenarm, Co. Antrim. Small patches of beached oil were reported, but not in significant quantities. Two days later on 12 January scattered pancakes of oil were found on the shoreline from Ballywater in the North to Ballyquintin point in the South with the heaviest depositions at Portavogie. Clean-up action was carried out by the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) on 10 and 11 January. MPCU requested beach samples to be sent to the laboratory of the Government chemist for analysis—the results are still awaited. On 12 and 17 January aerial reconnaissance by MPCU did not reveal any floating oil at sea.

Pollution incidents on the coasts of Strathclyde—Ballentrae and Turnberry—Dumfries and Galloway, Port Patrick, were reported to the MPCU between 14 and 17 January. In the Strathclyde region, isolated globules of oil were found on a 6·75 mile stretch of beach south of Ballentrae, and small amounts of oil have also been found on rocks at Turnberry point. In Dumfries and Galloway, oil described as liquid oil clinging to seaweed was found on the beach at Port Mara and Port Kale, near Port Patrick. Clean-up action was carried out by Kyle and Carrick district council over this period, and it was requested to send beach samples to the LGC for analysis. The results are not yet known. MPCU's aerial surveillance aircraft flew over the area on 12, 17, 22 and 24 January, but no floating oil at sea was detected.

There is no evidence to suggest that this pollution originated from a recent marine accident. Neither the Marine Accident Investigation Branch nor the Marine Pollution Control Unit is aware of any incident in the vacinity of the affected areas to which the pollution could be attributed. In the circumstances, there is nothing for the MAIB to investigate. The direction of any further action by the MPCU will depend on the outcome of the analysis of beach samples by the LGC.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

European Regional Assistance

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether all parts of Birmingham will remain eligible for European regional development fund.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) on 28 January, *Official Report*, column *409*.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total budget awarded under the European regional development fund to the Commission initiatives of *(a)* ENVIREG, *(b)* INTERREG, *(c)* PRISMA, *(d)* RECHAR, *(e)* RESIDER, *(f)* REGEN, *(g)* REGIS, *(h)* RENAVAL, *(i)* STAR, *(j)* STRIDE, *(k)* TELEMATICS, and *(l)* VALOREN in each year since their establishment; and what was the total budget of each awarded to (i) the northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Sainsbury: European regional development fund allocations to Community initiatives are shown in the table. Allocations by year are not available. For several of the initiatives, in the United Kingdom only Northern Ireland has been eligible.

ERDF allocations to community initiatives
1993 prices

Million ecu

	Total EC	*Total UK*	*Northern Region*
(a) ENVIREG[4]	547	18	—
(b) INTERREG	[1]960	[3]—	[3]—
(c) PRISMA[4]	120	6	—
(d) RECHAR	325	158	26
(e) RESIDER	131	5	0
(f) REGEN	384	0	0
(g) REGIS	207	0	0
(h) RENAVAL	[1]—	71	41

	Total EC	Total UK	Northern Region
(i) STAR	933	14	0
(j) STRIDE	402	29	2
(k) TELEMATIQUE[4]	215	5	0
(l) VALOREN	472	6	0

[1] Represents total allocations under European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, and guidance section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. Allocations by fund not readily available.

[2] Information on total EC allocations not readily available.

[3] Allocations not made to individual Member States.

[4] Only Northern Ireland eligible in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total budget awarded to the EC's European regional development fund, in each year since its establishment; and what proportion of this was granted to (i) the northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Sainsbury: European regional development fund allocations in each of the years 1975 to 1993 are shown in the table:

ERDF ALLOCATIONS

Million ecu, current prices

	Total EC	Total UK	Northern Region
1975	250	86	17
1976	388	142	45
1977	386	146	46
1978	561	151	28
1979	962	260	41
1980	1,138	243	41
1981	1,637	361	69
1982	1,845	449	105
1983	2,127	458	57
1984	2,383	621	65
1985	2,495	585	43
1986	3,328	513	58
1987	3,662	628	89
1988	3,827	563	105
1989	4,666	511	84
1990	5,227	462	11
1991	7,175	586	55
1992	8,901	655	98
1993	10,407	893	65

Regional Enterprise Grants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of regional enterprise grants, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Mr. Sainsbury: Expenditure on the administration of regional enterprise grants in England in 1992-93, the first year for which figures have been published, totalled around £1 million. Publicity costs, which included printing, advertising and stationery costs, totalled £3,400 for the same year. Comparable figures for the years since the scheme began in 1988 are not available.

English Estates

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will itemise the expenditure on the administration of English Estates, including printing, advertising and stationery costs as well as worker expenses *(a)* over the last year and *(b)* since the scheme was developed.

Mr. Sainsbury: English Estates is a body which has been in existence in various form since 1936. Its activities have developed over that period. Figures going back to 1936 are not available. Forecast running costs for 1993-94 are as follows:

	£ million
Maintenance of premises and sites	4·4
Personnel costs	8·2
Office Expenses	2·0
Professional fees and charges	3·9
Research and development	0·4
Advertising and marketing	2·3

Note: Figures include the cost of activities carried out on behalf of the Rural Development Commission.

Manufacturing Programme

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what sum of money has been allocated for the manufacturing, planning and implementation studies programmes for 1993-94; what proportion thereof had been allocated as at 31 December; and how many (i) successful, (ii) unsuccessful and (iii) pending applications there have been for assistance under the programme.

Mr. McLoughlin: The forecast for the grant payments under the manufacturing planning and implementation studies programme is £3·5 million for 1993-94, of which £2·9 million had been committed on 31 December 1993. Total grant payments for the scheme is £8·75 million.

A total of 312 applications were received by the closing date, 31 May 1993. A total of 120 cases were successful and have been awarded grant status; a further 28 applications are pending. Fifty-nine applications were unsuccessful; the remainder chose not to pursue their applications.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what sum of money has been allocated for publicity and promotion of the manufacturing, planning and implementation studies programmes for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. McLoughlin: The manufacturing planning and implementation studies programme was launched in February 1991. The spend profile for promotion is as follows:

	£
February 1991 to March 1992	75,000
April 1992 to May 1993	52,793

This gives a total of £127,793 for the promotion of the programme. Since the closure of the scheme to new applications on 31 May 1993 there has been no further promotion spend.

Chief Scientist

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the change in his Department's post of chief scientist.

Mr. Heseltine: Over the last 18 months I have redefined the Department's science and technology policies to relate more closely to my overall focus on competitiveness and to the Government White Paper on Science and Technology. In recognition of this, elements of the recently announced organisational change in my Department involve the integration of delivery of these policies with the sectoral and regional organisation for the support of industry.

One result of this reorganisation, which will take effect on 1 March 1994, is that the rationale for the post of chief adviser on science and technology in its present form no longer applies. Therefore a successor to the current holder, Dr Geoffrey Robinson, will not be appointed when Dr Robinson returns to the private sector at the beginning of March. Dr David Evans—formerly chief scientist at the Department of Energy—has been appointed head of the technology and innovation policy division, and will have overall responsibility for the Department's science and technology policies and programmes.

Cornwall (Government Expenditure)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much central Government money was spent on developing and supporting *(a)* manufacturing industries and *(b)* businesses in general in Cornwall in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is not possible to provide a fully comprehensive answer without a disproportionate cost. The figures account for moneys paid to Cornish Enterprises under the regional development grant II, regional selective assistance and regional enterprise grant schemes, which have been the major source of grant over the period in question.

Financial year	*Manufacturing total*	*Service total*	*Total*
1979	1,112,767	—	1,112,767
1980	1,450,468	—	1,450,468
1981	1,384,159	—	1,384,159
1982	887,701	—	887,701
1983	521,376	—	521,376
1984	561,718	—	561,718
1985	1,464,826	330,000	1,794,826
1986	3,703,031	735,892	4,438,923
1987	4,900,029	867,014	5,767,043
1988	7,017,236	728,182	7,745,418
1989	5,623,299	461,929	6,085,228
1990	2,366,027	367,705	2,733,732
1991	2,032,525	1,037,275	3,069,800
1992	2,193,816	646,372	2,840,188
1993	3,122,380	641,736	3,764,116
Total	27,106,973	5,816,105	32,923,078

Export Control Regulations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies or individual exporters have contacted his Department's export control organisation regarding the application of export control regulations since the guidance at page 84 of his Overseas Trade Board's plan was published.

Mr. Needham: The British Overseas Trade Board's annual report for 1992-93 and forward plan was published on 9 June 1993. From that date to 27 January 1994 my Export Control Organisation's inquiry unit received just over 25,000 telephone calls and fax messages about a wide range of export control matters.

Arms Exports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will now list those countries which receive United Kingdom aid to which arms have been exported in each of the last 14 years.

Mr. Needham: In recent years about 140 countries have been recipients of the United Kingdom's bilateral aid. To examine any correlation between each of those countries and the issue of export licences for arms for each of the past 14 years could be undertaken only at disproportionate expense.

Matrix Churchill

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what communications he has had with the United States Secretary of Commerce in regard to the trading links between Matrix-Churchill Corporation of Cleveland, Ohio and the United Kingdom Matrix Churchill company.

Mr. Needham: None.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Eggar: The sums reimbursed were as follows:

	£000
[1]1993-94	204
1992-93	281

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[1] To end December.

Figures for earlier years are not available.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notification to, and consultation with, the Chief Whip's Office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. Eggar: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointment.

Regional Policy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Baord of Trade what further changes he is planning in regional policy since his answer of 23 June 1993, *Official Report*, column 227.

Mr. Sainsbury: Regional policy is kept under continual review. Since June 1993 there have been several changes to our regional policy. The new assisted areas map was announced on 23 July 1993. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 4 November 1993 plans to introduce a single regeneration budget and integrated regional offices from April 1994. Details of the European Commission's decisions about objective 2 and 5b areas under the structural funds were announced recently.

Electronic Mail

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to issue departmental press releases by electronic mail.

Mr. Eggar: My Department's press releases, in common with those of other Government Departments, are already released electronically through the Central Office of Information's electronic news distribution system.

Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations his Department has received relating to the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation; and what consideration he has given to them in deciding on the future of British Coal.

Mr. Eggar: The Department has received some 50 representations about the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation. I and my officials are in touch with British Coal and CISWO about the future provision of welfare services.

Competitiveness

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the sectors of industry and services that have been reviewed by his competitiveness unit.

Mr. Sainsbury: The competitiveness division is concerned with the overall competitiveness of all parts of manufacturing and services. The DTI's 15 sector divisions have each been considering the competitiveness of their particular sectors.

Spirits (Hungarian Quotas)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has made to the Hungarian Government about the restrictive quotas applied to Scotch whisky and other imported spirits.

Mr. Needham: My Department has a close working relationship with the scotch whisky industry both through the Scotch Whisky Association and through many individual producers. Some of the larger companies have offices in Budapest and are well known to British embassy officials.

Through this network we have been aware of the difficulties which importers of spirits face in this market for some considerable time, and have raised these when appropriate with Hungarian counterparts. We have also been active in giving support to the industry's representations to the Hungarian Administration. In some areas—for example, labelling—progress has been made.

The Hungarian quota system for imported spirits remains a concern and one which has been exacerbated by the announcement of what appear to be even more restrictive terms for the current year. We are now considering what might be done, balancing the needs of the industry with our experience of the Hungarian market as one in which insensitive lobbying can be counter-productive.

Export Credit Guarantees Department

Mrs. Browning: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has completed the review of ECGD arrangements for allocating claims recoveries to exporters.

Mr. Heseltine: As a result of a review of its IT systems, it became clear that ECGD was applying different interpretations of similar terms in different guarantees when allocating recoveries to its policyholders. The Cardiff office, which handled short-term guarantees, interpreted ECGD's legal rights differently in a particular respect from the London office which handles medium and long term guarantees, the Cardiff interpretation being in certain cases more generous to the exporter than the London interpretation. When this emerged ECGD at once put a hold on the further allocation of certain categories of recovery and sought legal advice on what has proved to tbe an exceedingly complex matter.

I have now received considered legal advice on all aspects of this matter. It is now clear how the relevant provisions of the guarantee should be interpreted and all future recoveries, including those currently held by ECGD, will be allocated between the exporter and ECGD in accordance with the London interpretation. This will mean that some policyholders will receive a lower share of recoveries than they had in the past. The hold on payments to its customers which ECGD has imposed while the review has been in progress will now be ended.

ECGD has estimated that the amounts which it has paid to policyholders since 1975 which are in excess of what is now considered to be the correct legal entitlement could total up to £83 million.

Given the complexity of this issue and the difficulty and cost of establishing the case of recovering these excess payments from a large number of exporters the Government have decided not to pursue their legal right to seek restitution of these excess payments. I believe that this represents a realistic balance between the interests of the taxpayer and of the exporter.

Shipbuilding

Mr. Etherington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the North East Shipbuilders Ltd./British Shipbuilders closure document as agreed between the United Kingdom Government and the EC in 1988;

(2) if he will list the package of aid approved by the EC in December 1988 intended to cover costs associated with the closure of North East Shipbuilders Ltd./British Shipbuilders.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answers 1 February 1994]*: No. It is not the Government's policy to make available the details of agreements entered into with the European Commission where, as in this case, they contain commercially sensitive information.

An aid package worth some £45 million in total was agreed for those affected by the closure. It comprised the following three main elements: first, an enterprise zone for

Sunderland; secondly, English Estates received £7 million for the provision of advance factory space; and, thirdly, some £10 million was made available over three years to Sunderland Enterprise and Training Ltd. and the Wearside Opportunity. This aid finance has been almost entirely taken up.

English Estates

Mr. Hutton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total amount spent by English Estates in providing new factory premises and serviced sites in Barrow and Furness since June 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* English Estates has spent £5·1 million in the Barrow-in-Furness travel-to-work area since June 1991. Of this, some £1 million has been used to assemble sites for the town centre redevelopment and the remainder has gone on the development of 34,500 sq ft of managed workspace to help encourage the formation of new businesses, 33,000 sq ft of workshops/small factories and 46,000 sq ft of large detached factories for both indigenous companies and inward investors.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many acres of serviced industrial land have been provided by English Estates in Barow and Furness since 1991 under the Cumbria special support initiative announced by the Government in June 1991.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* Since Cumbria county council is well advanced with its own site reclamation/servicing programmes, assisted by derelict land grant, English Estates has supported these efforts by acquiring 7·5 acres of serviced land. It has also been working with the county council to identify further locations in the Barrow-in-Furness travel-to-work area where land can be brought forward. Feasibility studies are well advanced on two possible sites involving around 30 acres in total.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to include the consideration of environmental matters such as energy efficiency in the joint OFGAS/DTI consultation paper on the licensing and competition arrangements for independent gas suppliers.

Mr. McLoughlin: *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* I expect the efficient use of gas to be one of the aspects to be considered in the consultation document.

SCOTLAND

Care in the Community

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who is responsible for the loan charges when a council makes a grant to a charitable trust, in order to house people under the care in the community iniatitive; how many grants of this nature have been made by Scottish local authorities since 1983; and what is the total amount of subsidy that has been given.

Mr. Lang: When a local authority incurs a capital debt as a consequence of making a capital grant to a charitable trust in such circumstances, each year the outstanding debt will be included in the calculation of the loan charges element of the annual distribution of aggregate external finance to that authority.

Information is not held centrally on the number of grants made by local authorities of the type identified by the right hon. Member, nor on the amounts involved. It is therefore not possible to estimate the amount of loan charges support which has been given for such grants.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the planned expenditure on care in the community in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each of the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Planned expenditure on community care services is entirely a matter for local authorities to determine.

Public Appointments

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the hon. Members defeated in Scotland in the general election of June 1987; and which of them were subsequently given public appointments.

Mr. Lang: The following hon. Members were defeated in Scotland in the general election of June 1987:

Michael Ancram
John Corrie
Sir Alex Fletcher
Peter Fraser (now Lord Fraser of Carmyllie)
Barry Henderson
Roy Jenkins (now Lord Jenkins of Hillhead)
Michael Hirst (now Sir Michael Hirst)
Anna McCurley
John MacKay (now Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish)
Albert McQuarrie (now Sir Albert McQuarrie)
Gerald Malone
Alexander Pollock
Gordon Wilson

None currently holds appointment on bodies for which my Department has responsibility. The information held centrally by my Department does not show whether defeated Members were appointed to such bodies earlier.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of appointments made by him to Scottish health board trusts; and if will give details of the political party affiliations of those appointed.

Mr. Stewart: So far, my right hon. Friend has appointed 38 chairmen and 165 non-executive directors to NHS trusts. Party political affiliations are not relevant to such appointments and such information is neither sought nor held centrally although in some cases, such as those referred to in the reply to the hon. Member's other question today, a person's political affiliation may be obvious.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the codes of practice governing the making of appointments to public bodies by Ministers.

Mr. Lang: The general procedures for the making of public appointments is contained in the Cabinet Office publication "Guide on Public Appointments Procedures" which is available in the Library of the House.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's Office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. Lang: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointments.

Forestry Commission Land

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all land owned by the Forestry Commission in the Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale constituency; and what plans he has to sell off Forestry Commission land in the Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale constituency under the current disposals programme.

Mr. Lang: The Forestry Commission is preparing a list of all its woodlands in the right hon. Member's constituency, and this will identify those which the Commission is currently selling or planning to sell. I shall send a copy to the right hon. Member and I shall also arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Research Projects

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those research projects *(a)* undertaken internally by his Department and *(b)* commissioned by his Department from external contractors, within the last five years, which have gathered data on the employment status (i) of persons convicted of crime and (ii) of persons given custodial sentences.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following research reports contain data on the employment status of persons convicted of crimes: the first three were in-house projects and the remainder were externally commissioned. Unless otherwise stated, the reports were published by the Scottish Office central research unit.

1. "A Survey of Fine Defaulters in Scottish Courts" published in 1990.
2. "Diversion from Prosecution: Diversion to Social Work" published in 1992.
3. "The Deferred Sentence in Scotland" published in 1992.
4. "Treatment as an Alternative to Prosecution: Diversion to the Douglas Inch Centre" published in 1989.
5. "Sentenced to Serve: The Operation and Impact of Community Service by Offenders" published by Avebury Press in 1992.
6. "Making Amends: Justice for Victims and Offenders: An Evaluation of the SACRO Reparation and Mediation Project", published by Avebury Press in 1992.

A further two research reports contained data on the employment status of those given a custodial sentence. These were "The Prison Survey 1990-91" and "A Survey of the Employment Aspirations and Skill Levels of Offenders in Young Offenders Institutions" published by the Scottish Prison Service, 1992. Both were in-house projects.

Tourist Boards

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will, in his deliberations on the future of Scottish area tourist boards, respect the wishes of both the Edinburgh and the Borders tourist boards in respect of whether or not to have a combined board;

(2) if he will make a statement on the reorganisation of the structure of Scottish area tourist boards.

Mr. Lang: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for tourism in Scotland on 26 January, *Official Report* columns *314-15*.

Student Grants

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the level of Government expenditure on student grants in Scotland in *(a)* higher and *(b)* further education in each academic year since 1990-91; what are the expected levels of expenditure for 1993-94 and 1994-95; and how much was spent per registered student in each of these years;

(2) what amount of Scottish university student fees was paid by Her Majesty's Government in each academic year since 1990-91; what is the expected level of expenditure for 1993-94 and 1994-95; and how much was spent per registered student in each of these years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Awards made under the students' allowances scheme to students in higher education cover maintenance, travel and fees and are available to eligible students attending full-time or sandwich courses provided by institutions, including universities, in the United Kingdom which led to a first degree or comparable qualification, or to a diploma. They are also available for full-time courses of initial teacher training. Similar support for courses in further education is the responsibility of the education authorities.

Departmental records of expenditure and plans relate to financial years. The actual expenditure on maintenance and tuition fees, and the average expenditure per award holder in the financial years 1990-91 to 1992-93 are shown in the table. The table also shows the total announced expenditure for 1993-94 and 1994-95.

	Total expenditure		*Average per student*[1]	
	Fees £ million	*Maintenance £ million*	*Fees £ million*	*Maintenance £ million*
1990-91	39,145	95,189	1,145	1,347
1991-92	74,217	117,268	2.071	1,456
1992-93	86,603	136,471	2,251	1,523
[2]1993-94	[4]218,223	158,243	—	—
[3]1994-95	[4]158,914	158,360	—	—

[1] Average per award holder.

[2] Announced expenditure including winter supplementary estimate.

[3] Planned.

[4] Covers total fees expenditure. It is not possible to distinguish between expenditure on fees to universities and to other institutions.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much funding has been made available to each training and enterprise council in 1992-93 and 1993-94, expressed in cash terms and real terms, and giving a real terms percentage change from the previous year, for *(a)* youth training and credits, *(b)* training for work and the programmes it replaced and *(c)* business start-up allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: There are no training and enterprise councils in Scotland. The funding of local enterprise companies is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have asked the chairmen of these bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what delay there has been in payment of sheep annual premium to Scottish farmers in the last 12 months.

Sir Hector Monro: The processing of claims for payment under the 1993 sheep annual premium scheme has been slower than in previous years because of complexities arising from the introduction of sheep annual premium quotas. Payments began in October 1993 compared to the end of August in the previous year and have continued since then at regular intervals.

Prisons (Drug Abuse)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons have died in prisons as a direct result of the abuse or misuse of *(a)* lawful drugs and *(b)* unlawful drugs in each year since 1978.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the period from 1 January 1978 to 31 December 1993 there has been only one death in Scottish prisons from abuse or misuse of drugs: in 1983 a prisoner died from an overdose of unlawful drugs.

Strathclyde

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the findings of the Parliamentary Boundaries Commission in respect of Strathclyde; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no locus at this stage of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission's review of constituencies in Scotland. The commission is required to submit its report with respect to the whole of Scotland, showing the constituencies into which it recommends the country should be divided, by 31 December 1994.

Conservation

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the number of economic developments which have been *(a)* delayed and *(b)* discontinued by way of objections raised under the terms of the European Community directive on the conservation of natural habitats of fauna and flora.

Sir Hector Monro: None.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on wildlife conservation on Forestry Commission land.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* One of the main aims of the Forestry Commission's forest enterprise is to enhance the wildlife conservation value of its woodlands as a whole and to safeguard special habitats. Wildlife conservation is an integral part of forest enterprise's multi-purpose forest management which integrates wood production, conservation, recreation and amenity.

In achieving these aims, forest enterprise undertakes a wide range of conversation projects. It manages some 400 sites of special scientific interest and 46 forest nature reserves and undertakes projects for many species of flora and fauna. All of its forest districts have prepared conservation plans which identify sites where conservation should be the principal management objective, and specify what action is to be taken in these sites.

Forest enterprise has set down its commitment to best environmental practice in the form of an environmental code which states that it:

(i) produces wood only from sustainable sources;
(ii) identifies and manages special habitats, protects and maintains archaeological features and carries out positive management for threatened species;
(iii) maintains expertise in environmental science and seeks a sound understanding of the interaction of its activities with the wider environment through available research and consultation with expert authorities;
(iv) promotes environmental awareness and understanding amongst its staff and the outside world;
(v) aims to minimise environmental disturbance in its operations and to meet the Forestry Authority's water, landscape and nature conservation guidelines;
(vi) works to conservation plan for all its forests and actively manages to maintain and enhance conservation value;
(vii) maintains close liaison with regulatory bodies and environmental organisations in order to keep in touch with their views on environmental policies and practices.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the costs of implementing the European Community directive 92/43 EEC on the conservation of natural habitats of fauna and flora; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced to the House on 8 December 1993 that Scottish Natural Heritage would be allocated £39.851 million in the financial year 1994-95. This represents an increase of 10·5 per cent. on Scottish Natural Heritage's grant-in-aid for 1993-94. Scottish Natural Heritage has been instructed to accord the highest priority to work to implement the EC habitats directive. It is not, however, possible to make a firm estimate of costs specific to habitats directive implementation until work to implement the directive is further advanced.

Courts (Vulnerable Witnesses)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has commissioned in respect of the circumstances surrounding the position of vulnerable adults when giving evidence in court proceedings; if he will place a copy of the results in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The treatment of vulnerable witnesses is a matter which is kept under review. Police units for assisting women who are the subject of sexual or other assault operate in all parts of the country. The Crown Office has a committee part of the remit of which is to keep under review commitments in the justice charter to improved arrangements for witnesses. Arrangements exist at local level to assist and support vulnerable witnesses before they attend court to give evidence. Present research relates to the use of closed circuit television to enable children to give evidence in criminal cases outwith the court room. The results of that research will be used to advice decisions on new research proposals in this general field.

Prisons (Suicide)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons have died by their own hand in prisons in each year since 1978; and what were the means by which such deaths were brought about.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table:

Year	*Means*	*Total*
1978	Hanging (2), cut throat (1), jumping (1)	4
1979	Hanging (2), jumping (1)	3
1980	Jumping[1]	1
1981	Hanging (3) solvent inhalation (1)	4
1982	Hanging	3
1983	Hanging (4), overdose (1), cell fire and asphyxiation (1)[1]	6
1984	Hanging (4), inhalation of toxic fumes in cell fire (1)	5
1985	Hanging	6
1986	Hanging (5), jumping (2)[1]	7
1987	Hanging (6), inhalation of vomit, asphyxia and solvent abuse (1)	7
1988	Hanging	7
1989	Hanging (5), self-inflicted wounds to left arm (1)	6
1990	Hanging (2), self strangulation (1)	3
1991	Hanging	4
1992	Hanging	9
1993	Hanging	1

[1] Died in hospital.

Civil Servants

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females have been employed in each of the four senior grades in the Scottish Office in each of the past five years.

Mr. Lang: At 1 April each year the numbers of staff—expressed as full-time equivalents—employed in each of the four senior grades in the Scottish Office were as follows:

FTE

Unified Grade	*1989*		*1990*		*As at April 1991*[1]		*1992*[1]		*1993*[1]	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
1	1	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	1	—
2	7	—	8	—	7	—	7	—	7	—
3	22	1	21	1	23	1	21	2·5	20	3
4	10	—	10	—	14	1	14	1	13	2
TOTAL	40	1	40	1	45	2	43	3·5	41	5

[1] Medical staff at these grades are included in the figures with effect from 1 April 1991.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of staff employed in the Scottish Office in each of the past five years in terms of occupational grades.

Mr. Lang: The full-time equivalent numbers of staff by main occupational group, as defined by Treasury, in each of the past five years are shown in the table.

Number of Staff (FTE) employed by The Scottish Office, by occupational group[2]

FTE

Occupational group	*As at 1 April 1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
a. The Scottish Office, excluding Scottish Prison Service[1]					
Open Structure[2]	681·0	723·5	621·0	627·5	656·5
Administration Group	2,857·5	2,881·0	2,888·0	2,833·0	2,856·5
Economist group	9·5	9·5	11·5	11·5	13·5
Information Officer Group	24·0	27·5	28·5	26·0	27·5
Librarian Group	13·5	14·0	14·0	13·5	12·0
Statistician Group	8·0	10·0	11·0	9·0	15·0
Secretarial Group	555·0	568·5	568·5	545·0	543·0
Science group	215·0	219·0	224·0	225·0	223·5
Professional and Technology Group	301·5	296·5	291·0	288·5	245·5
Graphics Officer Group	3·0	3·0	2·0	3·0	2·0
Legal Group	5·0	7·0	9·0	5·0	6·0
Curatorial/Conservation Group	10·0	17·0	22·5	27·5	27·0
Research Officer Group	14·5	16·0	16·0	15·0	18·0
General Service Group	372·5	353·0	448·5	423·0	396·0
Departmental Groups	625·0	587·5	588·0	555·5	569·5
Industrial Grades	578·0	542·0	538·5	524·0	486·5
	6,273·0	6,275·0	6,282·0	6,132·0	6,098·0
b. Scottish Prison Service[1]					
Non-Industrial Grades	3,726·5	3,920·5	3,929·0	4,154·5	4,544·0
Industrial Grades	77·0	79·0	75·0	74·0	81·0
	3,803·5	3,999·5	4,004·0	4,228·5	4,625·0

Occupational group	As at 1 April 1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Total					
Scottish Office Core and Agencies	10,076·5	10,274·5	10,286·0	10,360·5	10,723·0

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[1] The Scottish Prison Service became an agency with effect from 1 April 1993. Prior to this, staff in prisons headquarters were counted in the Scottish Office, excluding SPS, figures.

[2] There is no formal classification of posts or individuals by occupational group for staff at unified grade 7 and above—such staff are counted in the "Open Structure" group.

Nurse Grading Appeals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, for each health board area, the number of nurse clinical grading appeals which are pending at the different levels of the appeals procedure; what are the amounts of money involved in these claims; what proposals he has to improve the processing of appeals; and when he expects the whole exercise to be completed.

Mr. Stewart: I understand that there were no nurse clinical grading appeals outstanding at health board level on 21 January 1994. On the same date a total of 586 appeals were outstanding at Scottish and national levels, a reduction from 960 in May 1993. The breakdown of these by health board is given in the table.

No estimate of the total sum of money involved in these claims has been made. The nursing and midwifery staffs negotiating council is currently discussing new procedures to speed up and streamline the appeals process and I expect that the bulk of the outstanding cases in Scotland will be cleard by early 1995.

Outstanding Nurse Clinical Grading Appeals in Scotland

Health board	Scottish appeals committee outstanding	National level appeals outstanding	Total
Argyll and Clyde	1	26	27
Ayrshire and Arran	13	4	17
Borders	1	11	12
Dumfries and Galloway	—	16	16
Fife	1	44	45
Forth Valley	40	64	104
Grampian	10	5	15
Greater Glasgow	14	46	60
Highland	—	11	11
Lanarkshire	24	39	63
Lothian	1	56	57
Orkney	—	—	—
Shetland	1	3	4
Tayside	85	62	147
Western Isles	—	8	8
CSA	—	—	—
State Hospital	—	—	—
Total	191	395	586

Homelessness

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were classified as homeless at the latest available date in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer of 1 December 1993, *Official Report*, column 479.

Mental Health Officers

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many social workers attained the mental health officer qualification in each of the regional and island council areas in each of the past four years; what is the total number of such qualified social workers in each of these areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Information on the number of social workers who have attained the mental health officer qualification is not held centrally. Information supplied to the Scottish Office by local authorities on the number of main grade and senior social workers who have undertaken the mental health officer course in the period October 1989 to October 1992 is set out in the table.

Number of main grade/senior social workers undertaking the mental health officer course, where course commenced by October 1992

Region	Year course concluded 1990	1991	1992	1993
Borders	—	6	4	—
Central	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	2	—	2
Fife	—	—	—	—
Grampian	11	8	—	—
Highland	2	1	2	—
Lothian	—	—	—	—
Strathclyde	4	25	—	—
Tayside	—	6	—	—
Orkney	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—
Western Isles	—	—	—	1

NHS Dental Patients

Dr. Godman: To ask sthe Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were registered as national health service dental patients in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Stewart: Formal arrangements for patients to be registered with a specific dentist were introduced under the new contract for general dental practitioners on 1 October 1990. The number of people registered in each of the four health board areas within Strathclyde region and the total number registered in Scotland is contained in the table. Information for individual local government districts and regional areas is not available.

Number of people registered with a dentist in Scotland as at 31 March

Health Board Area	1991	1992	1993
Argyll and Clyde	146,481	212,879	211,071
Ayrshire and Arran	170,743	219,701	199,510
Greater Glasgow	296,476	456,581	472,401
Lanarkshire	150,452	233,418	242,743
Scotland—Total	1,710,947	2,485,531	2,528,268

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions since 1982 in Scotland a potentially damaging operation to a site of special scientific interest has been carried out following the failure to reach a management agreement as set out in section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Information on damage to sites of special scientific interest is contained in the annual reports of the former Nature Conservancy Council and the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland, copies of which are in the Library.

Scottish National Theatre Company

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Arts Council concerning the creation of a Scottish National Theatre Company; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: There has been no recent discussion between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Arts Council on the subject of a Scottish national theatre. I understand, however, that a working party was established recently by the Scottish Arts Council to assess the demand and potential remit of a national theatre company. It would be for the Scottish Arts Council to determine whether such a company, if established, should be supported by its funds.

Less-favoured Areas

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cattle and sheep farms are wholly or mainly in the less-favoured areas.

Sir Hector Monro: In June 1993 there were 13,443 main holdings classified as cattle and sheep farms wholly or mainly in the less-favoured areas.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the total subsidy to be paid on cattle and sheep in the less-favoured areas in 1994.

Sir Hector Monro: The total direct subsidy paid under the sheep annual premium, suckler cow premium and hill livestock compensatory allowance schemes in 1994 on cattle and sheep in the Scottish less-favoured areas is estimated to be over £180 million.

NHS Helpline

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many calls have been received by the NHS helpline in Scotland each month since its inception.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* Information on the total number of calls, both interactive and non-interactive, which have been made to the NHS helpline each month since it came into operation is as follows:

	Number
29 October—20 November 1992	759
21 November—18 December 1992	710
19 December 1992—15 January 1993	674
16 January—12 February 1993	1,303
13 February—12 March 1993	1,140
13 March—9 April 1993	1,214
10 April—7 May 1993	834
8 May—4 June 1993	975
5 June—2 July 1993	1,128
3 July—30 July 1993	1,236
31 July—27 August 1993	861
28 August—24 September 1993	801
25 September—22 October 1993	1,059
23 October—19 November 1993	765
20 November—17 December 1993	644
18 December 1993—14 January 1994	561
Total	14,664

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of setting up the NHS helpline in Scotland and the cost to date; what has been the total cost of administering the service to date; how many staff have been employed; and what is the salary of the head of the NHS helpline.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The NHS helpline was set up in October 1992 at a cost of £72,401; and total expenditure to date on operational and publicity costs is £330,912. The service is operated on behalf of the NHS in Scotland management executive by Network Scotland on a contractual basis with the cost of administering the helpline met from within the contract price. Network Scotland employs a project supervisor and up to four part-time operators to work specifically on the NHS helpline. The salaries of Network Scotland employees are not known.

Holyrood House

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to his Department of Holyrood house in each of the last 10 years; and how this cost was divided between major categories of expenditure.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The information for the most recent five years is:

	Programme expenditure £	*Staff costs* £	*Total* £
1989-90	771,667	307,856	1,079,523
1990-91	860,833	288,636	1,149,469
1991-92	723,000	334,346	1,057,346
1992-93	696,600	338,530	1,035,130
1993-94	671,550	337,852	[1]1,009,402

[1] Estimate.

These costs include all expenditure directly attributable to the palace but not professional and central administration. Information for previous years was not collected on a comparable basis.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what grace-and-favour accommodation is available at Holyrood house; who occupies it; and how costs are allocated between the occupants and his Department.

Sir Hector Monro: *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* I understand that there is no grace and favour accommodation at the palace of Holyrood house.

Shameless Indecency

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the adequacy of the enforcement of the law of shameless indecency in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* I am not aware of any particular difficulties in enforcing this aspect of the common law. The statistics show that in 1992 more than double the number of persons were charged with shameless indecency than in 1988 and nearly double the number of persons were convicted of that offence by the courts.

Irvine Development Corporation

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions his Department is planning to have with tenants' groups within Irvine new town on safeguarding the interests of development corporation tenants.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Responsibility for discussion and consultation with the tenants lies with the development corporation. I understand that it has already held meetings and issued newsletters and plans to continue this practice.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the timetable for the disposal by Irvine development corporation of its housing stock.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Our policy guidance to corporations encourages them to maximise tenure diversification in the period prior to wind-up. This will involve sales to tenants under right to buy and rent to mortgage and sales of all new build and vacant houses to housing associations.

For the remaining tenanted stock, the development corporation is to submit its strategy to the Secretary of State by 31 December 1994 and once approved successor landlords will be invited to submit bids for the stock. Tenants will choose their successor landlord in ballots to be held around six months before wind-up.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many tenancies are currently managed by Irvine development corporation; how many Irvine development corporation tenants have opted to purchase their properties for each year since the introduction of the legislation allowing this; what are the current values of *(a)* Irvine development corporation's housing stock, *(b)* Irvine development corporation's commercial assets and *(c)* Irvine development corporation's headquarters; and what is Irvine development corporation's current annual turnover and its annual expenditure.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* There is no standard definition of turnover which can be applied to the new towns. The annual accounts of each town are prepared to a common style and disclose income arising from rents, grants, subsidies and other sources together with the income and outgoings on property transactions. The latest accounts which are contained in the corporation's annual report for 1992-93 are available in the Library of the House. These accounts also provide the net book value of the corporation's assets at 31 March 1993.

Valuations for individual properties do not appear since it is commercial inappropriate to provide these for properties which will be sold in the near future.

The tenancies managed by the corporation at 1 January 1994 were:

	Number
(a) Housing	3,668
(b) Industry	92
(c) Commercial	83
(d) Other, including agricultural	161

The numbers of corporation housing tenants who have opted to purchase their house under the right-to-buy provisions are as follows:

	Number
1980-81	21
1981-82	15
1982-83	79
1983-84	74
1984-85	94
1985-86	86
1986-87	192
1987-88	196
1988-89	279
1989-90	353
1990-91	261
1991-92	167
1992-93	138
[1]1993-94	133

[1] To 1 December 1993.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what precise measures he will take to ensure the rights of Irvine development corporation tenants to transfer to a local authority landlord, following the Government's planned reforms of Scottish local government.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* The tenants of Irvine development corporation will be able to choose their successor landlord in ballots to be held before wind-up. My right hon. Friend agreed in February 1992 that the local authority could bid to be the successor landlord and the detailed guidance issued to development corporations and local authorities makes clear what is expected of all bidders. Local government reform does not alter this.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a figure for the number of staff in his Department covered by statutory sick pay.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* As at 27 January 1994, 7,280 staff in the Scottish Office, excluding the Scottish Prison Service, and the associated departments were covered by statutory sick pay.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many companies have been awarded regional selective assistance in Scotland and have subsequently not met the terms of the original award;

(2) from which companies his Department has managed to recoup regional selective assistance; how much regional

selective assistance was recovered for each of the last five years; and from how many companies these moneys were recovered during each year of this period.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* It is envisaged that some investment projects may for good reason be revised, after an offer of regional selective assistance has been made. In some such cases the payment of assistance may still be justified according to the terms of the original offer. In other cases where changes occur which cannot be readily accommodated within the terms of the offer, the Department treats the project either as failed or reduced in scale and will seek repayment of grant paid or reduce the level of offer as appropriate. In the five years to 31 December 1993, 121 projects where some grant had been paid were treated as failed, the principal reason being the liquidation or receivership of the company.

Details of grant recoveries from individual companies are commercially confidential and are not divulged. The recovery figures requested are given in the table.

	Amount recovered £ million	*Number of companies*
1989	0·022	2
1990	1·117	9
1991	0·239	7
1992	0·610	4
1993	1·610	5

Cars (Allocation)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cars have been allocated to the managers, advisers and administrators employed by the NHS trust hospitals in each of the last two financial years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* This information is not held centrally.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Citizens Charters

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the total cost so far of *(a)* producing and *(b)* distributing (i) each of the citizens charters and (ii) the documents associated with each of them.

Mr. Waldegrave: Production and distribution costs of publishing the Citizen's Charter White Paper (Cm 1599) and the Citizen's Charter First Report: 1992 (Cm 2101) are borne by HMSO, which expects to recover the costs through sales revenue. The cost of producing and distributing the leaflet guides to the Citizen's Charter White Paper and First Report are £900,000 and £440,000 respectively. Individual public service organisations are responsible for producing and distributing their own charters for those who use their services. The total costs of these, as far as we are aware of them, are set out in the table.

Costs of publication and distribution of charters and associated documents

Department/Organisation	*Cost £*
OPSS	
Guide to Citizen's Charter White Paper (Cm 1599)	900,000
Guide to Citizen's Charter First Report (Cm 2101)	440,000
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	42,269
British Rail	250,000
HM Customs and Excise	306,948
Employment Department	630,808
Department for Education	5,262,639
Department of the Environment	79,418
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	41,779
Department of Health	4,101,227
Inland Revenue	5,000
London Underground	362,000
Lord Chancellor's Department	131,000
Department of Social Security	257,160
Northern Ireland Civil Service	518,700
Scottish Office	419,000
Welsh Office	622,148
Total	14,370,096

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for each of the last five years by Department *(a)* the number of approaches to the public appointments unit for names, *(b)* how many public appointments unit nominees have been forwarded in response to those approaches in *(a)*, and *(c)* how many of these nominees have been appointed to a public body as a result.

Mr. Waldegrave: The number of requests for names of candidates is not kept by individual Department, and the numbers of names put forward in response to such requests is not recorded. Aggregated information is available as follows:

Year	*Number of approaches to the public appointments unit (PAU)*	*Number of PAU nominees known to have been appointed*	
1988-89	215	117	[1](44)
1989-90	242	133	(32)
1990-91	188	140	(63)
1991-92	258	121	(57)
1992-93	308	128	(67)

[1] Number of female nominees appointed.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many names have been *(a)* added to and *(b)* deleted from the public appointments unit central list since 1990.

Mr. Waldegrave: Since January 1990, 1,578 new names have been added to the central list and 2,513 names have been deleted. The total number of names on the list is currently 5,015.

Charterline

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the cost of uniforms worn by staff answering telephones at the charterline offices in Havant, Hampshire.

Mr. David Davis: There is no direct cost to the Citizen's Charter Unit for uniforms worn by staff answering Charterline calls. The Charterline pilot is operated under a service contract by IBM's National Call Management Centre at Havant, and uniforms are provided as an integral part of this service.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much money has been spent on publicising the charterline scheme.

Mr. Davis: A total of £542,010 has been spent on publicising the Charterline scheme.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the pilot charterline scheme's first nine months of operation.

Mr. Davis: In background research more than 92 per cent. of people thought that Charterline should be launched; 84 per cent. of those who use Charterline are happy with the service. We will be reviewing the pilot study at the end of March.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of the cost of extending the charterline scheme to cover the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Davis: It would be possible to extend the Charterline scheme to cover the whole of the United Kingdom at minimal additional cost if the current call rates were repeated across the country. The total cost of running Charterline would depend on operating and advertising costs. The pilot will run until the end of March 1994. At the end of the pilot study we will make decisions about its future, which will include options for extending the service and the costs of doing so.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans there are to extend the charterline scheme to cover the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Davis: Charterline is currently a pilot available to citizens in Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. This pilot will run until the end of March 1994. At the end of the pilot study we will make decisions about its future, which will include options for extending the service.

Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what selection criteria are used for appointing persons to serve on the board of the Duchy of Lancaster's benevolent fund.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 31 January at column *469*.

"Charter News"

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost of publishing and printing "Charter News" issue No. 2; how many copies are being distributed; and what is the total contract with Forward Publishing Ltd. worth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The cost of publishing and printing "Charter News" issue No. 2 was £35,036. Approximately 110,000 copies are being distributed. Details of the contract with Forward Publishing Ltd. are commercially confidential.

Science Budget

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the distribution of the science budget in 1994-95.

Mr. Waldegrave: The distribution of the science budget for 1994-95 represents the first allocation of funding to the new research council system outlined in the White Paper on Science, Engineering and Technology which I presented to the House on 26 May 1993. On 1 April 1994 three new research councils come into existence, namely the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. The activities of the Agricultural and Food Research Council and the Science and Engineering Research Council will transfer to the new and existing research councils on 1 April.

I have discussed the allocations with the Director General of Research Councils and have decided that, subject to parliamentary approval of the Supply Estimates in due course, the science budget of £1,236·5 million should be allocated as follows:

Allocations for 1994-95	*£ million*
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	171·8
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council	364·0
Economic and Social Research Council	58·9
Medical Research Council	269·2
Natural Environment Research Council	155·4
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council	184·9
Royal Society	20·1
Royal Academy of Engineering	2·2
OST initiatives/policy studies, CEST subscription	3·6
Other, including payments to pensioners of the Science and Engineering Research Council and industrial quota CASE awards	6·4
TOTAL	1,236·5

These figures include additional funding for activities of high scientific priority and also for the introduction of some new pilot schemes targeted specifically at researchers working alongside industry. Further details are set out in the paper "Allocation of the Science Budget 1994-95" which I have placed in the Library of the House.

Charter Marks

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the total estimated cost of the charter mark regional seminars for 1994 and the additional costs of promoting and publishing charter marks.

Mr. Waldegrave: A decision has yet to be taken on the number of charter mark seminars to be held, and I am not yet able, therefore to give an estimated cost.

In 1993, we spent £105,000 to announce the scheme, and £345,000 to announce the charter mark winners. The figures are likely to be similar this year.

Citizens Conference

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the cost of the service for the citizen conference held on 7-8 December; who were the organisers; what was the contract worth; and what fees were paid to speakers.

Mr. Waldegrave: The service for the citizen conference held on 7-8 December 1993 was organised by Touchstone Exhibitions and Conferences Ltd.

The organisers bore all the costs of the conference, including payment to speakers.

Duchy Benevolent Fund

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for each of the last five years the organisations in *(a)* Lancaster and *(b)* the borough of Pendle that have benefited from grants and donations from the Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund; and if he will give the amounts in each case.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund has been maintained to provide income to be used for benevolent purposes primarily in the County Palatine. In making donations attempts have been made to distribute them fairly between the counties of Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside; although from time to time one area may appear to have received greater benefit than others. Donations have been made to causes which are known to duchy authorities and also in response to recommendations received.

Several charities who have received money from the fund in turn made donations to organisations and individuals resident in the County Palatine. Therefore an accurate reflection of precise geographical distribution of donations over the last five years would be difficult to obtain and would entail disproportionate cost.

I am, however, arranging for lists of donations made to charitable organisations within the County Palatine for the past five years to be placed in the Library of the House.

The offer I made to the hon. Gentleman in 1992 for a more detailed briefing on duchy matters remains open.

ENVIRONMENT

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 25 November 1993 to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), *Official Report*, column *186*, if he will now name the cities that he has visited since his appointment as Secretary of State.

Mr. Gummer: Further to my answer to the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) on 1 December 1993, *Official Report*, column *1030*, I have since visited Norwich, Newcastle, Telford and Prague. I said I visited 45 towns and cities. They are:

Manchester
Cambridge
York
Coventry
Birmingham
Leicester
Liverpool
Portsmouth
Nottingham
Derby
Gloucester
Bristol
Rochester
Peterborough
London
Ipswich
Cheltenham
Oxford
Harrogate
Tonbridge
Stoneleigh (Warks)
Harpenden
Newmarket
Newbury
Kings Lynn
Thurrock
Southend-on-Sea
Hastings
Bury St. Edmunds
Chorley
Stratford
Datford
Chatham
Bakewell
Hertford
Buckingham
Huntingdon
Woodbridge
Felixstowe
Stowmarket
Brussels
Luxembourg
New York
Monte Carlo
Paris

Council Housing Repairs

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the total cost of carrying out necessary repairs to local authority housing; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The priority placed on stock repairs and levels of expenditure are matters for local authorities. However, estimates of the works required, related to different standards of repair and to the characteristics of local authority property, are provided by the quinquennial English house condition survey. A report of the most recent survey was published in August 1993 and copies have been placed in the Library.

Housing Lets

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the numbers of local authority lets and housing association lets in each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: The number of local authority lets and estimates of housing association lets in each year since 1979 are as follows:

	Local authority (000s)		*Housing association[1] (000s)*	
	Total lettings	*of which new lettings*	*Total lettings*	*of which new lettings*
1979-80	438	275	45	37
1980-81	444	275	51	42
1981-82	415	251	52	43
1982-83	439	256	55	45
1983-84	429	246	58	47
1984-85	429	240	60	49
1985-86	437	247	62	51
1986-87	430	244	64	52
1987-88	426	242	67	54
1988-89	410	236	70	57
1989-90	390	229	76	60
1990-91	401	240	77	63
1991-92	407	239	86	71
1992-93	400	230	109	91

[1] Figures for the number of housing association lets in England have been available only since 1989-90. Figures for the previous years have been estimated on the basis of England and Wales data available for those years.

Source:

Local authority—HIP1 returns

Housing association—HAR10/1 returns

Ministers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the dates between which each Secretary of State and Minister of State has held office in his Department since 1979.

Mr. Gummer: The information is set out:

	Date
Secretaries of State	
Peter Shore	April 1976 to May 1979
Michael Heseltine	May 1979 to 6 January 1983
Tom King	6 January 1983 to 8 June 1983
Patrick Jenkin	9 June 1983 to 2 September 1985
Kenneth Baker	2 September 1985 to 21 May 1986
Nicholas Ridley	21 May 1986 to 24 July 1989
Christopher Patten	24 July 1989 to 28 November 1990
Michael Heseltine	28 November 1990 to 11 April 1992
Michael Howard	11 April 1992 to 27 May 1993
John Gummer	27 May 1993 to date
Ministers of State	
Reg Freeson	March 1974 to May 1979
Dennis Howell	March 1974 to May 1979
Tom King	May 1979 to 6 January 1983
John Stanley	May 1979 to 8 June 1983
Lord Bellwin	6 January 1983 to 10 September 1984
Ian Gow	9 June 1983 to 2 September 1985
Kenneth Baker	10 September 1984 to 2 September 1985
Lord Elton	25 March 1985 to 10 September 1986
William Waldegrave	2 September 1985 to 25 July 1988
John Patten	2 September 1985 to 15 June 1987
Dr Rhodes Boyson	11 September 1986 to 15 June 1987
Michael Howard	15 June 1987 to 3 January 1990
Lord Belstead	15 June 1987 to 10 January 1988
Earl Caithness	10 January 1988 to 24 July 1989
John Gummer	25 July 1988 to 24 July 1989
David Trippier	25 July 1988 to 13 April 1992
David Hunt	25 July 1989 to 4 May 1990
Michael Spicer	3 January 1990 to 29 November 1990
Michael Portillo	4 May 1990 to 13 April 1992
Sir George Young	29 November 1990 to date
Lady Blatch	22 May 1991 to 13 April 1992
John Redwood	14 April 1992 to 27 May 1993
David Maclean	14 April 1992 to 27 May 1993
David Curry	27 May 1993 to date
Tim Yeo	27 May 1993 to 4 January 1994
Robert Atkins	4 January 1994 to date

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution the THORP at Sellafield makes to his strategy of sustainable development.

Mr. Atkins: Reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel recovers uranium and plutonium, which may then be recycled. Provided that the necessary regulatory requirements are met, the Government believe that it should be a matter of commercial judgment whether spent fuel should be reprocessed or alternative fuel management options pursued.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from the Irish ambassador to the United Kingdom and the Irish Minister for Energy, Transport and Communications, following his announcement of his decision to give authorisation for THORP to open.

Mr. Atkins: The Secretary of State received a visit from the ambassador in London of the Republic of Ireland on 16 December 1993. The ambassador raised a number of points with regard to THORP on behalf of his Government.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the nuclear waste arising comprised by low-level waste, disposed of at Drigg, originates from foreign spent nuclear fuel reprocessed at Sellafield.

Mr. Atkins: I understand that at the end of March 1993, some 5 per cent. of low-level waste disposed of at Drigg has arisen from reprocessing spent fuel from overseas.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Gummer: Five paintings and one photograph, as well as 14 prints.

Charities

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce measures to ensure that all charities are entitled to bid for Government grants available for environmental work.

Mr. Atkins: The Department's environmental action fund is the main source of grants for environmental work. The fund is available to voluntary organisations and a number of registered charities get grants.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *1*, what are the particular qualifications, experience or expertise relating to the work of the Department of the Environment of his special adviser Mr. James Gray.

Mr. Gummer: It is not my practice to comment on the qualifications, expertise or experience of my political special advisers.

Climate Change

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which *(a)* university or *(b)* independent research departments were consulted in the preparation of the report on the United Kingdom climate change programme published on 25 January.

Mr. Atkins: Nineteen universities and research institutes responded to the discussion document on Britain's carbon dioxide programme that was published in December 1992. In addition, many universities and research institutes were invited to attend workshops in March 1993 and a conference in May 1993, to discuss the options for the completion of Britain's carbon dioxide programme. A list of these respondents and invitees is set out.

Advisory Council on Science and Technology
Birmingham University
Cambridge University
Energy Technology Support Unit
Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development
King's College London
Lancaster University
Leeds Metropolitan University
University of Leeds
University of Liverpool
Menchester Metropolitan University
Open University
University of Oxford
Science Policy Research Unit
Silsoe Research Institute
Southampton Energy and Transport Working Group
Staffordshire University
Transport Research Laboratory
UK Centre for Economic and Environmental Protection
University of Sussex
University College London
University College of Wales
University of Wales

Local Roads Spending

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the spending assessment for each local authority for spending on maintainance of local roads in each year since 1989.

Mr. Baldry: The highway maintenance element of the standard spending assessment for each highway authority for the years 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95 are shown. SSAs were introduced in 1990-91. The figures shown for 1989-90 are the sum of the separate elements for normal maintenance, winter maintenance, and street lighting within the system of grant-related expenditure assessments which operated until 1989-90.

Comparisons between years are complicated by the transfer in recent years of funding for the structural maintenance of bridges and principal roads from the revenue to the capital account—and therefore from SSAs to transport supplementary grant and credit approvals. A total of £310 million was transferred between 1991-92 and 1993-94.

Highway maintenance grant-related expenditure for 1989-90 and standard spending assessment since 1990-91 for each highway authority

£ million

Local authority	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*
City of London	0·505	1·346	1·650	2·486	2·415	2·734
Camden	3·613	5·078	5·885	5·868	5·494	5·715
Greenwich	5·752	7·356	8·663	7·668	7·635	7·568
Hackney	3·989	5·287	6·055	6·065	5·662	5·966
Hammersmith and Fulham	3·021	4·262	4·852	5·185	4·712	4·918
Islington	3·092	4·222	4·975	5·369	4·747	4·925
Kensington and Chelsea	2·892	4·112	4·623	4·385	4·388	4·671
Lambeth	5·259	6·656	7·810	7·239	7·161	7·433
Lewisham	5·004	6·662	7·934	7·988	7·632	7·953
Southwark	4·716	6·653	7·812	7·366	6·850	7·151
Tower Hamlets	3·587	4·612	5·297	5·192	5·025	5·360
Wandsworth	4·774	6·714	7·819	7·804	7·655	8·123
Westminster	5·320	8·241	9·641	9·483	8·760	9·654
Barking and Dagenham	3·346	4·290	4·678	4·666	4·383	4·275
Barnet	5·855	7·946	9·102	9·402	8·672	8·686
Bexley	4·774	6·230	6·924	7·188	6·650	6·691
Brent	5·504	7·149	8·033	7·989	7·209	7·226
Bromley	7·652	9·558	10·952	10·873	10·013	10·034
Croydon	7·509	10·111	11·041	11·234	10·333	10·416
Ealing	6·373	8·368	8·998	8·738	8·310	8·619
Enfield	5·625	7·407	8·202	8·471	7·715	7·943
Haringey	3·685	4·957	5·581	5·676	5·499	5·551
Harrow	4·397	5·612	6·104	6·445	5·790	5·816
Havering	4·801	6·588	7·495	8·182	7·941	8·194
Hillingdon	5·814	7·870	8·676	9·130	8·396	8·423
Hounslow	4·149	5·571	6·405	6·951	6·598	6·535
Kingston upon Thames	3·096	4·251	4·745	4·794	4·559	4·752
Merton	3·910	5·192	5·860	5·824	5·532	5·534
Newham	4·689	6·008	6·579	6·544	6·389	6·575
Redbridge	5·237	6·279	7·297	7·801	7·121	7·168
Richmond upon Thames	3·764	4·724	5·419	5·209	5·055	5·177
Sutton	4·075	5.525	5·888	5·679	5·652	5·719
Waltham Forest	4·429	5·809	6·533	6·564	6·180	6·226
Bolton	7·174	9·814	10·948	9·786	9·407	9·810
Bury	4·840	6·522	7·157	7·129	6·656	6·689
Manchester	14·871	19·332	22·192	21·014	20,541	20·156
Oldham	6·483	6·962	7·605	7·727	7·002	6·849
Rochdale	5·703	6·378	7·570	7·110	7·157	7·030
Salford	6·653	9·826	10·667	10·157	10·527	10·581

Local authority	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*
Stockport	7·661	10·334	11·069	11·395	10·849	10·435
Tameside	6·506	8·074	8·984	8·523	8·666	8·430
Trafford	6·327	8·672	9·559	9·424	9·501	9·128
Wigan	7·520	8·993	10·178	10·151	9·592	9·765
Knowsley	3·288	4·200	4·800	4·871	4·557	4·560
Liverpool	11·916	14·833	17·544	16·950	16·908	16·544
St. Helens	4·778	5·277	6·293	6·272	5·830	5·612
Sefton	5·969	7·406	8·554	8·523	8·191	8·025
Wirral	6·666	8·066	9·481	10·297	9·187	9·011
Barnsley	5·374	6·229	7·107	7·008	6·949	6·853
Doncaster	8·311	8·310	10·024	10·258	10·926	10·922
Rotherham	7·513	9·193	10·471	10·948	10·445	10·253
Sheffield	15·928	19·780	23·830	24·189	23·791	23·575
Gateshead	6·804	8·360	9·851	10·601	10·404	10·425
Newcastle upon Tyne	8·243	11·330	13·254	12·478	12·266	11·858
North Tyneside	4·592	6·298	7·066	7·497	6·861	6·713
South Tyneside	3·661	4·343	5·356	6·005	5·721	5·298
Sunderland	6·987	8·563	10·950	11·585	11·596	11·674
Birmingham	24·361	32·928	37·420	37·024	36·330	35·532
Coventry	7·694	10·498	10·855	10·944	10·416	10·144
Dudley	7·653	10·066	11·269	10·425	10·736	10·805
Sandwell	8·263	10·458	11·753	11·616	11·277	11·042
Solihull	4·599	6·398	7·608	7·816	7·825	8·020
Walsall	6·324	8·225	9·186	8·739	9·295	9·288
Wolverhampton	6·971	8·796	9·721	8·853	8·818	8·636
Bradford	11·889	14·578	16·721	16·146	17·684	17·619
Calderdale	5·243	5·937	6·737	6·840	6·495	6·394
Kirklees	11·816	13·583	14·767	14·758	13·454	13·365
Leeds	20·965	25·845	28·712	29·077	27·634	27·244
Wakefield	9·095	11·086	11·904	11·506	11·403	11·592
Avon	27·054	34·653	38·456	38·735	36·341	36·177
Bedfordshire	10·147	15·210	18·156	19·611	19·024	20·607
Berkshire	16·264	24·181	26·011	29·150	26·304	27·776
Buckinghamshire	16·256	21·803	24·031	25·717	24·803	24·886
Cambridgeshire	17·521	21·777	25·240	24·528	23·710	26·323
Cheshire	25·121	31·175	34·432	33·974	33·167	33·426
Cleveland	15·546	17·901	21·091	22·299	20·294	20·170
Cornwall	16·491	18·972	20·928	21·807	21·290	22·348
Cumbria	18·506	20·786	23·070	23·651	22·472	24·152
Derbyshire	22·991	26·449	30·587	31·272	29·857	29·441
Devon	37·653	40·106	45·563	47·063	44·571	42·514
Dorset	19·307	21·758	24·680	24·632	24·273	24·292
Durham	16·616	17·529	20·393	20·411	19·703	19·626
East Sussex	15·425	19·265	21·909	21·323	20·964	21·195
Essex	33·436	49·024	54·349	58·392	58·308	61·069
Gloucestershire	14·989	16·483	19·757	19·572	17·787	17·589
Hampshire	37·859	49·329	54·702	56·154	53·316	53·424
Hereford and Worcester	21·586	23·126	26·858	25·462	25·114	24·968
Hertfordshire	23·672	31·649	37·628	40·077	38·130	39·142
Humberside	23·160	25·382	28·254	28·845	28·174	27·795
Isle of Wight	3·095	3·520	3·899	4·161	3·471	3·773
Kent	39·260	53·727	59·197	60·187	56·555	58·102
Lancashire	36·612	41·530	46·932	49·675	47·659	47·570
Leicestershire	26·868	31·251	34·390	34·327	33·807	33·956
Lincolnshire	19·502	23·527	25·984	25·918	24·686	26·586
Norfolk	24·218	26·876	32·135	31·243	30·802	33·100
Northamptonshire	14·992	20·428	21·889	21·614	20·925	21·014
Northumberland	13·226	14·953	16·518	16·631	16·094	17·209
North Yorkshire	25·910	28·674	32·843	32·232	32·435	32·796
Nottinghamshire	26·617	31·417	35·238	36·575	33·168	33·109
Oxfordshire	12·877	16·075	17·826	19·749	18·011	18·862
Shropshire	13·908	16·056	17·861	17·505	17·014	18·430
Somerset	18·058	20·657	24·493	25·265	23·170	23·088
Staffordshire	27·904	31·949	37·490	35·720	35·301	35·265
Suffolk	17·266	19·349	22·108	21·721	24·177	24·421
Surrey	28·356	40·281	43·183	44·727	39·855	42·446
Warwickshire	11·220	13·739	16·535	16·843	17·153	17·641
West Sussex	17·021	22·052	24·461	24·006	22·885	23·249
Wiltshire	15·026	19·099	21·975	21·955	20·064	19·712
Isles of Scilly	0·112	0·144	0·158	0·168	0·133	0·144

Note: **The grant-related expenditure for 1989-90 is the sum of the normal maintenance, winter maintenance and street lighting components; for shire counties this is prior to any assignment to shire districts. For all authorities it excludes professional and technical services.**

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress made by Her Majesty's pollution inspectorate in assessing the effects of test firing of depleted uranium ammunition on the environment.

Mr. Atkins: The Ministry of Defence carries out a programme of regular environmental monitoring at its Eskmeals site. The results of this monitoring are made available to HMIP.

Local Government Ombudsman

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sanctions govern the enforcement of rulings arrived at by the local government ombudsman on complaints from the public.

Mr. Baldry: A local authority which declines to comply fully with the remedies imposed by the ombudsman must publish a statement of its reasons for failing to implement the report in local newspapers at its own expense, together with a statement about the matter provided by the ombudsman.

Conservation Areas

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will designate parts of Cardigan bay, the Bristol channel and St. George's channel as special areas of conservation under directive 92/43/EEC.

Mr. Atkins: The list of sites which member states shall designate as special areas of conservation must be agreed with the Commission by 1998 and the site designation process must be completed by 2004.

The Government's scientific advisers are preparing their recommendations for the United Kingdom's proposed special areas of conservation. It is therefore premature to comment on whether and when specific sites might be designated.

Retirement Housing

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) from what groups representing *(a)* leaseholders and *(b)* managing agents and landlords he sought advice during the formulation of the code of conduct for retirement housing;

(2) when he expects to be able to publish the code of conduct for retirement housing; and if it will be compulsory.

Sir George Young: Section 87 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 gives the Secretary of State for the Environment powers to endorse codes of good management practice submitted to him for approval. The Act prevents the Secretary of State from approving any code unless he is satisfied that arrangements have been made to ensure that it has been brought to the notice of those likely to be affected by it.

The Act also provides that any code which is approved will be admissible evidence and where relevant may be taken into account in any court proceedings relating to the management of residential property.

So far, no such codes have been submitted for approval, but I understand that the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Association of Retirement Housing Managers have published draft codes of practice and are consulting on them widely.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 1 February by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, *Official Report*, column *611*.

Housing Association Grant

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria have been agreed by the Housing Corporation for the allocation of housing association grant to developing housing authorities.

Sir George Young: Housing Corporation resources are distributed on the basis of the housing needs index. The allocation of housing association grant to housing associations is made by the Housing Corporation in accordance with the following criteria: to meet the priority housing needs identified by local authorities in the most cost-effective way; to achieve targets set by Ministers for programmes such as low-cost home ownership, rehabilitation and rural housing; and, in choosing between bids to meet a particular objective, to achieve value for money in terms of the volume of housing to be delivered from a given HAG input subject to the performance of an association, its ability to deliver a good management service once the development is completed and any local authority views about the proposed development.

Council House Sales

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each London borough the total discounted value of houses and flats sold by them for each year since 1980.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 26 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *242-244*, to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle).

Council Tax

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals have been lodged since the 1992 valuations of homes for the purpose of assessing council tax; and how many of these cases have now received a final adjudication.

Mr. Baldry: During the eight-month period allowed for appeal, expiring on 30 November 1993, the Valuation Office agency received 860,305 proposals to alter the council tax bands of dwellings in England. Of these, 175,206 had been settled by 31 December 1993.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department expects all the currently outstanding appeals against house valuations for the purposes of assessing council tax to have received a final adjudication.

Mr. Baldry: The Valuation Office agency has six months from the date of its receipt to consider proposals to alter the council tax banding of dwellings. If not resolved at the end of this period, cases are referred as formal appeals to a valuation tribunal.

The Valuation Office agency and the valuation tribunals are expected to have dealt with nearly 700,000 or 80 per cent. of cases in England by the end of 1994. This would be almost within a year of the end of the appeal period. Any remaining appeals will be settled as quickly as possible in 1995.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether local authorities will be expected to repay with interest any overpayments received in council tax arising from wrong valuations of properties subsequently revised under the appeals system.

Mr. Baldry: There is no provision in the regulations on council tax appeals for the payment of interest when an appeal has been determined in the taxpayer's favour. The sums at stake in such appeals are generally modest and the cost of administering an interest payment scheme would be disproportionate.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are employed within his Department investigating possible improvements to the standard spending assessment system.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. member to the reply my right hon Friend gave to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) on 28 January, *Official Report*, columns *433-34*.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the representations made by Westminster city council to his Department prior to the current year's standard spending assessment allocation.

Mr. Baldry: Since March 1993 we have received a number of letters from Westminster dealing with a number of issues concerning the review of standard spending assessments and the proposals for 1994-95.

In addition, my right hon. Friend met the leader of Westminster city council on 13 October 1993 to discuss the review of standard spending assessments for 1994-95.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the representations made by Wandsworth borough council to his Department prior to the current year's standard spending assessment allocation.

Mr. Baldry: Since March 1993 we have received two written representations from the London borough of Wandsworth on the calculation of standard spending assessments for 1994-95.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the authorities that have made representations to his Department, supporting the use of day visitors as a method of measuring grant need.

Mr. Baldry: The following local authorities made representations in support of the use of data on day visitors in the calculation of standard spending assessments, during the review of standard spending assessments or during consultation on the provisional revenue support grant settlement for 1994-95:

Bath City Council
Birmingham City Council
London Borough of Brent
Brighton Borough Council
Chester City Council
Chester-le-Street District Council
Cleethorpes Borough Council
East Lindsey District Council
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Great Yarmouth Borough Council
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
Harrogate District Council
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
London Borough of Greenwich
High Peak Borough Council
North Norfolk District Council
Norwich City Council
Nottingham City Council
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Sheffield City Council
Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council
South Lakeland District Council
Southend-on-Sea District Council
Stoke on Trent City Council
Suffolk Coastal District Council
Tendring District Council
Thanet District Council
Thurrock Borough Council
Torbay Borough Council
Uttlesford District Council
London Borough of Westminster
Weymouth and Portland Borough Council
Woodspring District Council

We also received a joint representation from the seven west midlands metropolitan districts in support of the inclusion of day visitors in the calculation of standard spending assessments.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretry of State for the Environment if he will list the authorities that have made representations to his Department supporting the use of homelessness figures as a method of measuring grant need.

Mr. Baldry: The following local authorities made representations in support of the use of data on homelessness in the calculation of SSAs, during the review of SSAs or during consultations on the provisional revenue support grant settlement for 1994-95:

London Borough of Barnet
London Borough of Brent
Brighton Borough Council
Broxtowe Borough Council
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
London Borough of Ealing
East Hertfordshire District Council
Elmbridge Borough Council
London Borough of Enfield
Gloucester City Council
London Borough of Greenwich
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
London Borough of Haringey
London Borough of Harrow
Hartlepool Borough Council
London Borough of Hillingdon
London Borough of Lambeth
London Borough of Lewisham
London Borough of Newham
Reading Borough Council
Thurrock Borough Council
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Westminster City Council

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions since 1982 in England a potentially damaging operation to a site of special scientific interest has been carried out following the failure to reach a management agreement as set out in section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I assume the hon. Member requests details of damage occurring to sites of special scientific interest —including those sites subject to a nature conservation order—after notice of a potentially damaging operation has been given by owners and occupiers. I regret that such information is not available in this form, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information on damage to SSSIs and proposed SSSIs generally is contained in the annual reports of English Nature and of the former Nature Conservancy Council, copies of which are in the Library.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *871-72*, if he will publish a breakdown of the totals spent from usable capital receipts into areas of local authority spending

Mr. Curry: This information is not available. Local authorities' capital financing decisions are, in general, taken on a corporate basis covering the whole of their capital programme. Information on the financing of capital expenditure for individual services is not therefore collected by the Department.

Energy Efficiency Targets

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has had to his call in November for organisations to publish energy efficiency targets.

Mr. Gummer: I have called for a partnership between Government, business and the voluntary sector to help the United Kingdom meet its CO_2 emission reduction targets. As part of that, I have urged all organisations to set up proper environmental and energy management systems, including the setting of clear targets and systems to monitor performance and report against those targets.

Much remains to be done both by business and the public sector in this area, but I welcome the lead given by the organisations listed which, as signatories of the marking a corporate commitment campaign, have published energy efficiency targets and are working to secure the commercial and environmental benefits that result from good energy management. I hope others will follow this lead.

The public sector is also playing its part. Central Government and health authorities and trusts are working to meet a 15 per cent. cut in energy consumption in the five years 1991-96; while the local authority associations are promoting similar aspirational targets for individual local authorities.

Published Targets

Making a corporate commitment campaign signatory targets

3M:	A global target of a 20 per cent. reduction in energy use to produce a kilogram of good product from 1990 to 1995; and a 20 per cent. reduction in the amount of energy required to support a square meter of non-manufacturing space from 1990 to 1995;
Allied Lyons plc:	Following significant earlier savings, the company has set energy, effluent and water savings targets of around 2 per cent. per annum, over a three to five-year time scale;
BAA plc:	A 10 per cent. reduction in consumption in all airport operations by December 1994, with the expectation of a further 5 per cent. saving in the following four years; and an initial 10 per cent. improvement in non-airport operations by January 1995;
BT plc:	A 15 per cent. reduction in energy consumption over five years to 1997;
Babcock Energy Ltd.:	A 10 per cent. reduction in energy costs in 1993-94;
Bank of England:	A 15 per cent. reduction in energy consumption over five years to 1998;
Birmingham International Airport plc:	As one of its energy targets, a further 5 per cent. reduction in kilowatt hours per passenger, based on the moving annual total;
Bowring Services Ltd.:	A minimum 5 per cent. annual reduction in energy costs;
British Gas plc:	A 15 per cent. saving over five years;
Cheltenham and Gloucester Building Society:	Twin goals to reduce energy costs by 10 per cent. within two years and energy consumption by 10 per cent. by the end of 1996;
DHL International:	An improvement in fuel efficiency of 15 per cent. over three years commencing with a target of 8 per cent. in the year October 1993-94, and a 15 per cent. iprovement in energy use at operational sites by the end of 1994, rising to 20 per cent. in 1995 and 25 per cent. in 1996;
Eley Ltd.:	A 5 per cent. reduction in energy consumption in 1993, taking production volume changes into account;
English Nature:	A 15 per cent. reduction in energy consumption over five years;
Fina plc:	A performance improvement target for energy costs of 10 per cent. and a 5 per cent. reduction in energy consumption for individual areas of the company over a two-year period ending December 1994;
Forte:	An initial target to reduce energy and water consumption by 10 per cent. without reducing the level of service, quality or customer comfort;

IBM:	A worldwide corporate goal of implementing energy efficient improvement projects to achieve 4 per cent. savings year on year;
J. Sainsbury plc:	A target of a 5 per cent. annual saving on the difference between actual energy used and the predicted energy which should have been if utilised in the most efficient manner;
Nationwide Building Society:	A 15 per cent. target over five years with the expectation that this could be increased to 20 to 25 per cent. in the longer term;
National Westminster Bank plc:	A 15 per cent. reduction in energy consumption by the end of 1995;
Rockware Glass Ltd.:	CO_2 emissions in 2000 will not exceed 1992 values;
Rover Group:	A 5 per cent. per annum reduction in 1991 energy and CO_2 levels adjusted for the number of standard production hours worked and degree days during the year;
Safeway Stores plc:	A real saving of at least 10 per cent. over five years;
Sterling Organics:	A programme of improvement projects which will reduce energy consumption by 6 per cent. in the two years ending 1994, against a baseline of 1992;
Tesco plc:	A further 5 per cent. reduction in energy use in each of the next two years;
Texaco Ltd.:	Improve the energy index at its Pembroke refinery by 1 per cent. each year over the next five years; and save 15 per cent. of its energy consumption in its headquarters building in 1994;
Toshiba (Manufacturing Operations):	A 16 per cent. improvement in energy use by 1995;
Warwick International Ltd.:	A 20 per cent. improvement in energy use per unit of product produced in 1993 and 1994;
University College London:	A 15 per cent. reduction in effective energy use over five years to 1998.
Electricity Companies	
Manweb plc:	A 10 per cent. reduction in own electricity use in the three years to 1994 95;
Norweb plc:	A 15 per cent. reduction in own electricity consumption over five years to 1996;
Northern Electric plc:	To reduce own energy usage by one third over the next five years;
Nuclear Electric plc:	A 5 per cent. reduction in overall energy bill in 1993;
Southern Electric plc:	A 20 per cent. reduction in energy consumption in office buildings over the next five years.
Local Authorities	
Basingstoke and Dean Borough Council:	15 per cent. reduction in effective energy use in five years to 1998;
Bedfordshire County Council:	15 per cent. reduction in energy costs over five years to 1991 and then 10 per cent. by 2000;
Cleveland County Council:	7·5 per cent. for educational establishments while Cleveland police authority has set a target of 10 per cent. over one year for its buildings;
Cotswold District Council:	15 per cent. over five years to 1997;
Ipswich Borough Council:	15 per cent. over five years to 1998;
Leicester City Council:	To complement a 14 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions over the past five years, the council intend to reduce CO_2 emissions by 50 per cent. of the 1990 level by the year 2025;
London Borough of Hounslow:	To reduce 1992 energy consumption by 20 per cent. by the end of 1997, with consequent CO_2 emission reductions in excess of 20 per cent., by investing 10 per cent. of the annual energy budget in a programme of building and plant improvements, and by encouraging and implementing responsible energy management measures;
London Fire and Civil Defence Authority:	A 10 per cent. reduction in energy consumption over five years to 1994-95.
London Borough of Sutton:	4 per cent. energy savings in this financial year and a 15 per cent. saving over 10 years.
Northamptonshire County Council:	To reduce energy and water consumption and CO_2 emissions by a further 15 per cent. over five years commencing April 1994;
Nottingham City Council:	A 10 per cent. reduction in energy consumption by 1994-95; a further 5 per cent. by 1996-97 with up to a 50 per cent. reduction by the year 2027;
Oxfordshire County Council:	On course to reduce their energy use in council buildings by 15 per cent. over the five years to 1998;
Redditch Borough Council:	A 15 per cent. reduction in energy costs over three years to 1995;
Stratford on Avon District Council:	A 5 per cent. reduction in the 1992-93 level of normalised energy consumption by March 1995;

Suffolk Coastal District Council:	Following cumulative reductions to date of some 5,000 tonnes of CO_2 emissions, the council intends to reduce energy consumption by a further 10 per cent. in the five years to 1998;
West Sussex County Council:	A CO_2 reduction target of 50,000 tonnes per year by 2000;
Woking Borough Council:	A 20 per cent. reduction in energy consumption in five years to 1998.

Northumberland Special Protection Area

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that English Nature extend the period of consultation of the proposed special protection area for the coast of Northumberland.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The consultation period has already been extended to 10 weeks, two and a half times the period normally given for such consultations. I see no reason for a further extension.

EU Habitats Directive

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to make additional financial resources available to implement the European Union directive—92/43/EEC—on the conservation of natural habitats of wild fauna and flora; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked his advisers on nature conservation, English Nature, to give implementation of the habitats directive the highest priority for resources. Grants in aid to English nature for the financial year 1994-95 will be £40·405 million, an increase of 6·56 per cent. over the current year.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud;

(2) how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* Disciplinary action is always taken, with dismissal as the ultimate sanction when the evidence justifies it.

The table sets out the number of employees disciplined for fraud and the number ultimately dismissed in the years from April 1989—Property Services Agency in brackets.

	Employees disciplined for fraud		Employees dismissed	
1989	1		—	
1990	1	(2)	—	(2)
1991	3	(1)	3	(1)
1992	5	(2)	1	(1)
1993	2		—	

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 3 February 1994

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the latest expenditure forecast for the legal aid budget in the financial year 1993-94.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) on 20 January at columns *719-20.* Based on the latest information available it seems likely that total net expenditure on legal aid in the financial year 1993-94 will be £1,225 million compared with a provision of £1,283·2 million. The actual outturn will depend on the bills presented and paid between now and the end of the financial year.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have no plans to buy or borrow any photographs.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are no paintings and three photographs on the walls of my room.

"Small Personal Injury Claims"

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he received during the consultation over his document "Small Personal Injury Claims"; and when he expects to announce the results of his consultations.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department has received approximately 150 responses to our recent consultation paper on small personal injury claims. Consultees cover the full spectrum of interests and include solicitors, doctors, insurance companies and consumer groups. Many of their letters deal with the proposals in great detail and provide us with much valuable input and information.

We are currently considering the points made by consultees and will be taking all arguments they put forward into account when finalising the detail of new procedures. The Lord Chancellor expects to issue draft rules of court and draft forms for consultation by the autumn.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity Industry

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will strengthen consumer representation covering the electricity industry.

Mr. Eggar: I am satisfied that the electricity consumers' committees represent consumer interest effectively and have no plans to change the structure or the scope of their remit. The Director General of Electricity Supply is responsible for the appointment of the committees' members.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the change in electricity prices since 1989.

Mr. Eggar: The latest figures available show that domestic electricity prices fell by 0·4 per cent. in real terms between the third quarter of 1989 and the third quarter of 1993. Over the same period, average industrial electricity prices fell by about 4 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will commission a report on the impact of electricity price rises on low-income consumers.

Mr. Eggar: I have no plans to commission such a report. Domestic electricity prices have broadly remained stable since privatisation.

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his Department or any agencies for which he is responsible has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has engaged the services of Touche Ross for new contracts on three occasions since 1 July 1993. During the same period two contracts previously issued were extended.

Global Warming

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the basis for the statement at paragraph 19.16 of the report on sustainable development, page 133, that nuclear power provides a source of energy free from the pollutants that contribute towards global warming.

Mr. McLoughlin: An analysis of the effect on global warming of nuclear power as well as other fuels is set out in the report "The Impact of UK Electricity, Gas and Oil Use on Global Warming" by N. J. Eyre and L. A. Michaelis of the energy technology support unit, published in 1991.

This report sets out greenhouse gas emissions for a range of fuel cycles including different forms of electricity generation. The report covers for the electricity fuel cycles the extraction, processing, transport, generation, distribution and utilisation by final user. Even taking into account these aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle, the emissions of greenhouse gases are very low.

I have arranged for copies of this report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what ways he intends to explore within the European Community alternatives to a command and control approach to environmental protection as set out in the letter by the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology to Lord Ezra of 17 June 1993.

Mr. McLoughlin: The United Kingdom national sustainable development strategy, published on 25 January, restates the Government's commitment to using economic instruments, where appropriate, as an alternative to a command and control approach to environmental protection.

The European Commission has also made clear its wish to use such instruments—most recently in its communication to the Council, "Making the most of the Internal Market: Strategic Programme" (COM (93) 632 final). Officials are in touch with the Commission as specific proposals for action are developed.

In addition the Government have invited the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment to advise, from the business perspective, on the circumstances in which economic instruments, regulation or other policy instruments would be the most appropriate means for achieving environmental goals. This work will help to inform our examination of future EC proposals for environmental protection measures.

Oil Sales

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the aggregate sale of oil from the United Kingdom to all recipient countries in *(a)* monetary values and *(b)* tonnage for each month since January 1992.

Mr. Eggar: Monthly exports of oil from the United Kingdom since January 1992 are as follows:

United Kingdom oil[1] exports

	Value (£ million)	*Volume (thousand tonnes)*
1992		
January	539	6,572
February	427	5,217
March	511	6,248
April	542	6,263
May	510	5,862
June	493	5,387
July	525	5,957
August	588	7,069
September	515	6,201
October	667	7,519
November	621	6,531
December	628	6,471
Total	6,566	75,297
1993[2]		
January	483	5,810
February	617	6,500
March	629	5,970
April	602	5,920
May	635	6,300
June	579	6,130
July	729	7,690
August	709	7,800
September	622	7,220
October	717	8,190

[1] Petroleum, petroleum products, and related materials; i.e. Division 33 of the Standard International Trade Classification.

[2] It should be noted that these figures remain provisional and are subject to greater revisions than usual. Data on exports to other EC countries are only available up to October.

Source: Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the monthly sale of oil in tonnes from the United Kingdom to Cyprus in each month since July 1992.

Mr. Eggar: Monthly exports of oil by the United Kingdom to Cyprus since July 1992 are as follows:

Volume of United Kingdom oil[1] exports to Cyprus

	Tonnes
1992	
July	364
August	256
September	240
October	415
November	259
December	177
Total	1,711
1993	
January	148
February	375
March	165
April	255
May	294
June	119
July	291
August	267
September	212
October	257
November	233
Total to November	2,616

[1] Petroleum, petroleum products, and related materials; i.e. Division 33 of the Standard International Trade Classification.

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Car Boot Sales

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to ensure compliance with minimum legislative requirements within the framework of his deregulation policy at car boot sales.

Mr. McLoughlin: There is no legislation relating specifically to car boot sales. In so far as car boot sales raise questions of planning law, this is a matter for local authorities and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. In so far as they raise questions of compliance with such legislation as the Trade Descriptions Act or consumer safety regulations, they are a matter for local authority trading standards departments.

Children (Accident)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many accidents to children were recorded in each year since 1987.

Mr. McLoughlin: Statistics on home and leisure accidents to children are published by the Department in the home accident surveillance system annual reports for the years 1987 to 1991—the latest figures available—copies of which are held in the Library of the House. It should be noted that the national figures are extrapolated from a sample of accident cases treated in hospitals.

Statistics on road traffic and work accidents are a matter for my right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Employment.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the recorded numbers of accidents that children had *(a)* in the home, *(b)* on the roads, *(c)* in school and *(d)* in playgrounds, in each year since 1987.

Mr. McLoughlin: The statistics requested in sections *(a)*, *(c)* and *(d)* are published by the Department in the home accident surveillance system annual reports for the years 1987 to 1991—the latest available figures—copies of which are held in the Library of the House. It should be noted that the national figure is extrapolated from a sample of accident cases treated in hospitals.

The answer to section *(b)* is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Nightwear Safety Regulations

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further representations he has received from business, medical or consumer organisations about deregulation of the nightwear safety regulations.

Mr. McLoughlin: Consultation on the Nightwear Safety Regulations 1985, under the deregulation initiative, was concluded on 29 October 1993. Since then my Department has received a further 22 letters from business, medical and consumer interests which added to the general support for the retention of the regulations.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to the experience of T. S. Industrial Development Ltd. based in the Norwich, North constituency in failing to secure lending under the provisions of the loan guarantee scheme; if he will review the current qualification rules on the level of turnover and the number of employees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: There appears to have been no correspondence with DTI about the loan guarantee scheme and T. S. Industrial Development Ltd. Neither has any application for loan guarantee scheme assistance, from this company, been rejected by DTI. No comment on the individual case can, therefore, be made.

However, all applications for the loan guarantee scheme are reviewed by participating scheme lenders in the first instance and may be rejected by them.

The qualification rules on level of turnover and the number of employees were reviewed in 1993 and regular reviews are undertaken.

Parcelforce

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost to the Post Office of establishing Parcelforce as a separate business *(a)* in total, *(b)* for its Milton Keynes headquarters and *(c)* for new distribution and sorting depots.

Mr. McLoughlin: The establishment of a separate parcels operating unit within the Post Office has been taking place gradually since 1986, to improve efficiency and allow each of the main businesses to focus on its particular market. Details of the costs involved are commercially confidential; however, all Parcelforce investment projects are required to meet standard public sector investment criteria.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes have been agreed to the regulation on opencast mining since the publication of the first report of session 1992-93 from the Trade and Industry Committee on British energy policy and the market for coal.

Mr. Eggar: The Government have published their proposals for amendments to the Opencast Coal Act 1958 in the Coal Industry Bill published on 2 December.

Regional Assistance

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) of 3 December 1993, *Official Report,* column *765,* what was the total amount spent on *(a)* regional enterprise grants, *(b)* enterprise initiative schemes, *(c)* regional development grants and *(d)* regional selective assistance in 1992-93 in (i) the United Kingdom as a whole and (ii) each of the regions.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 January 1994]:* Expenditure in 1992-93 on regional enterprise grants—REG; enterprise initiative schemes—EI; regional development grants—RDG; regional selective assistance—RSA is as follows.

£ million

	REG	[1]*EI*	*RDG*	*RSA*
South East	—	6·0	—	—
East	—	11·0	—	—
Northern	1·5	[2]2·0	8·3	28·1
North West	1·3	[3]8·0	1·3	18·2
Yorkshire and Humberside	1·8	6·3	1·1	8·4
South West	0·8	4·7	—	5·1
East Midlands	0·3	4·0	0·3	0·6
West Midlands	0·1	6·5	—	10·7
England	5·8	48·5	11·0	71·1
Wales	1·1	3·8	5·5	58·8
Scotland	2·8	5·4	8·9	59·2
Great Britain	9·7	57·7	25·4	189·1
Northern Ireland	—	0·4	—	—
United Kingdom[5]	9·7	[4]58·6	25·4	189·1

[1] Expenditure relates to the Consultancy Initiative and the SMART and SPUR schemes.

[2] Northern region excluding Cumbria.

[3] North West region including Cumbria.

[4] Includes £0·5 million not allocated regionally.

[5] REG; RDG and RSA schemes operate only in Great Britain. Northern Ireland schemes are not directly comparable.

Fireworks

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had from the British Standards Institute on the abolition of import licences for fireworks.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has had no representations from the British Standards Institution relating to abolition of import licences for fireworks.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what further representations he has had from the British Pyrotechnists Association on his proposals to abolish import licences for fireworks with particular reference to category 4;

(2) if he will make it his policy to amend the Consumer Protection Act 1987 to exclude category 4 fireworks from retail sales.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* On 27 January the British Pyrotechnists Association met my noble Friend Lord Strathclyde, the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms, to discuss the position of category 4 fireworks under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 following the recent changes by the Health and Safety Executive to the legislation relating to the import of fireworks.

The powers available in sections 10 and 13 of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 are adequate to deal with the sale of category devices to the general public. The association has, however, promised to put forward suggestions for reinforcing the present arrangements for limiting the availability of category 4 fireworks to members of the general public and these will be considered.

Patent Office

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what will be the cost to the Exchequer of the review of the Patent Office being carried out by consultants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The fees paid to the consultants carrying out the review of the Patent Office are confidential for commercial reasons.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to raise *(a)* the environmental implications of the new GATT and *(b)* the economic implications of the international trade in nuclear materials between Europe and other economic areas at the forthcoming world economic summit in Davos.

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor attended an informal gathering of world economic leaders in Davos on 28-30 January as part of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting. This meeting was not an intergovernmental summit to discuss specific issues; it was an opportunity for international economic policy makers to discuss longer-term trends in the world economy on an informal basis.

Petrol Stations

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimates have been made of the cost of implementation of the draft county councils directive 8348/92, stage 1, to petrol stations in rural and urban areas.

Mr. Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

There is currently under negotiation a proposed European Community directive which will introduce a system of petrol vapour recovery during the distribution of petrol. Following consultation with industry and a report from independent consultants, the Government have concluded that typical costs for service stations in the United Kingdom are likely to be in the range of £2,000 to £3,000. There will be variations in individual cases, dependent for example on existing equipment layout.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Goosanders

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will reconsider her decision to allow goosanders to be shot on the River Wharfe; and if she will ensure that this decision will not be used as a precedent for the destruction of goosanders and similar species as a matter of routine.

Mr. Soames: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides for the issue of licences to kill or take protected wild bird species for the purpose of preventing serious damage to fisheries. The Agriculture Departments—in England, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food —are responsible for the issue of these licences and they must not be unreasonably withheld.

Applications for licences are judged on a case by case basis and the issue of any one licence does not set a precedent. Licences to allow shooting, as an aid to scaring, will not be issued unless the applicant has provided sufficient evidence of serious damage to the fishery and where other methods of scaring are shown to be ineffective or impractical and not just difficult to implement. Each applicant is visited by Agricultural Development Advisory Service, the Ministry's wildlife advisers, before a decision is taken on whether or not to issue a licence. All licences issued are to shoot only a restricted number of birds, over a specific site, during the time of year when the serious damage is occurring.

The licence to shoot goosanders on the River Wharfe was issued only after sufficient evidence of serious damage to the fishery was presented to the Ministry.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what considerations led her to license the Bolton Abbey Estate to kill 14 goosanders on the River Wharfe and on the estate fish farm; what representations and advice she received from English Nature; if she will make it her policy that all species listed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 will be guaranteed protection in future; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides for the issue of licences to kill or take protected wild bird species for the purpose of preventing serious damage to fisheries. The Agriculture Departments—in England, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food —are responsible for the issue of these licences and they must not be unreasonably withheld.

Applications for licences are judged on a case-by-case basis. Licences to allow shooting, as an aid to scaring, will not be issued unless the applicant has provided sufficient evidence of serious damage to the fishery and where other methods of scaring are shown to be ineffective or impractical and not just difficult to implement.

The Agricultural Development Advisory Service, the Ministry's wildlife advisers, visit each applicant to assess the case before reporting back to the Ministry. English Nature is consulted locally and its representations are taken into account in making the licensing decision. Nevertheless, the responsibility for the issue of such licences must remain with the Ministry. All licences issued are to shoot only a restricted number of birds, over a specific site, during the time of year when the serious damage is occurring.

The licences to shoot goosanders on the River Wharfe and on the estate fish farm were issued only after sufficient evidence of serious damage was presented to the Ministry.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current policy of her Department on the use of bovine somatotropin to increase the milk yield of cows.

Mr. Soames: It remains our view that any final Community decision on the marketing and use of bovine somatotropin—BST—should be based firmly on the scientific principles of safety, quality and efficacy, but should take into account the need to avoid international trading problems, to encourage Community-based research industries, and to maintain the competitiveness of the Community's agriculture and food industries.

BST has been cleared by all advisory bodies, and the European Commission itself has accepted that milk produced from BST-treated cattle is safe. In those circumstances it should be for the market place to determine whether BST has a role to play, and it is inappropriate to introduce fresh criteria. Nevertheless, the Community should benefit from the experience of other countries where BST is available, in particular the United States of America, where approval was recently given and took effect from the beginning of February 1994.

On that basis, therefore, my right hon. Friend the Minister accepted at the December meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers that it was sensible to extend the current moratorium for not more than one year, until December 1994, so that the Council could consider these new developments and experience overseas.

National Poisons Unit

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what resources have been made available to the national poisons unit for the assessment of *(a)* pesticides and *(b)* dietary supplements in 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Soames: The Ministry has a specific research contract with the national poisons unit—NPU—to investigate possible cases of poisoning due to dietary supplements and traditional remedies. Payments to the NPU under this contract in the financial years 1992-93 and 1993-94 were £109,000 and £117,000 respectively. MAFF is not funding any work on pesticides at the NPU.

Sheep Dip

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she plans to set up a panel to evaluate research into reports of long-term health effects arising from exposure to organophosphorus sheep dips; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Dr. D. N. Bateman BSc, MB BS, MRCS, MD, FRCP, consultant physician of Freeman hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne; reader in therapeutics; and medical director of the northern region drug and therapeutics centre, has agreed to chair a panel to look into reports of long-term health effects claimed to arise from organophosphorus—OP—sheep dip exposure. In its recent advice, the Veterinary Products Committee pointed to a lack of firm scientific evidence to support any such link, but nevertheless considered that knowledge of potential toxicity should be enhanced. The committee went on to recommend the setting up of a panel of independent medical and scientific experts to address this question, and the Government accepted the recommendation.

The terms of reference of the panel, which will act as a sub-committee to the Veterinary Products Committee, will be:

to evaluate research currently available, and in progress, on OP sheep dip products in relation to possible human exposure:

to advise on any additional work that may be needed to elucidate the potential long term effects on humans of OP sheep dips;

to advise on the suitability of any projects submitted for research; and

to report findings to the Veterinary Products Committee, as its sub-committee.

Prospective members of the panel are now being approached and invited to serve. A further announcement will be made once the panel's composition has been finalised.

The Government treat with the utmost seriousness any suggestion of potential harm to human health. I am sure that the panel's work will make a valuable contribution in adding to our state of knowledge in this field.

Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of the moneys allocated to decommissioning fishing vessels in the current financial year has been taken up; how many tenders accepted by her Department have not been taken up; how much is left; and what she proposes to do with the remaining moneys.

Mr. Jack: As explained in my reply to the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) on 14 December, fishermen whose bids have been accepted will receive their grants provided they comply with the rules. Some vessel owners who were successful in the tender have since decided not to go ahead with decommissioning and there may be others who in the event do not submit valid claims. The final position will not be clear until the 1 March closing date for the submission of claims. Any shortfall in the extent of decommissioning flowing from this round will have to be taken into account in future decisions about how the United Kingdom is to meet the targets laid down in its multi-annual guidance programme, which provides that 55 per cent. of the total reduction has to be met by cuts in fishing capacity.

Currently a shortfall of about £¾ million is expected. In the context of the overall management of the Department's budgets I would expect that expenditure on any subsequent decommissioning schemes could be correspondingly adjusted. A total of £25 million remains available for expenditure on decommissioning in the present and future financial years.

Coppicing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new proposals she has to extend coppicing.

Mr. Jack: *In 1993 we secured agreement in the EC* Council of Ministers that short rotation coppice could be grown on non-rotational set-aside land. On land outside the Arable area payments scheme, short rotation coppice is eligible for grants under the woodland grant scheme. Also electricity generated using coppice as a fuel may benefit from the provisions of the President of the Board of Trade's third Renewables Order imposing a non-fossil fuel obligation on public electricity supply licensees. We are considering whether any further measures to encourage coppice might be necessary, against the background of the common agricultural policy and our own forestry review.

Organic Farming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new proposals she has to increase organic farming production.

Mr. Jack: The Government's efforts to encourage British farmers to respond to demand for organic food include a substantial research and development programme and on 10 August 1993 my hon. Friend the Minister announced a proposed organic aid scheme, designed to increase the area under organic production in England threefold.

My right hon. Friend also met representatives of the organic farming movement recently. It was agreed that there should be further discussions with officials, and another ministerial meeting in the spring concentrating on the role of organic farming in relation to reform of the Community's common agricultural policy.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inflation

13. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of inflation rates in 1994.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I expect underlying inflation in 1994 to remain safely within its 1 to 4 per cent. target range.

28. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the target rate of inflation.

Mr. Nelson: The Government announced in October 1992 that they would aim to keep underlying inflation—as measured by the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments—in the range 1 to 4 per cent. and to bring it down to the lower half of this range by the end of the present Parliament. This objective was confirmed in the March and November 1993 Budgets. Underlying inflation has been within the target range in each month since October 1992. The most recent figure, for December 1993, showed underlying inflation of 2·7 per cent.

Public Spending

14. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement about public spending levels.

Mr. Portillo: The Government are committed to firm control of public spending to ensure that spending falls as a proportion of national income while value for money is constantly improved.

Family Tax Burden

15. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he estimates the cumulative tax increases since March 1993 will cost the average family from *(a)* April 1994 and *(b)* April 1995.

Mr. Dorrell: On average, the main tax-related changes will cost households around £5·30 a week from April 1994, and an additional £3·30 a week from April 1995.

24. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross earnings value added tax took up for a one-earner family on average male earnings with two children in 1978-79; and what is the latest estimate.

Sir John Cope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 19 January 1994 at columns *635-42*.

Tax Evasion and Avoidance

12. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he plans to reduce tax evasion and avoidance.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government are determined to do all they can to curb both tax evasion and avoidance. In line with every budget over the last 14 years, the current Finance Bill includes a substantial package of measures to tackle avoidance. And both the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise will continue under their existing powers to combat tax evasion.

Demand Level

17. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the level of total demand in the economy.

Mr. Portillo: For domestic demand, the most recent figures available are for the third quarter of 1993. By then, it had risen for six successive quarters, to a level over 2¼ per cent. above its trough in the first quarter of 1992. Its growth is forecast to strengthen in 1994.

Income Tax

18. **Mr. Heald:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the total income tax take *(a)* is currently being contributed by top rate tax payers and *(b)* was contributed in 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: Higher rate taxpayers currently pay 40 per cent. of total income tax compared with 20 per cent. in 1978-79.

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will set out for each year between 1979-80 and 1988-89 *(a)* the total income, both earned and unearned, *(b)* the total national insurance contributions and *(c)* the total income tax paid by (i) the top 1 per cent., (ii) the top 5 per cent., (iii) the top 10 per cent., (iv) the bottom 50 per cent. and (v) all taxpayers;

(2) if he will publish tables showing the change in income tax in each year between 1979-80 and 1988-89 as against the 1978-79 indexed regime, broken down into the top one per cent., five per cent., 10 per cent. and bottom 70 *per cent. 50 per cent. and 30 per cent., and all taxpayers,* giving the number of taxpayers in each category.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* This information cannot be provided since the relevant surveys of personal incomes do not include the necessary data on national insurance contributions and these analyses of income tax could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many additional income tax payers there will be in 194-95 as a result of his proposal to freeze the value of personal allowances.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* About 180,000 more people will pay tax in 1994-95 under the Budget proposals than if income tax allowances had been increased in line with statutory indexation. About 1·2 million more people would pay income tax in 1994-95 if all tax allowances had been increased in line with statutory indexation since 1978-79.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many more income tax payers will be paying tax at the margin of the higher rather than the basic rate in 1994-95 *(a)* as a result of his proposal to freeze the pesonal allowance and *(b)* in addition to those under *(a)*, as a result of his proposal to freeze the higher rate threshold.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* Compared with statutory indexation of the personal allowance, about 20,000 more people will pay some tax at the higher rate in 1994-95. A further 100,000 more people will pay higher rate tax compared with statutory indexation of the basic rate limit.

Taxation

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the change in taxation per individual arising from each relevant component of the 1994 Budget, both at current prices and net of indexation, for those at one half and three quarters of average earnings, average earnings, and one and a half, two, five and 10 times average earnings; and if he will provide comparable figures for last year.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* Figures for the effects of income tax and national insurance contributions changes taking effect in 1994-95 and similar figures for 1993-94 are given in the table. The effects of indirect tax changes will vary with the spending pattern of the individual.

Increase (+)/decrease (−) in income tax and national insurance contributions for a single person and a married man (£ per week)

	Multiples of average earnings						
	½	*¾*	*1*	*1½*	*2*	*5*	*10*
1994-95							
Relative to 1993-94 tax system							
Single person							
Income tax	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48
NICs	1·23	2·17	3·10	4·56	4·56	4·56	4·56
Married man							
Income tax	1·17	1·17	1·17	6·13	6·13	6·13	6·13
NICs	1·23	2·17	3·10	4·56	4·56	4·56	4·56
Relative to indexed 1993-94 tax system							
Single person							
Income tax	−0·05	−0·05	−0·05	1·60	1·60	1·60	1·60
NICs	1·30	2·24	3·17	4·18	4·18	4·18	4·18
Married man							
Income tax	1·80	1·80	1·80	7·71	8·52	8·52	8·52
NICs	1·30	2·24	3·17	4·18	4·18	4·18	4·18
1993-94							
Relative to 1992-93 tax system							
Single person							
Income tax	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48
NICs	−0·14	−0·14	−0·14	1·21	1·21	1·21	1·21
Married man							
Income tax	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48	−0·48
NICs	−0·14	−0·14	−0·14	1·21	1·21	1·21	1·21
Relative to indexed 1992-93 tax system							
Single person							
Income tax	0·05	0·05	0·05	2·33	2·33	2·33	2·33
NICs	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00
Married man							
Income tax	0·29	0·29	0·29	0·29	2·71	2·71	2·71
NICs	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·00

Note:

1. Average earnings are assumed to be £359·90 per week in 1993-94 and £374·30 per week in 1994-95. Taxpayers are assumed to have no reliefs other than the standard tax allowances, to have no sources of income other than earnings and to pay national insurance contributions at the contracted-in rate.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden of 3 November, *Official Report*, column 257, how many of the estimated 1·9 million families with children below the income tax threshold in 1993-94 are in paid work.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* Approximately 0·7 million families with children below the income tax threshold in 1993-94 had some earnings from employment or self-employment.

Taxation (Proportion of GDP)

19. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the percentage of gross national product taken in all forms of taxation; and what were comparable figures for 1979, 1974, 1970 and 1966.

Mr. Dorrell: Taxes and social security contributions are forecast to be equivalent to 34 per cent. of GDP in 1993-94. The comparable figure in 1978-79 was 34¼ per cent.; in 1973-74, 33¾ per cent.; in 1969-70, 37½ per cent.; and in 1965-66, 31¾ per cent.

26. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what the nation's tax burden as a percentage of GDP will be in 1998-99; and what this figure was in 1978-79.

Mr. Dorrell: On the basis of the medium term fiscal projections shown in the latest "Financial Statement and Budget Report", non-North sea taxes and social security contributions would be 38½ per cent. of non-oil GDP in 1998-99, when the PSBR is projected to represent a ¼ per cent. of GDP. The comparable figure for 1978-79, when the PSBR represented 5½ per cent. of GDP, was 34¾ per cent.

Budget Representations

20. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the most recent representations he has received over the effect of the Budget on families.

Sir John Cope: A number of letters have been received about the impact of the Budget on family finances.

VAT (Fuel)

21. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has now received about his proposals to impose value added tax on domestic fuel and power.

Sir John Cope: I have received a large number of representations.

Illegal Drugs

22. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review his Department's relationship with police authorities in the combating of illegal drug importation.

Sir John Cope: Customs and the police co-operate closely and successfully through frequent joint operations and their joint staffing of the National Criminal Intelligence Service. The distinct responsibilities of Customs and police, and the arrangements for co-operation, are kept under regular review.

Insurance Tax

23. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had concerning his plans to impose taxation on all domestic insurance premiums.

Sir John Cope: Treasury Ministers have received a number of representations about the introduction of insurance premium tax. These have been primarily from the insurance industry about the practical implementation of the tax. There have also been some more general representations concerning the scope of the tax.

Tax Levels

25. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of income for those on average wages was taken in taxation in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1993.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Barrow in Furness (Mr. Hutton).

Manufacturing Output

27. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the latest manufacturing output figures.

Mr. Portillo: Manufacturing output in the three months to November was up 0·8 per cent. on the previous three months and up 1·8 per cent. on a year earlier. Business surveys point to further increases in the months ahead.

Car Industry

29. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what economic factors he attributes the performance of the British car manufacturing industry; and what comparison he has made with the performance of similar manufacturers elsewhere in Europe.

Mr. Portillo: Car production in the United Kingdom rose by 6½ per cent. in 1993 despite depressed car markets in continental Europe, the fastest growth in any calendar year since 1988. By contrast car production has fallen very sharply in France, Germany and Italy. The United Kingdom car industry's performance has benefited from the Government's policies of low inflation and sound public finances, and by its own efforts to control costs.

Government Debt

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what growth in the budget deficit would occur if growth in gross domestic product was only 2 per cent. per annum after 1994; what would be the total level of Government debt as a proportion of gross domestic product in each of the next five years on that assumption; and what proportion of the budget deficit in each of the next five years will be incurred by revenue spending at current prices;

(2) what changes there would be in the budget deficit at a rate of growth in gross domestic product after 1994 of *(a)* zero per cent., *(b)* 1 per cent., *(c)* 2 per cent., *(d)* 3 per cent. and *(e)* 4 per cent.; what would be the total level of Government debt as a proportion of gross domestic product in each of the next five years on these assumptions; and what proportion of the budget deficit in each of the next five years would be incurred by revenue spending at current prices.

Mr. Portillo: Table 2.5 of the 1994-95 "Financial Statement and Budget Report" shows projections to illustrate the effects on the public sector borrowing requirement of higher or lower growth than the main growth projection in the medium term financial strategy, assuming unchanged policies. On those assumptions public sector net debt would fall to around 36½ per cent. of GDP by 1998-99 in the higher growth case illustrated in the FSBR, and it would rise to around 47¼ per cent. of GDP in the lower growth case. Tables 2.2 and 2.3 of the FSBR set out the main projections and show details of Government revenues and spending, and the current balance of the public sector, over the next five years.

Cash Dispensers and Credit Cards

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the protection of the rights of individuals and companies in cases of disputes involving automatic cash dispensers or credit cards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The Government believe that the code of banking practice and the banking ombudsman scheme provide an adequate framework in which disputes about banking services can be resolved.

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions his Department has had with the joint stock banks over the problems of phantom withdrawals from cash dispensers.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury has had no recent discussions with the banks on this issue, but officials do keep in regular contact with the Association of Payment Clearing Services who keep them informed about what the banks are doing to improve further the security and reliability of their systems.

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department or any agencies for which he is responsible has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Sir John Cope: Once.

Incomes

Sir David Knox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentages of earnings, plus child benefit where appropriate, were taken in income tax and national insurance contributions from each of *(a)* a single person, *(b)* a single wage married couple with two children and *(c)* a single wage married couple with four children at (i) half average male manual earnings, (ii) three quarters male manual earnings, (iii) average male manual earnings and (iv) twice male manual earnings, in the tax years 1990-91 and 1992-93; and what the comparable figures are expected to be for 1993-94.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is in the tables:

Income tax and national insurance contributions[1] as a percentage of gross earnings plus child benefit

[2]Multiple of average earnings	Single	Married, one earner, with two children	Married, one earner, with four children
1990-91			
½	19·5	11·4	10·3
¾	24·4	18·4	17·1
1	26·8	22·1	20·9
2	28·8	25·4	24·7
1992-93			
½	17·6	10·3	9·3
¾	23·1	17·5	16·4
1	25·8	21·4	20·3
2	28·2	25·3	24·6
1993-94			
½	17·7	10·7	9·7
¾	23·2	17·7	16·6
1	25·9	21·5	20·4
2	28·7	25·6	24·9

[1] National Insurance contributions are at the standard class 1 rate for employees not contracted-out of the state additional (earnings related) pension scheme. Tax is calculated assuming no allowances or reliefs are available other than the standard allowance.

[2] Average earnings are taken to be the average gross weekly manual earnings of full-time males on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. These are £244·50 and £272·00 in 1990-91 and 1992-93 respectively. In 1993-94 these are estimated to be £281·50 using an illustrative growth rate of 3·5 per cent.

Sir David Knox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing tax-free incomes, defined as income tax thresholds plus child benefits, as percentages of average male manual earnings for single wage families with one, two, three and four children in each year since 1979-80.

Mr. Dorrell: The figures in the table give the levels of income at which there is no net deduction from income, after allowing for the effect of tax allowances, tax rates and child benefit.

Break-even point[1] for a married man expressed as a percentage of average male manual earnings[2]

	With one child	With two children	With three children	With four children
[3]1978-79	49·2	61·8	74·1	87·0
1979-80	50·8	64·2	77·5	90·9
1980-81	48·2	60·6	73·0	85·4
1981-82	45·5	58·5	71·4	84·4
1982-83	47·9	61·3	74·7	88·1
1983-84	50·5	64·3	78·2	92·0
1984-85	52·5	66·5	80·5	94·5
1985-86	53·2	67·0	80·6	94·3
1986-87	53·0	66·7	80·3	93·9
1987-88	51·9	65·9	79·9	93·9
1988-89	51·8	65·7	79·6	93·5
1989-90	50·1	63·0	75·9	88·7
1990-91	49·0	60·9	72·7	84·6
1991-92	50·5	61·9	73·2	84·6
1992-93	53·5	65·0	76·5	87·9
[4]1993-94	52·9	64·4	75·9	87·4

[1] The level of earnings at which income tax paid is equal to the money received through child benefit.

[2] Full-time males paid at adult rates working a full week.

[3] First two children aged under 11 ; third aged between 11 and 15 and fourth aged 16 or over.

[4] Assuming that the husband receives the full married couple's allowance. Provisional.

Africa (Structural Adjustment Programmes)

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those African countries currently participating in International Monetary Fund and/or World bank structural adjustment programmes.

Mr. Nelson: Twenty-five African countries currently have IMF and/or World bank structural adjustment programmes. Sixteen have IMF programmes: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, The Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Ethopia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. In addition, Sierra Leone and Zambia have rights accumulation programmes of structural adjustment which earn rights towards IMF resources. Twenty have World bank programmes: Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Egypt, Ethopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Nelson: That amount reimbursed by the Department of Social Security to the Treasury in respect of statutory sick pay is £39,335·25 in 1993-94 to date, and £53,964·41 in 1992-93. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), of 26 November 1992, *Official Report,* column *750;* what further inquiry he has made into the BCCI accounts to ascertain whether they facilitated arms deals with Iraq.

Mr. Nelson: None. The examination of the facts relating to the export to Iraq of defence equipment and dual use goods is a matter for Lord Justice Scott's inquiry.

Cheque Clearing

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to investigate the cheque-clearing practices of high street banks.

Mr. Nelson: None. The cheque-clearing practices of the high street banks are a matter of contract between banks and their customers.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total number of recipients of mortgage interest tax relief is expected to be in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96; and if he will make a statement of the effects on them of the reductions in the rate of relief announced in the March and November 1993 Budgets.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* Working assumptions based on recent trends are shown in the table. Also shown as the average reduction in the relief as well as the saving on an average mortgage as a result of interest rate reductions since October 1990.

	1993-94	*1994-95*	*1995-96*
Numbers of single people and married couples with mortgages (millions)	9·9	10·0	10·1
Average reduction in mortgage interest relief (£ per month)	—	7·16	14·89
Benefit on an average mortgage from interest reduction since October 1990 (£ per month)	160	160	160

Personal Allowance

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the value of the personal allowance against income tax in 1978-79 prices in 1978-79, 1984-85 and 1988-89; and what are his estimates for 1993-94 and under his Budget proposal for 1994-95.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* The information is as follows:

	Personal allowance for a single person at 1978-79 prices (£)
1978-79	985
1984-85	1,135
1988-89	1,225
1993-94[1]	1,245
1994-95[1]	1,205

[1] Assuming that prices increase by 2 per cent. in 1993-94 and 3·25 per cent. in 1994-95 in line with the illustrative assumptions in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1994-95.

Inland Revenue Statistics

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update table 2.4 of Inland Revenue Statistics 1993 with data for 1994-95 on the basis of his budget proposals for income tax.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* The information is given in the table. Estimates for 1992-93 onwards are based on a projection of the 1991-92 survey of personal incomes.

Total income tax liabilities, by range of total income tax

Percentages

Range of total income tax (lower limit)	*1990-91*		*1991-92*		*1992-93*		*1993-94*		*1994-95*	
	Taxpayers	*Tax*	*Taxpayers*	*Tax*	*Taxpayers*	*Tax*	*Taxpayers*	*Tax*	*Taxpayers*	*Tax*
1	4·1	0·1	4·0	0·1	4·7	0·1	4·7	0·1	4·3	0·1
100	14·6	1·9	14·6	1·8	16·2	1·8	16·9	1·9	15·2	1·6
500	17·2	5·6	15·7	4·8	14·9	4·4	14·2	4·1	14·1	3·8

Range of total income tax (lower limit)	1990-91		1991-92		1992-93		1993-94		1994-95	
	Taxpayers	Tax	Taxpayers	Tax	Taxpayers	Tax	Taxpayers	Tax	Taxpayers	Tax
1,000	15·9	8·6	14·9	7·6	13·8	6·8	13·3	6·4	13·0	5·8
1,500	12·2	9·2	13·0	9·2	12·3	8·6	11·5	7·8	10·8	6·8
2,000	9·4	9·2	9·4	8·6	8·8	7·9	9·2	8·0	9·4	7·6
2,500	6·6	7·8	6·8	7·6	6·6	7·3	6·8	7·3	7·1	7·0
3,000	8·0	12·1	9·1	12·8	9·1	12·6	9·4	12·6	10·2	12·8
4,000	4·9	9·5	4·5	8·1	5·0	8·8	5·2	9·0	5·7	9·2
5,000	4·7	13·9	5·4	14·7	5·8	15·6	6·0	15·8	6·7	16·6
10,000	2·3	22·2	2·6	24·7	2·8	26·0	3·0	27·0	3·5	28·7
TOTAL	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0

Total income tax liabilities, all taxpayers

	Numbers (Millions)	Amounts (£ billion)
1990-91	26·3	60·4
1991-92	25·9	63·5
1992-93	25·3	63·2
1993-94	25·3	65·0
1994-95	25·5	70·7

Tax Changes

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update, to take account of the 1994 Budget, the information on tax changes contained in his answer to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) of 21 October 1986, *Official Report*, columns *812-14.*

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Readily available information on the annual reduction in income tax liability, compared with the 1978-79 indexed regime is given in the tables. The 1978-79 regime has been indexed by reference to the statutory formula and allowing for independent taxation. For the purpose of these calculations the indexed regime of 1978-79 is applied directly to the later income base. In practice, retention of the regime, indexed as appropriate, for the intervening years would have led to changes in the income base.

Average reduction in income tax per individual[1] in 1993-94 compared with the 1978-79 indexed regime

Range of individual's income in 1993-94 (£)	Number of individuals 1993-94[1] (million)	Total reduction (£ million)	Average reduction (£ per annum)
Under 5,000	3·30	460	140
5,000 to 10,000	8·20	3,100	380
10,000 to 15,000	6·10	4,600	740
15,000 to 20,000	3·90	4,300	1,080
20,000 to 30,000	3·20	5,200	1,600
30,000 to 50,000	1·30	3,400	2,540
50,000 to 80,000	0·31	2,500	7,910
Over 80,000	0·18	8,400	47,700
Total	26·70	31,800	1,200

[1] Individuals liable to income tax under the 1978-79 indexed regime.

Average reduction in income tax per individual[1] in 1994-95 compared with the 1978-79 indexed regime

Range of individual's income in 1994-95 (£)	Number of individuals 1994-95[1] (million)	Total reduction (£ million)	Average reduction (£ per annum)
Under 5,000	3·10	390	130
5,000 to 10,000	8·10	2,900	360
10,000 to 15,000	6·10	4,100	680
15,000 to 20,000	4·00	4,000	1,000
20,000 to 30,000	3·50	5,100	1,470
30,000 to 50,000	1·50	3,200	2,160
50,000 to 80,000	0·34	2,400	7,190
Over 80,000	0·20	9,300	47,500
Total	26·80	31,400	1,200

[1] Individuals liable to income tax under the 1978-79 indexed regime.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update to 1994-95 the information on real net earnings provided in his answer to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) of 10 April 1986, *Official Report*, columns 193-94.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* Estimates for 1994-95 are as follows:

Income Tax and Income Tax + NIC—[1] as percentages of gross earnings

	⅓	1	2	5	10
Multiples of average earnings[2]					
Single					
Tax	17·2	19·8	26·9	34·8	37·4
Tax+NIC	25·4	28·6	32·1	36·8	38·4
Married without children					
Tax	14·6	18·0	26·1	34·4	37·2
Tax+NIC	22·7	26·8	31·2	36·5	38·2
Real net earnings after Income Tax and NIC (1956-57=100)					
Multiples of average earnings[2]					
Single	181·0	183·9	191·4	223·2	288·3
Married without children	176·5	176·6	186·8	218·6	282·8

[1] At the contracted-in rate.

[2] Full time adult males (all occupations).

Payroll Giving

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees have registered with the Inland Revenue payroll giving schemes run by employers, pursuant to section 202 of the Taxes act 1988; how many employees contributed to charities via a payroll giving scheme; and what was the total amount contributed in the tax year 1992-93.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is as follows:

	1992-93
Schemes in force at end of period	6,638
Donors (thousands)	[1]280
Gross amounts donated (£ million)	13

[1] The figure includes only the number of donors at the end of the period.

Council Tax

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many appeals against council tax valuations in each London borough have been *(a)* received and *(b)* settled; and how many of those settled resulted in a reduced council tax valuation;

(2) how many appeals against council tax valuations in each London borough have been settled in the last six months; and what was the average cost of settling each appeal.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The number of appeals received in each of the London boroughs during the initial appeal period up to 30 November 1993 and the numbers settled in the six month period to 31 December 1993 are as shown.

The estimated average cost of processing a council tax appeal in the current financial year in England is £115. This estimate includes Valuation Office Agency and valuation tribunal costs.

Statistics relating to settlements which have resulted in a lower council tax band are not available centrally.

	Received	*Settled*
Barking and Dagenham	652	78
Havering	3,015	552
Bromley	8,056	1,214
Croydon	5,695	1,020
Sutton	2,862	523
City of London	200	15
Ealing	5,480	1,234
Hounslow	3,716	805
Barnet	7,214	1,214
Enfield	5,532	721
Haringey	5,768	1,127
Bexley	3,906	653
Greenwich	3,745	301
Lewisham	3,056	402
Brent	3,484	578
Harrow	2,634	480
Hillingdon	2,777	577
Hackney	3,213	564
Islington	4,943	894
Hammersmith and Fulham	5,220	1,255
Kensington and Chelsea	10,093	1,924
Lambeth	6,733	797
Southwark	5,168	684
Camden	7,322	1,302
City of Westminster	8,095	1,672
Redbridge	3,730	550
Waltham Forest	1,943	287
Newham	1,511	395
Tower Hamlets	1,961	289
Kingston upon Thames	2,304	439
Merton	2,236	318
Richmond upon Thames	4,642	897
Wandsworth	2,436	354

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service is obtaining copies of photographs of three former Directors of Public Prosecutions to complete a set of former directors in their headquarters office.

Public Interest Immunity Certificate

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report,* column *640,* if he will list the leading authorities concerning the duty of a Minister to sign a public interest immunity certificate.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the following publications for a consideration of the leading authorities: The "Supreme Court Practice 1993" vol. 1. paragraph 24/5/15 at pages 451-453, and "Archbold Criminal Pleading Evidence and Practice 1993" vol. 1 chapter 12 paragraphs 12-22 to 12-33 at pages 1/1579 to 1/1587. Copies of these extracts have been placed in the Library.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

The Attorney-General: There are eight paintings, and 156 photographs mainly of former Law Officers, on the walls of the Attorney-General's chambers.

West Midlands Serious Crime Squad

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list *(a)* the cases in which charges have been dropped and *(b)* the convictions quashed since the decision by the chief constable of the West Midlands to disband the West Midlands serious crime squad.

The Attorney-General: There is no central record of cases involving officers of the West Midlands serious crime squad. Inquiries amongst relevant CPS staff have identified no such cases which have been dropped by the prosecution, but have identified 23 appellants whose appeals have been allowed by the Court of Appeal. The inquiries covered the period from 15 August 1989.

Police Officers (Criminal Conduct)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases involving allegations of criminal misconduct against police officers were considered by the Attorney-General; and how many of these resulted in prosecutions being brought, in the last three years.

The Attorney-General: Allegations that police officers have committed criminal offences are ordinarily reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions in accordance with section 90 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and not to myself. The DPP consults me where she considers it appropriate to do so having regard to the difficulty or importance of the particular case. In addition, the DPP submits papers in any case where proceedings are considered appropriate for an offence subject to a statutory requirement that my consent be obtained.

Statistics are not maintained either in the Crown Prosecution Service or my Department as to the number of cases referred to me which relate to police officers. The number is very small but precise information could be obtained only by a trawl of all departmental files involving disproportionate expense.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will hold a public inquiry into the activities and performance of the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of the Child Support Agency collection enforcement manual.

Mr. Burt: There are no plans to do so.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library the departmental guidelines issued to the Child Support Agency specialist tracing section.

Mr. Burt: The guidance on specialist tracing is contained within the "Child Support Manual", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) in how many cases in the latest period for which figures are available there has been a refusal by the parent with care to supply information about the absent parent; and in how many of these cases the Child Support Agency accepted that co-operation had been refused with good cause;

(2) what is his estimate of the arrears outstanding on maintenance payments set by the Child Support Agency both in total and as a percentage of the total amount to be paid;

(3) in how many cases in the latest period for which figures are available the Child Support Agency has adjusted a maintenance assessment to allow for the recovery of arrears under paragraph 10 of the arrears regulations;

(4) what estimate he has made of the average weekly maintenance assessment set by the Child Support Agency at the latest date for which figures are available;

(5) what is the average time between the issue of the inquiry form, and the maintenance assessment, at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 2 February 1994.

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking various questions about the Child Support Agency's operations.

At 31 December 1993, 35,600 cases had been received where the requirement to co-operate with the Agency was an issue. In 20,500 of these the Agency accepted that the parent with care had good cause not to co-operate in pursuing a maintenance application.

Initial estimates were that average weekly maimtenance assessments would be approximately £45–50. Information gathered on assessments completed to date is consistent with these estimates.

The Agency is not yet in a position to estimate the arrears outstanding on maintenance payments. I regret, also, that information on cases in which Regulation 10 of the Arrears Regulations has been applied is not collected.

Information on the length of time betweeen the return of the maintenance enquiry form and the completion of the maintenance assessment is not regularly collected in the form requested. From a small sample of cases it is estimated that the average time between the issue of the maintenance enquiry form and the maintenance assessment is approximately 7 weeks.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings the Child Support Agency has made to date.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 2 February 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how much of the Child Support Agency's target has been collected to date.

For the period from April 1993 to December 1993, benefit savings of £214·5 million have so far been reported. This figure does not represent the total amount of savings achieved because some will be scored retrospectively.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Income Support

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of *(a)* income support or *(b)* other benefits have been informed by Benefits Agency staff that they would lose their entitlement to benefit if they pursued an educational course; and how many have lost benefit following a decision to study.

Mr. Burt: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Maternity Pay

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which organisations have responded to the consultative document, "Changes in Maternity Pay", published in August 1993.

Mr. Hague: The following organisations have responded.

Association of British Chambers of Commerce
Association of Local Authorities of Northern Ireland
Mr. R. E. B. Atkinson
Bairdwear
Barclays Bank
Beck Electronics Ltd.
Boots
Bradford and Bingley Building Society
British Payroll Managers' Association
British Payroll Managers' Association-conference
British Railways Board
British Computer Society-payroll specialists
British Merchant Banking and Security Houses Federation
British Apparel and Textile Confederation
British Association of Professional Hairdressing Employers
British Bankers' Association
British Printing Industries Association
Mr. S. D. Bryant
BT.
Chemical Industries Federation
Chessington Computer Centre
Child Poverty Action Group
City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Clares Dickies
Clydeside Federation
Confederation of British Industry
Co-operative Union
Committee on the Administration of Justice
Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of Great Britain
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Crest Nicholson plc
Dairy Trade Federation
Daycare Trust
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
Electrical Association
Empire Paper LTD
Engineering Employers' Federation
Engineering Employers' Federation (Northern Ireland Association)
Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland
Equal Opportunities Commission
Federation of Small Businesses
Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors
Federation of Recruitment and Employment Services LTD
Field, Fisher, Waterhouse
Food and Drink Federation
General Federation of Trades Unions
GMB—Britain's general union
GPMU—graphical, paper and media union
Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit
Guild of Hairdressers
Hair and Beauty Studio
Health Visitors' Association
Herdman GW Mr.
Huntingdonshire District Council
IBM
ICL
Institute of Personnel Management
Labour Relations Agency
Leeds City Council—equal opportunities unit
Legal and General
Local Government Management Board
Low Pay Unit
Mail Order Traders Association
Manchester City Council—welfare rights unit
Maternity Alliance
Medical Women's Federation
Middlesex Area Probation Service
Millar, Boyd and Reid LTD
MPG—federation of managerial, professional and general associations
MSF—the union for skilled and professional people
NASUWT—the career teachers' organisation
National Council of Women of Great Britain
National Childbirth Trust
National Metal Trades Federation
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
National Childminding Association
National Hairdressers' Federation
National Farmers' Union
Nationwide Group—staff association
New Forest DC
Newcastle on Tyne University
North British Housing Association
North-East Derbyshire DC
Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Northumberland County Council
Panache—Ladies hair and beauty salon
Paskins Hotel
Pay Equity Project
Payroll Solutions
Payroll Alliance
Peterborough Software
Peugeot
Police Federation
Polytechnic and Colleges Employers' Forum
Post Office
RJM Business Analysts
Royal College of Nursing (Northern Ireland Board)
Royal College of Nursing
Royal College of Midwives
Royal College of Midwives (Northern Ireland Board)
Sainsburys
Scottish Low Pay Unit
Shell
Southcombe Brothers Ltd.
The Brewers' Society
The Staffordshire Association of Registered Care Homes
The Newspaper Society
The Royal Society
The Law Society
The Labour Party
The Bookshop, Chipping Norton
Trade Union Council
UK Federation of Business and Professional Women
UK Baby Friendly Initiative
Ulster Unionist Council
UNISON—the public service union
University of Glasgow
University of Strathclyde
Wandsworth Borough Council
Waterfront Partnership (for Unigate)
Whitbread Inns
Woking Borough Council

Housing Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total number of tenants who received housing benefit in *(a)* local authority housing, *(b)* housing association housing and *(c)* the private rented sector in (i) London and (ii) Great Britain at the latest available date;

(2) what was the average level of housing benefit paid to tenants in *(a)* local authority housing *(b)* housing association housing and *(c)* the private rented sector in (i) London and (ii) Great Britain at the latest available date.

Mr. Burt: Details for May 1992, the latest date for which information is available, are in the table.

Number of Housing Benefit Cases (Thousands) and Average Amount of Benefit (£/Week) in London and Great Britain in May 1992

	London	*Great Britain*
Local Authority		
Number of cases	404	3,030
Average amount	39·53	26·45
Housing Association		
Number of cases	72	341
Average amount	40·10	32·24
Other private rented		
Number of cases	187	948
Average amount	52·46	40·69
All cases		
Number of cases	663	4,318
Average amount	43·24	30·04

Sources: The Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit Management Information System 1 per cent. inquiry for May 1992 and the Income Support Annual Statistical 1 per cent. inquiry for May 1992.

Notes:

1. The figures are in benefit units and are rounded to the nearest thousand. A benefit unit may be a single person or a couple.
2. The information for "Other Private Tenants" excludes that of Housing Association tenants.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 1 February at column *611*.

Child Support Act 1991

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made as to the effects of the Child Support Act 1991 on the number of families entitled to *(a)* family credit and *(b)* income support, distinguishing between lone-parent families and the families paying maintenance.

Mr. Burt: In the long run it is estimated that increased payments of child maintenance under the Child Support Act will result in some 60,000 to 80,000 lone parent families no longer needing to rely on income support. It is expected that the majority of these will start work and be entitled to family credit. It is further estimated that around 10,000 lone parents already in receipt of family credit will move off this benefit. These estimates are based on data from the family expenditure survey for 1987, 1988 and 1989.

The Act should not have any significant effect on the number of absent parents entitled to income support or family credit.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the expected saving, in real cash terms, of delaying entitlement to the age allowance component of incapacity benefit by six months.

Mr. Scott: Estimated savings are around £10 million per year.

Note:

Estimates expressed in constant 1993-94 prices, are rounded to nearest £5 million and are net of offsetting changes in income-related benefit expenditure.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to, and consultation with, the Chief Whip's Office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. Hague: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointments.

Departmental Finance Limits

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes there have been in the cash limits or running cost limits of his Department.

Mr. Scott: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XIII vote 4 will be increased by £1,870,000 from £2,558,124,000 to £2,559,994,000. The revision takes account of an increase of £1,806,000—running costs—offset by a corresponding reduction on Department of the Environment: Property Holdings and other services to Government, class VII, vote 6, an increase of £493,000—of which £484,000 is running costs—offset by a corresponding reduction on Department of Health: administration, miscellaneous health services and personal services, England, class XII vote 3, an increase of £6,000—running costs—offset by a corresponding reduction on Cabinet Office: other services, class XIX vote 1, a reduction of £348,000—running costs—offset by a corresponding increase on Department of Health: administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England, class XII vote 3, a reduction of £47,000 offset by a corresponding increase in Foreign and Commonwealth office: overseas representation, class II vote 1, a reduction of £40,000 offset by a corresponding increase on Department of Employment: programmes and central services, class V vote 1.

Further running cost changes arise from a reduction of £99,000 for services provided by Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) on a repayment basis, an increase of £692,000 in value added tax refunds and a reduction of £6,920,000 as a result of a reallocation to capital expenditure.

As a result of these changes the running cost limit of the Department of Social Security will be reduced by £5,850,000 from £2,921,010,000 to £2,915,160,000.

The additional requirements are offset by reductions elsewhere and will therefore not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Family Credit

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the research by the social policy research unit on the assessment of self-employed earnings in family credit to be published.

Mr. Burt: I have today placed in the Library copies of the report "Measuring Low Incomes: Self-Employment and Family Credit" by the social policy research unit at the University of York.

We welcome this detailed review and plan to introduce a package of measures from April 1994 to improve the family credit service to self-employed families. The fast-track service for people who have recently started work will be extended to self-employed families. Currently the fast track for families of employees clears 95 per cent. of claims received within one week. At the same time the family credit claim pack will enable self-employed people to provide information about their earnings straightaway rather than later. These measures should speed up awards of family credit and make it as simple as possible to get the benefits due to them.

Within the next few weeks the Department will be issuing a consultative document to interested professional associations and bodies representing self-employed customers to seek their opinions on the issues raised by the report.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual cost to the Exchequer of paying unemployment benefit.

Mr. Burt: The cost in 1991-92 was £1,604 million. The estimated out-turn for 1992-93 was £1,838 million and the plans for 1993-94 account for £1,886 million. These figures are recorded in table 1 of the Department's third annual report—Cm 2213—a copy of which is in the Library.

Community Care Grants

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women were given community care grants in respect of the purchase of essential furnishings when they were re-housed from Women's Aid refuges in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland in each of the past three years; what was the average amount paid to such claimants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

War Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will set out his reasons for and the intended effect of his proposal to change the war pensions scheme by amending the Service Pensions Order to exclude diseases caused by the use or effects of tobacco, or the consumption of alcohol, from the definition of injury in schedule 4 to the order; what representations his Department has received from the Royal British Legion about the proposal; what reply he has sent; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what responses he has had from members of the central advisory committee on war pensions to his proposal to change the war pensions scheme by amending the Service Pensions Order to exclude diseases caused by the use or effects of tobacco, or the consumption of alcohol, from the definition of injury in schedule 4 to the order.

Mr. Hague: The war pensions scheme provides compensation for disablement or death suffered as a result of service in the Armed Forces. The long-standing policy of successive Governments has been that the decision to smoke or drink is a personal one, and that smoking and the consumption of alcohol should be regarded as attributable to service in the Armed Forces only where a severely disabling mental condition itself attributable to service renders the individual incapable of exercising personal choice.

The proposed amendments follow a recent decision in the High Court and would ensure that the legislation reflects the policy intention.

Nineteen representations from members of the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions, including three from representatives of the Royal British Legion, have been received.

Careful consideration is being given to all the representations, which have been both for and against the proposed change. Members of the committee will be advised when a decision has been reached.

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department or any agencies for which he is responsible has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Mr. Hague: The Department of Social Security has engaged the services of Touche Ross on the following occasions since 1 July 1993:

12 July 1993—Extension of contract let on 16 February 1993 to provide consultancy support to the Benefits Agency Accommodation and Office Services market testing projects.

July 1993—Consultancy support to the Contributions Agency's Information Systems Strategy.

August 1993—Quality assurance of the Contributions Agency's management information system.

August 1993—Consultancy support to the Contributions Agency's market test of data entry activity.

6 September 1993—Consultancy support for the development and preparation of an outplacement counselling contingency plan for the Benefits Agency Personnel Directorate.

Pensions

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether married women in receipt of small graduated pensions will be eligible to receive the increase in pension directly attributable to the imposition of VAT on domestic heating fuel.

Mr. Hague: The extra help for VAT on domestic fuel will be paid as an addition to the rate of basic retirement pension or income-related benefit. Married women who receive graduated retirement benefit with either a basic retirement pension or an income-related benefit will receive the extra help. Those receiving graduated retirement benefit only will receive no increase beyond normal price indexation.

EDUCATION

Surplus Places

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has of the number of surplus places that exist in the primary, secondary and special places sectors in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire; and what percentage this represents of the total number of places in each sector.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) on 31 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *517-21.*

LEAs (Spending)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the estimated amount being spent by each shire local education authority on primary education and secondary education in 1993-94 and the likely amounts for 1994-95 if the 1994-95 total is increased or reduced by the proposed standard spending assessment and reduced or increased by any increase or reduction in the numbers entering schools in 1993-94, assuming that such increases or reductions were spread proportionately between the primary and secondary sectors.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is not available in the form in which it has been requested. I will write to my hon. Friend.

Teacher Numbers

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list, for each local education authority, how many full-time equivalent teachers were employed in January 1993.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows the full-time equivalent number of teachers employed in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools sector, including self-governing—grant-maintained—schools, in each local education authority in England at January 1993.

Teacher numbers (FTE) in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector in England, including self-governing (GM) schools, as at January 1993

	FTE of teachers
Corporation of London	15
Camden	1,273
Greenwich	2,033
Hackney	1,550
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,024
Islington	1,533
Kensington and Chelsea	696
Lambeth	1,549
Lewisham	1,777
Southwark	1,705
Tower Hamlets	2,232
Wandsworth	1,754
City of Westminster	1,188
Barking	1,353
Barnet	2,597
Bexley	1,753
Brent	2,030
Bromley	2,080
Croydon	2,397
Ealing	2,130
Enfield	2,324
Haringey	1,589
Harrow	1,581
Havering	2,009
Hillingdon	1,843
Hounslow	1,869
Kingston upon Thames	1,051
Merton	1,297
Newham	1,972
Redbridge	1,858
Richmond upon Thames	1,029
Sutton	1,266
Waltham Forest	1,903
Birmingham	9,548
Coventry	2,752
Dudley	2,670
Sandwell	2,959
Solihull	1,857
Walsall	2,575
Wolverhampton	2,467
Knowsley	1,351
Liverpool	4,185
St. Helens	1,679
Sefton	2,515
Wirral	2,963
Bolton	2,517
Bury	1,467
Manchester	4,044
Oldham	2,256
Rochdale	1,851
Salford	2,000
Stockport	2,362
Tameside	2,036
Trafford	1,616
Wigan	3,096

	FTE of teachers
Barnsley	1,696
Doncaster	2,760
Rotherham	2,335
Sheffield	3,866
Bradford	5,004
Calderdale	1,827
Kirklees	3,632
Leeds	6,010
Wakefield	2,741
Gateshead	1,707
Newcastle	2,212
North Tyneside	1,765
South Tyneside	1,325
Sunderland	2,651
Isles of Scilly	28
Avon	7,612
Bedfordshire	4,983
Berkshire	6,080
Buckinghamshire	5,215
Cambridgeshire	5,667
Cheshire	8,072
Cleveland	5,560
Cornwall	3,647
Cumbria	4,211
Derbyshire	8,098
Devon	7,229
Dorset	4,389
Durham	5,239
East Sussex	4,908
Essex	12,033
Gloucestershire	4,090
Hampshire	12,037
Hereford and Worcester	5,441
Hertfordshire	8,280
Humberside	7,740
Isle of Wight	997
Kent	11,980
Lancashire	11,922
Leicestershire	7,570
Lincolnshire	4,808
Norfolk	5,791
North Yorkshire	5,954
Northamptonshire	5,466
Northumberland	2,677
Nottinghamshire	8,508
Oxfordshire	4,206
Shropshire	3,563
Somerset	3,595
Staffordshire	8,357
Suffolk	5,276
Surrey	6,677
Warwickshire	3,961
West Sussex	5,319
Wiltshire	4,596
England	396,331

Genetic Screening

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what response he has made to the Nuffield report on genetic screening in relation to the aspects which affect his department.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend welcomes the initiatives of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics in producing this report. He regards it as essential that through the combination of science, religious and health education pupils are equipped to tackle the ethical issues which they will encounter at the various stages of their lives, including those resulting from advances in genetic science.

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if his Department or any agencies for which he is responsible has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Mr. Boswell: The Department has placed one contract with Touche Ross since 1 July 1993, for a financial management and policy review of the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges.

Education Charters

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the companies commissioned by his Department in 1992-93 to carry out polling and market research in the course of preparing *(a)* the further education charter and *(b)* the higher education charter; and if he will list the areas of research, the questionnaires used and the groups questioned.

Mr. Boswell: The Department for Education commissioned The British Market Research Bureau—BMRB—and Research Services Limited—RSL—for both the further education charter and the higher education charter. BMRB undertook research among students, parents and the wider community and RSL specifically consulted employers. All areas of research undertaken are reflected in both charters.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Brass Bands

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action he is taking to seek to ensure the continuation of the tradition of civilian brass bands.

Mr. Sproat: I am keen to find ways to encourage and help civilian brass bands to flourish. I regard such bands as an important element in our British cultural traditions.

I have recently received a number of representations about difficulties confronting some of our most prestigious brass bands. I am aware of the wider economic and social factors that might have contributed to specific instances of difficulty; for example, for colliery bands.

I am also keen to see the brass band tradition strengthened in schools. I shall be raising these subjects with other Government Departments. In order to gain a better understanding of the position from an arts funding perspective, and of the current state of the brass band movement, I am consulting the Arts Council and the British Federation of Brass Bands.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will provide figures for the amount his Department or the Office of Arts and Libraries has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Sproat: The amount of statutory sick pay reimbursed by the Department of Social Security to the Department of National Heritage, excluding its executive agencies, the Historic Royal Palaces Agency and the royal parks, from 1 April 1993 to 31 December 1993 was £7,572·73. Reimbursement to the Office of Arts and Libraries in the financial year 1992-93 was £1,393·93. No figures are available for the financial year 1991-92

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if his Department or any agencies for which he is responsible have engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Mr. Sproat: My Department has engaged the services of Touche Ross on two occasions since 1 July 1993. Neither of the agencies for which I am responsible has engaged Touche Ross's services during the same period.

Broadcasting Restrictions

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will take account in his review of braodcasting restrictions applying in the United Kingdom of the guidelines, issued on 20 January to Radio Telefis Eireann staff, and now applying to broadcasting in the Irish Republic; when he expects to complete his review of broadcasting restrictions; and if he will list the individuals and organisations which he has invited to submit views to him and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The outcome of the review will be announced very shortly. I do not propose to take special account of guidelines issued by RTE. I have taken account of the views of the broadcasting regulatory authorities in the United Kingdom, of all the main broadcasters themselves, and of those organisations including the NUJ which have directly approached my Department. I have not invited any individuals to submit views.

Tourism

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much central Government money was spent per head of the population on encouraging tourism in Cornwall in each year since 1979.

Mr. Sproat: The information is not available in this form. National and regional programmes funded by the British tourist authority and the English tourist board from grant-in-aid help to support tourism in all areas of the country, but it is not possible to say that a certain proportion of the grant-in-aid is specifically targeted on one particular area. However, the level of English tourist board support for the West Country tourist board, which covers Cornwall, were as follows:

Financial year	*Amount in £*
1979-80	82,895
1980-81	99,100
1981-82	106,600
1982-83	114,400
1983-84	124,140
1984-85	135,850
1985-86	141,962
1986-87	252,732
1987-88	273,911
1988-89	288,000
1989-90	334,500
1990-91	580,570
1991-92	582,766
1992-93	561,638

In the current financial year, in addition to the general funds allocated by the English tourist board to the West Country tourist board, £400,000 has been allocated to the Cornwall renewal programme.

National Lottery

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will publish details of all those who have applied to run the national lottery; when he expects to issue a licence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: The names and addresses of those organisations which have publicly announced their intention to apply for the main licence to run the national lottery are set out in my response to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) on 31 January, *Official Report,* columns 516-17). The director general of the national lottery will publish a full list of all those who apply after 14 February, which is the closing date for applications. The timing of the issue of the licence to run the national lottery is a matter for the director general.

Royal Palaces

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the cost of refurbishment of each of the royal apartments in each of the occupied royal palaces in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The total cost of refurbishment of each of the royal apartments in each of the occupied royal palaces in each of the last three years was:

	£000s
1991-92	
Apartment occupied by THR The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester at Kensington Palace	4
Apartment occupied by TRH The Duke and Duchess of Kent at St. James's Palace	10
Clarence House private apartments, occupied by HM Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother	45
TOTAL	59
1992-93	
Apartment occupied by HRH The Prince of Wales at St. James's Palace	6
Clarence House, private apartments	35
TOTAL	41
1993-94	
The forecast expenditure is:—	
Apartment occupied by TRH Prince and Princess Michael of Kent at Kensington Palace	6
Apartment occupied by HRH The Princess of Wales at Kensington Palace	1
Apartment occupied by HRH The Prince of Wales at St. James's Palace	43
Clarence House, private apartments	2
TOTAL	52

Information on expenditure prior to 1991-92 is not held in the form required.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is his Department's policy for dealing with employees found guilty of fraud.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* Where an employee is found guilty of fraud the circumstances of the case would be thoroughly investigated and an appropriate disciplinary penalty, which might include dismissal, would be invoked.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many employees were judged to be guilty of fraud in his Department in each year since 1989; and how many were dismissed.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The Department of National Heritage was established in April 1992, since when no employees have been found guilty of fraud.

Department (Set-up Costs)

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what were the total costs, including the acquisition of office premises, of setting up his Department.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The total non-recurrent cost of establishing my Department was £8·2 milion plus value added tax. My Department occupies leased premises on the Government estate under an inter-departmental agreement with DoE/Property Holdings. The terms of the leases are commercial-in-confidence.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 3 February.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 3 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Review Body Reports

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Prime Minister, if he will make a statement on the review body reports.

The Prime Minister: The 1994 reports of the review bodies on the pay of school teachers, senior civil servants, the senior military, the judiciary, the armed forces, doctors and dentists, nursing staff, midwives and health vistors and the professions allied to medicine have now been published. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. The Government are grateful to the members of the review bodies for the time and care which they have put into the preparation of the reports.

The Government's policy is that increases in pay must be fully met from existing budgets. Pay increases for public sector staff therefore have to be paid for by greater efficiency, or by savings in the cost of running Government itself. This position was made clear in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement on public sector pay on 14 September, and reaffirmed in his Budget statement and in the Government's evidence to the review bodies. It is fundamental to the Government's response to their recommendations.

The review bodies have made the following recommendations:

The School Teachers' Review Body has recommended a 2·9 per cent. increase in teachers' pay.

The Senior Salaries Review Body has recommended:

(i) an increase of 2·75 per cent. in the budget for performance-related pay for civil servants at grades 2 and 3, and a 2·75 per cent. increase in the pay of Permanent Secretaries.

(ii) A 2·75 per cent. increase in the pay of most of the senior armed forces officers in its remit.

(iii) A 2·75 per cent. increase in the pay of the judiciary.

The Armed Forces Pay Review Body has recommended a range of increases between 3·0 and 4·4 per cent. averaging 3·6 per cent. for the various ranks in its remit group.

The Doctors and Dentists Review Body has recommended a 3·0 per cent. increase in salaries, fees and allowances for doctors and dentists and the same increase in intended average net remuneration for general medical practitioners.

The Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine has recommended a 3·0 per cent. increase in national salary rates and a 2·0 per cent. increase in most leads and allowances.

The Government have taken its decisions on these recommendations on the basis of its policy on public sector pay. Except in the case of the armed forces, the Government accept the above increases and propose to implement them from the due date of 1 April. The costs will be met from the public expenditure totals published at Budget time. There will be no new money to finance these pay increases, and for the second year running there will be no call on the reserve.

In the case of the armed forces, the Government believe that the recommendations of the armed forces pay review body are too high to be implemented in full from 1 April. All ranks will receive pay increases of 2·7 per cent. from 1 April 1994, with the blance of the recommended awards paid from 1 January 1995.

The review body for nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions allied to medicine commented that, if the trusts had been ready to implement local pay, it would have recommended an increase in national pay rates for its remit groups of only 2 per cent. rather than 3 per cent., with further increases to be determined locally. The doctors and dentists review body similarly expressed support for moves towards local pay determination. The Government welcome and support these comments and intend to ensure that pay arrangements in both trusts and directly managed units in the NHS provide for a significant measure of local pay determination from next year. The necessary details will be discussed with the trusts and with the professions and with the staff sides in the coming months.

The senior salaries review body has restated its 1992 recommendation that possible future problems in maintaining its remit groups, particularly the judiciary, should be avoided by raising their pay levels over time. The review body has now recommended that the Government should seek to implement its 1992 recommendations for the judiciary plus annual uprating by 1 April 1999. The Government have already acknowledged the different position of the judiciary amongst the review body's remit groups and accepts this recommendation. The Government are currently considering a number of issues relating to the management of the senior civil service and the military. In that context it will take a view on the SSRB's recommendations on pay ranges for senior civil servants and the differential between one and two star officers.

The review body reports point the way to making further progress in extending performance-related pay in the public services. The doctors and dentists review body and the review body for nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions allied to medicine expressed support for developing performance pay at local level and urged that high priority should be given to establishing suitable arrangements in the coming year. The performance pay arrangements recommended last year by the school teachers review body have now been implemented and the review body intends to return to the issue of relating the pay of teachers still more closely to their performance. The senior salaries review body recommends reform of the performance pay scheme for grades 2 and 3 in the civil service through abolition of a standard pay increase, a larger performance pay budget and an increase in the width of pay ranges. The armed forces pay review body has appointed management consultants to assist it in addressing the issue of performance pay in its future work.

The Government support the review body recommendations on the development of performance-related pay and believe that they represent a valuable and effective contribution to the further development of remuneration in the public services.

1994 Review body recommendations

	Range of pay increases	*Cost*[1]	
	Per cent.	*£ million*	*Per cent.*
Schoolteachers (STRB)	2·9	309	2·9
Senior Civil Servants, Military and Judiciary (SSRB)			
CS Grades 1-3	2·75	1·3	2·75
Senior military	2·75	0·3	2·75
Judiciary	2·75	3·6	2·75
Total SSRB groups	2·75	5·2	2·75
Armed Forces	3·0-4·4	206	3·6
Doctors and dentists (DDRB)	3·0	158	3·0
Nurses and allied professions (NAPRB)			
Nurses and midwives	3·0	234	3·0
PAMs	3·0	26	3·0
Total NAPRB groups	3·0	260	3·0

[1] Costs include employers national insurance and superannuation payments to funded schemes.

HEALTH

General Practitioners

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy that GPs will not charge fees to persons on benefits for evidence in support of claims.

Dr. Mawhinney: Under their terms of service—schedule 2 to the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992,—general practitioners are required to issue a defined list of certificates to their patients free of charge, including those needed to support claims for a number of social security benefits. The list of certificates is kept under review.

Breast Feeding

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the figures for mothers breast feeding for each year from 1983.

(2) what efforts her Department has made to promote breast feeding in the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: A survey of infant feeding practices is carried out every five years on behalf of the Department of Health. The results of the latest of these surveys were set out in the report "Infant Feeding 1990", a copy of which is available in the Library. In 1985 the percentage of mothers who breast fed was 65 per cent.; in 1990 it was 64 per cent.

Based on unequivocal medical advice the Government have consistently supported breast feeding as the best means of feeding a baby. Measures have included the implementation of a voluntary code of practice for the marketing of infant formula and the banning of free or subsidised infant formula in national health service hospitals and clinics. The Government have also provided £265,000 in funding for the three voluntary organisations supporting breast feeding and the joint breast feeding initiative—from 1988-1992. In December 1992 it was announced that a national breast feeding working group was to be set up under the "Health of the Nation" initiative to

> "co-ordinate the next stages in a programme of action to promote and facilitate breast feeding, building on the work of the joint breast feeding initiative".

Dementia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to ensure that multidisciplinary assessment of people with dementia is available in every district health authority area.

Mr. Bowis: Since 1990 general practitioners have been required to offer an annual health check to patients aged 75 and over, and if evidence of severe cognitive impairment is found the GP will refer to the old age psychiatrist. It is for district health authorities to ensure that multi-disciplinary terms are in place to support the assessment of such patients.

Paediatric and Neo-natal Units

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines apply in relation to minimum nursing and medical staffing levels in paediatric and neo-natal units.

Dr. Mawhinney: The "Welfare of Children and Young People in Hospital", issued by the Department in July 1991 set the objective that a consultant paediatrician and at least two children's trained nurses should be available 24 hours a day to supervise the care of sick children and newborn babies and that provision of additional specially trained medical, midwifery and nursing staff should be commensurate to the degree of dependency of these children. The guide also commended additional guidance available from the English National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting and the British Paediatric Association.

Residential Accommodation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether she will amend existing guidance on charges for residential accommodation to allow spouses without an occupational pension of their own, to retain 50 per cent. of their partner's occupational pensions when he or she enters long-term care in a residential or nursing home;

(2) what steps she is taking to ensure that social services departments increase the personal expenses allowance of people in residential or nursing homes where this is necessary to support their spouse at home;

(3) what provision her Department has made for the continued financial well-being of carers when their relative or spouse with dementia enters long-term care in a residential nursing home.

Mr. Bowis: Guidance was sent to local authorities last month in LAC(94)1 reminding them that they have discretion to vary the personal expenses allowance to allow the resident to retain sufficient money to enable him or her to support his or her partner remaining at home where the partner has little or no income or capital of his or her own. This discretion could be extended to allow the resident to support a carer. Additionally, local authorities have discretion to ignore the value of property where a third party—such as someone who was caring for the resident at home—continues to live there. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Population Statistics

Mr. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the estimated population of each NHS region in each of the past five years.

Mr. Sackville: The latest population estimates, shown in the table, relate to mid-1991 and mid-1992. These take into account the results of the 1991 census of population. Retrospectively revised estimates for 1982-1990 will be published shortly in the "Office of Population Censuses and Surveys Monitor PP1/94/1", copies of which will be placed in the Library. The original annual estimates for 1981-1990 are available in the PP1 series of OPCS publications, copies of which are available in the Library.

Estimated mid-year resident population, persons all ages, thousands

Area	*1991*	*1992*
England and Wales	51,099·5	51,276·9
England	48,208·1	48,378·3
Northern RHA	3,091·7	3,098·9
Yorkshire RHA	3,680·9	3,698·0
Trent RHA	4,719·8	4,745·0
East Anglian RHA	2,082·7	2,089·4
North West Thames RHA	3,579·5	3,594·2
North East Thames RHA	3,786·0	3,798·5
South East Thames RHA	3,704·0	3,712·9
South West Thames RHA	3,033·0	3,042·7
Wessex RHA	2,979·4	2,993·3
Oxford RHA	2.560·0	2,581·4
South Western RHA	3,298·6	3,315·9
West Midlands RHA	5,265·6	5,277·6
Mersey RHA	2,415·8	2,412·5
North Western RHA	4,011·2	4,018·0
Wales	2,891·5	2,898·5

Notes: Figures may not add exactly due to rounding.
Source: Population estimates unit, OPCS.

Dentists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists there are in Lancashire; and how many and what percentage undertake private treatment only.

Dr. Mawhinney: The number of dentists in the general dental service practising in Lancashire family health services authority area on 30 September 1993 was 460. The number of dentists undertaking private treatment only is not available.

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the public appointments for which she is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. Sackville: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of Government relating to public appointments.

Children's Accidents

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the costs to the NHS for children's accidents *(a)* on the roads, *(b)* in the home, *(c)* in schools, and *(d)* in playgrounds for each year since 1987.

Mr. Bowis: The information available is from a study conducted by the Child Accident Prevention Trust with financial support from the Department. The trust estimated that in 1990-91 the cost to national health service hospitals and the ambulance service in treating accidental injuries to children under age 16 was some £230 million. Full information of the location of the accidents was not available, but mortality statistics collected by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys shows that, of the 480 accidental deaths among children in 1991, 283—59 per cent.—were caused by motor vehicle traffic accidents.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much her Department has spent on measures designed to prevent children's accidents for each year since 1987.

Mr. Bowis: Within the overall commitment of national health service staff and the Health Education Authority devoted to promoting children's health, a significant but unquantifiable proportion of their time is aimed at accident prevention. The Department has paid the following sums in grant aid to the Child Accident Prevention Trust under section 64 of the Public Health Act 1968:

Financial Year	*Grant*
1987-88	71,325
1988-89	93,500
1989-90	93,500
1990-91	106,050
1991-92	108,514
1992-93	103,000
1993-94	113,000

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide figures for the amount her Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Sackville: The following amounts of statutory sick pay provision have been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security: 1990-91 £256,874; 1991-92 £266,121 and 1992-93 £226,777.

Independent Schools (Inspection)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish the revised guidance note to social services departments on the inspection of independent schools under section 87 of the Children Act 1989.

Mr. Bowis: We shall issue draft revised guidance for consultation shortly.

Residential Care

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what current plans she has to change the capital or savings limit of £8,000 over which a person must pay the full cost of a place in residential care.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 21 June 1993 at column *39*.

Folic Acid

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has conducted to establish whether the taking of preparations containing folic acid by pregnant women reduces the likelihood of the birth of babies with spina bifida; what steps she has taken to publicise this information; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: In October 1991 an expert advisory group was set up in response to the publication of the final results from the Medical Research Council vitamin study group. Its report, "Folic Acid and the Prevention of Neural Tube Defects", published in December 1992, confirmed that women who increase their intake of folic acid before pregnancy can significantly reduce the risk of having a baby with neural tube defects. A copy of the report is available in the Library.

This advice was disseminated to doctors, senior nurses, midwives, health visitors and pharmacists and the Health Education Authority updated its publications to include the new guidance. The Department of Health has conducted a campaign to publicise findings in the press and media. Posters and complementary leaflets have been widely distributed within the national health service and to professional and voluntary bodies.

Special Hospitals

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a breakdown by race on the most convenient date, of the inmates held in each special hospital.

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Special Hospitals Service Authority, Mrs. Nelson, for details.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many suspected cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease have been identified since 31 May 1992.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals have been found to have suffered from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in the United Kingdom; how many current suspects there are; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Suspected cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease—CJD—in the United Kingdom are reported to Dr. R. G. Will, consultant neurologist, at the national CJD surveillance unit in Edinburgh.

One hundred and twenty suspected cases were referred to the CJD unit between 1 June 1992 and 1 January 1994. Following investigation, 69 have been classified as definite or probable cases of CJD.

Figures for the total number of definite and probable cases of CJD in the United Kingdom each year from 1985 are shown in the table.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in the United Kingdom, definite and probable cases by year of death 1985-1993

Year	*Total*
1985	28
1986	26
1987	22
1988	22
1989	28
1990	30
1991	36
1992	53
1993	[1]26

[1] Provisional total.

Source: CJD Surveillance Unit.

Note: The final figure for 1993 is likely to show some increase over the provisional total as diagnoses of people dying in 1993 are confirmed retrospectively. It is unlikely, however, to reach the 1992 figure.

Medical Treatment

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations she has received identifying instances in which it is alleged that medical treatment is allocated according to the purchaser's ability to pay; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: District health authorities are responsible for purchasing services based on their assessment of the health needs of their local population. It is for clinicians and not managers to decide who needs treatment immediately and who is put on a waiting list.

Prostate Cancer

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new diagnoses of cancer of the prostate were made in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The latest available information is shown in the table:

Registrations of newly diagnosed cases of cancer of the prostate (ICD 185)[1] for England and Wales, 1983-1987

	Number
1983	9,127
1984	9,524
1985	9,513
1986	10,180
1987	10,837

[1] International Classification of Disease, 9th Revision

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on screening for prostatic cancer.

Mr. Sackville: The key aim of any screening programme must be to secure a demonstrable improvement in health by increasing length of life and enhancing quality of life. There is, as yet, no evidence to suggest that this would be achieved in relation to prostate cancer. The Department of Health is pursuing research in screening through its own centrally commissioned programme and through the new national health service research and development programme. A copy of the Chief Medical Officer's speech to a recent *British Medical Journal* conference setting out current policy implementation issues for screening in the NHS will be placed in the Library.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average five year survival rate after diagnosis of prostatic cancer.

Mr. Sackville: The average survival rate after diagnosis of prostatic cancer in England and wales is 43 per cent. —based on cancers registered in 1981, the latest year for which a five-year span is available.

Operating Lease Arrangements

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has *(a)* instructed the NHS management executive and *(b)* notified NHS directors of finance that the provision for capital charge neutrality should no longer be applied when operating lease arrangements are submitted to the management executive for approval as part of the private finance initiative.

Mr. Sackville: Yes. Guidance on this matter was included in a letter sent by the director of finance of the National Health Service Management Executive to regional general managers and directors of finance on 7 December 1993, copies of the letter are available in the Library. The relevant passages are:

> "Regional allocations for capital charges reflect an initial move towards weighted capitation. The capital charges allocation is recurrent, and will be the starting point for further redistribution in 1995/96. The intention is that no distinction should be made between the allocation for capital charges and the allocation for other revenue, and they are used as a single revenue resource.
>
> "Where they have not already done so, RHAs are expected to start the process of redistribution of capital charges subregionally. The changes detailed above should remove a reported impediment to pursuing private finance options. The allocation a health authority receives will not be affected by changes in the asset base of its providers. Decisions on whether to pursue private finance (eg leasing) or direct purchase options should be based on value for money and transfer of risk criteria. RHAs and Outposts should ensure that this point is clearly understood by DHAs and Trusts".

GP Fundholders

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *888*, what reports she has received of breaches of the provisions of the regulations covering the uses to which the earnings of general practitioners in fundholding prctices may be put.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the management fee paid to *(a)* second wave *(b)* third wave and *(c)* fourth wave general practitioner fundholders in each (i) family health services authority, (ii) regional health authority and (iii) nationally in 1992 and 1993-94.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 26 January at column *298*. The figures for 1993-94 will not be available until this time next year.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to investigate the use to which general practitioner fundholders have put surplus funds from 1991-92.

Dr. Mawhinney: The uses to which savings may be put are set out in The National Health Service (Fundholding Practices) Regulations 1993, a copy of which is in the Library. Family health services authorities are responsible for authorising general practitioner fundholders' use of savings in accordance with the regulations.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many fundholding practices there are in the area of the Bexley and Greenwich family health services authority; and if she will list them with the amount of financial surplus for each practice in 1992-93.

Dr. Mawhinney: Regional health authorities are responsible for managing the general practitioner fundholding scheme in their areas and only regional level information is available centrally. For local information —in the South East Thames region—the hon. Member may wish to contact Peter Barker, chairman of the South East Thames regional health authority.

Hospital Activity Statistics

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the total cost of producing hospial activity figures; what are the benefits to patients resulting from these figures; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Hospital activity statistics are produced largely as a by-product of operational systems in the health service. This ensures that costs are kept to a minimum, but as a result the extra cost of producing the figures is impossible to quantify.

The statistics are used at all levels in the national health service and the Department of Health for contracting, monitoring performance and for planning health care. Central statistics are used for—inter alia—monitoring efficiency, securing and distributing NHS funds, accountability to Parliament and the public, support for policy initiatives such as the inquiry into London's health services, and for feeding back comparative performance measures to the NHS in health service indicators.

Accident and Emergency Ambulance Services

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research she has commissioned into the benefits of running accident and emergency ambulance services closely integrated to patient and contract services.

Mr. Sackville: We have commissioned no such research.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the response times by ambulances to 999 calls within the mid-Essex area for each of the last five years; what was the national average time for England as a whole for the same period; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Information on ambulance emergency response times is not collected centrally on an individual health authority basis. Information on the Essex ambulance service for each of the last five years is shown in the table.

Ambulance service emergency response times
Percentage of calls responded to within 20 minutes (1988-89 to 1990-91) and 19 minutes (1990-91 onwards)

	Essex Ambulance Service
1988-89	87·0
1989-90	79·1
1990-91	93·7
1991-92	96·5
1992-93	98·6

In 1990, following the acceptance of a report from the independent consultants ORH, a tighter response time for rural ambulance services was adopted. The response time target—now the patients charter standard—was changed from 20 to 19 minutes.

Lone Parents

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce measures to enable lone parents living on low incomes but not in receipt of benefits to claim free prescriptions, free school meals, free dental treatment and free spectacles; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Help with national health service prescription and dental charges and with the cost of optical services is already available to lone parents under the national health service low income scheme. The scheme ensures that no one need be detered from obtaining necessary medication and treatment on financial grounds. The arrangements for this help and the legislation governing entitlement to free school meals in Scotland are matters for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland. The legislation governing entitlement to free school meals in England and Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education.

Greenwich Healthcare Trust

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the people working in hospitals run by Greenwich healthcare trust who telephoned the Under-Secretary of State for Health in the week beginning Monday 24 January.

Mr. Bowis: A number of calls were received in my office. We have no intention of releasing such information as the conversations remain private between myself and the individuals concerned.

Management Consultants

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost by region of employing management consultants in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 14 December 1993, at column *558*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 1 February, *Official Report,* column *611.*

Anti-personnel Mines

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commowealth Affairs if he will support moves initiated by other Governments to establish a moratorium on the manufacture and export of anti-personnel land mines.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The initiative was proposed by the United States, and was tabled as a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly, calling for a moratorium on the export of anti-personnel land mines that pose grave dangers to civilian populations. The United Kingdom supported this resolution; however, in doing so, we stated our view that anti-personnel land mines directed at military targets are legitimate defensive weapons when used in compliance with the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention. If they are used in accordance with protocol II of the convention, and particularly if they are fitted with a self-destructing or self-neutralising mechanism, they do not pose grave dangers to civilian populations. We therefore think it would be wrong if the possession of self-destructing or self-neutralising anti-personnel mines were restricted to countries with the capacity to manufacture them. We already adhere to the provisions of the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention, and expect to be able to ratify it later this year.

There was no call for a moratorium on the manufacture of land mines. The United Kingdom has not manufactured or exported conventional anti-personnel land mines since 1982.

Yugoslavia

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet Lord Owen to discuss developments in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 2 February 1994]*: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs expects to meet Lord Owen on 7 February at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Letterboard

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many letters hon. Members may place on the letterboard; when such regulations were agreed; and what proposals the Committee is considering to improve the ability of hon. Members to contact each other through the letterboard.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The letterboard is intended to receive letters and messages of an urgent nature. For this reason, regulations have been in place for a number of years to limit to a maximum of six the number of letters placed by Members on the letterboard on any one sitting day. Increased demand for this service in recent years has placed further burdens on the letterboard; I have therefore asked the Serjeant at Arms to consider what further short and longer-term measures are needed to improve the system. His proposals will be considered by the Administration Committee and recommendations made to the appropriate authorities.

TRANSPORT

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has given to the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising regarding a prioritisation review of rail routes earmarked for early sale; what form such advice took; on what date such advice was issued; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, announced on 2 February 1993 the first seven service groups to be prepared for franchising. On 24 May the Secretary of State announced the remaining 18 groupings to be prepared for franchising, subject to some further work which resulted in a further announcement confirming all 25 groupings on 4 August.

It will be for the franchising director to decide the order in which franchises are offered for sale, taking into account both their readiness and market interest in bidding. We shall be asking the franchising director to prepare a programme for franchising all passenger services.

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department or any agencies for which he is responsible has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Mr. Norris: This firm was awarded an accountancy commission in connection with the channel tunnel rail link on 21 January 1994.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which special advisers in his Department are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondments.

Mr. MacGregor: Neither of my current special advisers, Sir Idris Pearce and Mrs. Laing, is seconded from other organisations.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were employed by DVLA in 1992-93; and how many sick days were taken by (i) men and (ii) women.

Mr. Key: The number of staff employed by DVLA at its Swansea headquarters on 31 March 1993 was 2,997—2,232 females and 765 males. Working days lost due to sick absence during 1992-93 were 22,887 for females and 15,905 for males.

On the same date, DVLA employed a further 1,566 staff—1,026 females and 540 males—in its network of local offices. Working days lost due to sick absences in these offices during 1992-93 were 17,135 but a breakdown by gender is not immediately available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information is to hand.

Channel Tunnel Concession

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report,* column 76, what is his Department's broad estimate of the revenue forgone; and what are the estimated parameters of the estimated costs.

Mr. Freeman: Since competition for the services provided by the channel tunnel in 2042 cannot be predicted now, and since the requirements for repair and updating of the tunnel nearly 50 years ahead are equally difficult to predict, I am unable to judge either the revenue or the costs flowing from the concession in that year. It follows that I am equally unable to say with any precision what the net present value of the extension which the British and French Governments have granted might be.

Deregulation

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which organisations were consulted by his Department, on each of the recommendations of the business deregulation task forces before they were agreed and action proposed in the DTI document, "Deregulation: Cutting the Red Tape".

Mr. Norris: Each of the task force recommendations agreed or agreed in principle by the Government has been or will be the subject of appropriate consultation with interested parties.

Oil Pollution

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet Care for the Wild and other charitable organisations involved to discuss costs incurred in their clean up operation of marine diesel fuel pollutants recently found off the coasts of Scotland and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 February 1994]*: No. While I recognise the value of the work done by charitable organisations in this field, when they decide to help in clean-up operations they bear the costs themselves. They may have a claim for compensation from the polluter if he can be identified. Beach samples from the affected areas of coastline in Scotland and Northern Ireland have been sent to the Laboratory of the Government Chemist for analysis, and the results are awaited. If it proves possible to trace the polluter, the Department of Transport would consider submitting a combined claim from all those organisations including Care for the Wild who have been involved in clean up activity as a result of these recent incidents.

WALES

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans to buy or borrow any photographs.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Redwood: There are seven on my walls in London and six in Cardiff.

Schools (Ballots)

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools there were in each local authority in Wales by 1 January; how many in each case had held ballots under section 61 of the Education Act 1988; how many ballots in each case resulted in votes in favour of seeking grant-maintained status; and how many ballots in each case resulted in votes against seeking grant-maintained status.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is as follows:

Local Education Authority	*Number[1] of primary schools*	*Number of primary schools that have held ballots*	*Outcome of ballot*		*Number[1] of secondary schools*	*Number of secondary schools that have held ballots*	*Outcome of ballot*	
			for GM	*aginst GM*			*for GM*	*against GM*
Clwyd	243	3	2	1	29	[2]7	4	3
Dyfed	313	1	0	1	31	0	0	0
Gwent	213	1	1	0	31	4	4	0
Gwynedd	190	1	1	0	23	0	0	0
Mid Glamorgan	305	1	1	0	42	0	0	0
Powys	107	1	1	0	13	1	0	1
South Glamorgan	158	1	0	1	25	3	3	0
West Glamorgan	164	0	0	0	26	3	1	2

[1] The information in these columns relates to September 1993

[2] This figure includes one school which has balloted twice

Farmers Charter

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to set up a farmers charter, with particular reference to the late payment of debts to small business.

Mr. Redwood: I intend to publish targets for dealing with grant, subsidy and licence applications in the next financial year.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the question of organophosphate sheep dips; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Veterinary Products Committee has recommended the introduction as soon as possible of a new certificate of competence for sheep dipping, which the Government have accepted. Interested parties have been consulted formally on the proposed order, in accordance with the Medicines Act 1968. Five responses have been received to date. We shall be considering all comments carefully before proceeding.

Wind Farms

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the subject of the Welsh Office planning guidelines relating to wind farms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Since the publication of planning policy guidance note No. 22, "Renewable Energy", my right hon. Friend has received two representations about its application to wind energy.

Beaches

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many beaches in Wales were accorded the EC blue flag in each year since 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The numbers of EC blue flag awards in Wales were as follows:

Year	*Number of awards*
1990	1
1991	3
1992	2
1993	3

Abattoirs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the question of increasing weekly animal slaughter units in small and medium-sized abattoirs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The EC fresh meat directive contains arrangements for small slaughterhouses, which can benefit from a special list of structural requirements. They have to comply in full with the EC hygiene rules. Following discussions in the Council of Agriculture Ministers, the Council agreed to increase the throughput limit for small slaughterhouses for which operators wish to take advantage of those arrangements from 12 to 20 units per week until 31 December 1994. During this period the Commission will review the implications of the meat hygiene directives for traditional small businesses. The Government will work closely with the Commission as it carries out this review. No representations have been received recently on this matter.

Drws y Nant Improvement Scheme

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Drws y Nant improvement scheme on the Dolgallatt to Bala road will commence; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Draft orders for that scheme are due to be published this spring. Commencement of the work is dependent on the satisfactory completion of those statutory procedures.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what the closing date was for the submission of Welsh language sheep annual premium forms in 1993; and what it is for 1994;

(2) what the closing date was for the submission of sheep annual premium forms in 1993; and what it is for 1994.

Mr. Redwood: The dates for both types of forms are identical and are:

1993 scheme

First application period—15 December 1992
Second application period—20 February 1993

Claims received within 10 working days after those dates were also accepted, subject to a 30 per cent. penalty reduction.

1994 scheme

First application period—15 December 1993
Second application period—20 February 1994

Claims received during the 20 calendar days immediately following these dates will still be accepted subject to a 1 per cent. penalty reduction for each working day which has elapsed.

House Renovation Grants

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to collect information on the waiting lists for approval of house renovation grants for each district council in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I do not propose to hold such information. It is for local councils to make decisions on grants within six months of receipt of an application and they must determine their own local priorities.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to relax for a further period the rules regarding use of capital receipts from the sale of council houses.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much additional funding will be available for each district council in Wales, and for Wales as a whole, as a result of relaxation in the budget of rules regarding the use of capital receipts from the sale of council houses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information is being compiled on the estimated levels of additional usable receipts available to local authorities during the relaxation period. I shall write to the hon. Member when figures are available and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the specific effects on Wales of the sustainable development action plan launched on 25 January.

Mr. Redwood: The United Kingdom strategy for sustainable development examines important environment and development issues at the national level over a 20-year period, and considers the role that central and local government, business, the voluntary sector and individual citizens might play in moving the country towards sustainable development. Some important measures are already under way in Wales in support of sustainability, for example the Welsh Development Agency's major land reclamation programme. The Welsh Office will be seeking to ensure that Welsh interests are properly catered for in the follow-up action planned on the strategy.

Cancer, Gwynedd

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research has been conducted on the incidence of cancer in Gwynedd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1987 the Welsh Office commissioned Professor Hubert Campbell to undertake an investigation into cancer rates along the north Wales coast for the period 1974-83. Professor Campbell's report was published in 1988 and a copy was placed in the Library of the House.

The following reports included sites in Gwynedd within a more general study:

"Cancer incidence and mortality in the vicinity of nuclear installations in England and Wales 1959-80". Office of Population Censuses and Surveys: Studies on Medical and Population Subjects No. 51. Published by HMSO ISBN 0 11 6910682.

"Geographical variation in mortality from leukaemia and other cancers in England and Wales in relation to proximity to nuclear installations 1969-78". P. J. Cook-Mozzafari, S. C. Dargy, R. Dell, D. Fomman, C. Herman, M. C. Pike and T. Vincent. British Journal of Cancer (1989) 59, 476-485.

The Welsh Office is currently investigating the incidence of certain types of cancer around Trawsfynydd and Wylfa nuclear installations. The results will be made available in due course.

Press Releases

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes have been agreed since his answer of 5 February 1993, *Official Report,* column *562,* on proposals to issue departmental press releases by electronic mail.

Mr. Redwood: None.

THORP

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of representations received from county district and borough councils in Wales on the subject of the proposed thermal oxide reprocessing plant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made a full statement to the House on 15 December about the outcome of extensive public consultation in connection with the authorisation of radioactive discharges from the whole Sellafield site. Seventeen of the representations considered received were from Welsh local authorities, six being from county councils.

Welsh Economic Model

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has agreed to contribute to the funding of a model of the Welsh economy by the Cardiff Business School Welsh economic research unit.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Office has made no contribution.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funding the Welsh Development Agency received and from what sources in each year since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: The information is set out in the following table:

£ million

	Grant in aid	[1]*Total gross expenditure*
1979-80	45·1	62·6
1980-81	65·1	88·0
1981-82	74·0	88·1
1982-83	53·7	78·2
1983-84	37·1	67·9
1984-85	32·1	70·0
1985-86	30·3	63·5
1986-87	31·7	72·0
1987-88	52·3	98·6
1988-89	61·9	115·1
1989-90	69·8	133·4
1990-91	81·2	149·2
1991-92	87·2	158·3
1992-93	78·4	165·2
1993-94	[2]69·6	[2]160·6

[1] Gross expenditure is funded from grant in aid, receipts, public dividend capital and borrowings.

[2] Forecast outturns.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Redwood: The amounts reimbursed were:

	£
1992-93	91,153·57
[1]1993-94	84,661·12

[1] April to December.

Figures for previous years are not available.

Milk

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dairy farmers in Wales have already signed and returned contracts to Milk Marque.

Mr. Redwood: The number of producers signed up by Milk Marque and other potential buyers is a matter for those concerned.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current timetable for the introduction of the Milk Marque scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Milk Marketing Board has said that it intends to submit amendments to its scheme of reorganisation. One of these is to propose 1 November 1994 as vesting day for Milk Marque. In order for this to be possible, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I would need to make an order extending the present deadline of 1 October for the revocation of the current milk marketing scheme.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has granted nature conservation orders for the protection of sites of special scientific interest under section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; how many are still in operation; how many he has refused in Wales since 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Since 1982, five orders have been made of which two are still in operation. Two have been refused.

Wales in Europe

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in relation to the publicity material of the Welsh Development Agency, in respect of the Wales in Europe campaign, the Wales European Centre in Brussels and the accords signed with Catalonia, Baden-Würtemberg, Lombardy and Rhône-Alpes.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy were reported on farms in Clwyd in 1992 and 1993; and if he will give the number of beasts affected, indicating the local authority district/borough area.

Mr. Redwood: The number of reported cases of suspected bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the county of Clwyd in 1992 was 752, of which 570 cases were subsequently confirmed. In 1993, 730 suspected cases were reported and 542 subsequently confirmed. The figures for 1993 are necessarily incomplete as the basis of the statistics is confirmed cases by report in the appropriate period. It is not possible to indicate the local authority except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of whether every precaution is taken to ensure that the human food chain remains free of infection by BSE.

Mr. Redwood: The Government are advised on matters relating to spongiform encephalopathies by the spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee. The Government are advised that the measures introduced since BSE was identified, which are based on independent scientific advice, prevent any risk of transmission to humans.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research he has initiated into the potential link between BSE and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: A wide-ranging research programme on BSE is in place, based on the recommendations of the consultative committee on research into spongiform encephalopathies. This committee was reconstituted as the spongiform encephalopathies advisory committee, which reports regularly to the Government. Its last report was issued in June 1992.

Doctors are asked to report every suspected case of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease to the national CJD surveillance unit in Edinburgh. The circumstances of each case are recorded fully and in particular all cases are examined for possible sources of transmission and any occupational factor. The unit was established in 1990 and provided reports in 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning BSE and the human food chain, including his advice concerning meat by-products.

Mr. Redwood: The Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health in May 1990 advised:

> "Beef can be safely eaten by anyone, both adults and children including patients in hospital".

This has been repeated by his successor, Dr. Calman. Dr. Calman further stated that he was confident that all necessary action is being taken to safeguard public health.

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department or any agencies for which he is responsible has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Mr. Redwood: Yes.

Health Promotion Authority for Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level and frequency of participation in overseas conferences and seminars of the director and staff of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The chief executive and staff of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales may take part in overseas conferences and visits to the extent that this assists their work in promoting better health in Wales and in generating income for this purpose. The former chief executive of the authority was also professor of health promotion and health education and head of the institute of health promotion at the university of Wales college of medicine and undertook overseas visits in that connection until 2 February 1994.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales concerning the value and volume of consultation work carried out in Brazil; and what evaluation he has carried out or will carry out in relation to such work.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Health Promotion Authority for Wales has not carried out or funded any consultation work in Brazil.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in relation to the Health Promotion Authority for Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In recent weeks, I have received two letters from the hon. Member.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the duties of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales in relation to the promotion of better health in Latin America.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The primary function of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales is to undertake health promotion activity in Wales. It may only engage in international work where there is a tangible benefit to Wales from that activity. Such activity has not so far included South America.

Epidemiological Research

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for extensive epidemiological research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office will continue to support United Kingdom-wide epidemiological research in collaboration with other Government Departments—notably the Department of Health—and the research councils.

Teachers

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each local education authority how many full-time equivalent teachers were employed in January 1993.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is contained in "Statistics of Education and Training in Wales: Schools", No. 2, 1994—table 6.02—published on 2 February 1994.

Right-to-repair Scheme

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of Wales whether the new right-to-repair scheme for council tenants will apply in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, laid before the House on Monday 31 January the Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/133) which will introduce the new right-to-repair scheme in both England and Wales.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction on 31 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *477*.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Senior Science Posts (Women)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many female applicants there have been for senior science posts in the public service, Government Departments, agencies and the research councils at civil service grades 3, 4 and 5 and above in the period 1 January 1993 to 18 January 1994; how many female appointments have been made to these grades, by grade; and what assessment he has made as to the consistency of these figures with the policy outlined in the White Paper "Realising our Potential;"

(2) how many females have been appointed to grade 3 science posts in Government Departments, agencies and the research councils in the past 12 months; and what steps the Chancellor will be making to encourage the appointment of women to these senior posts following the publication of the White Paper. "Realising our Potential".

Mr. Waldegrave: Over the last 12 months, there have been six senior science posts—grade 5 and above—within the civil service advertised through open competition and 10 such posts within the research councils.

For the six posts filled through open competition, there were 21 female applicants—out of a total of 317—none of whom were successful. For the 10 research council posts, there were only two female applicants, and again neither was successful.

For the 12 months to the end of September 1993, there were 24 senior science posts at grades 3, 4 or 5 filled by internal appointees; no females were appointed. In December, Mrs. Helen Williams was appointed to a grade 3 post as head of the Transdepartmental S and T group in the Office of Science and Technology—OST.

The White Paper on science, engineering and technology describes women as the country's biggest single most under-valued and therefore under-used human resource. The Office of Science and Technology will shortly be publishing a report by an independent working group of eminent scientists on how to make greater use of the talents of women in science, engineering and technology.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list each executive agency which has been established since the "Next Steps" initiative commenced; and if he will list any which existed before this initiative.

Mr. David Davis: The executive agencies established under the next steps initiative are as follows. No executive agencies existed previously.

Next Steps Agencies established to date

Agency	*Launch date*
Accounts Services Agency	1 October 1991
ADAS	1 April 1992
Army Base Repair Organisation	1 April 1993
Building Research Establishment	2 April 1990
Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments)	2 April 1991
Central Office of Information	5 April 1990
Central Science Laboratory	1 April 1992
Central Statistical Office	19 November 1991
Central Veterinary Laboratory	2 April 1990
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment	1 April 1991
Chessington Computer Centre	1 April 1993
Civil Service College	6 June 1989
Companies House	3 October 1988
Compensation Agency	1 April 1992
Defence Accounts Agency	1 April 1991
Defence Analytical Services Agency	1 July 1992
Defence Animal Centre	1 June 1993
Defence Operational Analysis Centre	1 July 1992
Defence Postal and Courier Services	1 July 1992
Defence Research Agency	2 April 1991
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	2 April 1990
Driver and Vehicle Licensing (NI)	2 August 1993
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency	1 April 1992
Driving Standards Agency	2 April 1990
Duke of York's Royal Military School	1 April 1992
DVOIT[1]	1 April 1992
Employment Service	2 April 1990
Fire Service College	1 April 1992
Forensic Science Service	1 April 1991
Government Property Lawyers	1 April 1993
Historic Royal Palaces Agency	1 October 1989
Historic Scotland	2 April 1991
Her Majesty's Prison Service	1 April 1993
HMSO	14 December 1988
Hydrographic Office	6 April 1990
Insolvency Service	21 March 1990
Intervention Board	2 April 1990
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	30 October 1989
Land Registry	2 July 1990
Medicines Control Agency	11 July 1991
Meteorological Office	2 April 1990
Military Survey	2 April 1991
National Physical Laboratory	3 July 1990
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	18 April 1989
Natural Resources Institute	2 April 1990
Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation	1 April 1992
NEL	5 October 1990
NHS Estates	1 April 1991
NHS Pensions Agency	20 November 1992
Northern Ireland Child Support Agency	5 April 1993
Occupational Health Service	2 April 1990
Ordnance Survey	1 May 1990
Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland	1 April 1992
Patent Office	1 March 1990
Paymaster	1 April 1993
Pesticides Safety Directorate	1 April 1993
Planning Inspectorate	1 April 1992
Public Record Office	1 April 1992
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	6 July 1989
Queen Victoria School	1 April 1992
Radiocommunications Agency	2 April 1990
RAF Maintenance	2 April 1991
Rate Collection Agency	1 April 1991

Agency	*Launch date*
Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency	2 April 1991
Registers of Scotland	6 April 1990
Royal Mint	2 April 1990
Royal Parks Agency	1 April 1993
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	1 April 1992
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	12 April 1991
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	1 April 1993
Scottish Prison Service	1 April 1993
Scottish Record Office	1 April 1993
Security Facilities Executive	15 October 1993
Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)	24 April 1991
Social Security Agency	1 July 1991
Social Security Benefits Agency	2 April 1991
Social Security Child Support Agency	5 April 1993
Social Security Contributions Agency	2 April 1991
Social Security Information Technology Services Agency	2 April 1990
Social Security Resettlement Agency	24 May 1989
Teachers' Pensions Agency	1 April 1992
The Buying Agency	31 October 1991
Training and Employment Agency	2 April 1990
Transport Research Laboratory	2 April 1992
United Kingdom Passport Agency	2 April 1991
Valuation and Lands Agency	1 April 1993
Valuation Office	30 September 1991
Vehicle Certification Agency	2 April 1990
Vehicle Inspectorate	1 August 1988
Veterinary Medicine Directorate	2 April 1990
Warren Spring Laboratory	20 April 1989
Wilton Park	1 September 1991
Customs and Excise (31 Executive Units)[2]	1 April 1991
Inland Revenue (31 Executive Offices)[2]	1 April 1992

[1] Subsequently privatised on 17 December 1993.

[2] Departments operating fully on Next Steps lines.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Illegal Immigrants (Employment)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what report he has received at his Queen Anne's gate office concerning the employment of suspected illegal immigrants; when his authority was sought to apprehend such employees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend is routinely advised of proposed enforcement operations of a major or sensitive nature, but his authority has not been sought to apprehend suspected immigration offenders employed at the Home Office, Queen Anne's gate.

Gatwick Passengers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for a nationwide operation this week to track down passengers who arrived at Gatwick on 21 December and who were given leave to enter the United Kingdom as visitors; how many such operations he has authorised over the past year, to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Where there is reason to believe that a passenger from the flight is in breach of the immigration laws, the case will be followed up in the usual way. No nationwide operation is planned, nor was such an operation conducted in 1993.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *329-30*, what is the total cost, to date, of removing passengers on flight ULE966, which landed at Gatwick on 21 December, who were refused entry to the United Kingdom, or granted temporary admission pending removal and removed including the costs of flights and escorts; what was the total cost of detention; where they were detained; if any third party is liable for meeting all or part of the costs of removal or detention; and if he will make a statement;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, columns *162-63*, what has been the total cost, to date, of removing from the United Kingdom passengers on flight BA1262 (KT310) which arrived at Gatwick on 15 December, including the costs of flights and escorts; what was the total cost of detaining other of those passengers; where they were detained; if any third party is liable for meeting all or part of the costs of removal or detention; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Those passengers refused entry from flights ULE966 and BA1262 and not removed on the charter flight on 15 December were removed under arrangements made directly by the inbound carrier or its agents and the costs are a matter for them. The total detention cost is still being calculated. Those detained were held in detention accommodation at Gatwick, Newhaven and Campsfield house. Police and Prison Service accommodation was also used.

Where the carrying company or its agents are given directions under paragraph 8 of schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971 to remove a passenger or to make arrangements to do so, they are responsible for all the costs involved, including those of any necessary in-flight escorts.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received, to date, from the Jamaican high commission in London concerning flight BA1262 (KT310) arriving at Gatwick on 15 December and flight ULE966 arriving at Gatwick on 21 December; what was the nature of those representations; what discussions have taken place between him and his officials and representatives of the high commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Immigration Service at Gatwick was in touch with the Jamaican high commission on the days of arrival of both flights.

As I stated in my reply to the hon. Member on 11 January at column 147 the high commission has maintained a close interest in the treatment of its nationals who were refused entry. A representative of the high commission was among a delegation I met on 18 January.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *329-30*, what are *(a)* the names, *(b)* the ages and *(c)* the sex of the passengers on flight ULE966 arriving at Gatwick on 21 December who have absconded from temporary admission; what were the terms of the temporary admission which they were granted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is normal practice not to disclose the names of individual passengers. Of the six referred to in my earlier reply, five are females aged 14, 16, 20, 23 and 25 and one is a male aged 16. One further female refused entry, aged 33, failed to report back from temporary admission on 26 January. A woman aged 25 also absconded from temporary admission before a decision was reached in her case.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what period those Jamaican citizens who arrived at Gatwick on 21 December on flight ULE966 and were given leave to enter the United Kingdom were allowed to enter.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The majority sought entry as visitors and were given leave to enter for six months; 20 were given leave to enter until 17 January 1994.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *329-30*, what were the ages and sex of the children aged 16 years or under who arrived on flight ULE966 who were refused entry; if any were travelling unaccompanied; were any of the 10 who were removed from the United Kingdom were travelling unaccompanied; what is the age and sex of the child who has absconded from temporary admission; and if the child was accompanied.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Of the 14 children referred to in my earlier reply seven are male and seven are female. Details of their ages are as follows:

3 aged 16
1 aged 14
2 aged 13
1 aged 12
3 aged 11
1 aged 9
1 aged 8
1 aged 4
1 aged 3.

Four were unaccompanied. Four of the 10 children so far removed were unaccompanied. Three children have now absconded, a male aged 16 and two females aged 16 and 14, one of whom arrived unaccompanied.

Disclosure of Information

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *331*, what was the nature of the disclosure of information to a newspaper which may have taken place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The investigation relates to the possibility of unauthorised disclosure to a newspaper of information about an operation conducted by the police and the Immigration Service enforcement directorate.

Immigration Officers (Powers)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discretion immigration officers may exercise in deciding what period of leave to grant; and for how long those granted leave to enter may lawfully remain in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The immigration rules provide certain periods for which a person seeking entry in various categories should normally be admitted. A person who has lawfully obtained leave to enter will normally be allowed to remain, provided he or she complies with any conditions attached to the leave, until the end of the period granted or the expiry of any variation of that leave.

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department or any agencies for which he is responsible has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Home Office has let five contracts to Touche Ross since 1 July 1993.

Telemillion Scheme

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations have been carried out into the status in terms of the Lottery and Amusements Act 1976 of the telemillion scheme operated by Interactive Telephone Services Group plc.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Any investigation of allegations of criminal offences under the 1976 Act would be a matter for the police.

Immigration Powers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *329*, under what powers, apart from the Immigration (Carriers Liability) Act 1987, he can demand any third party to defray all or part of the costs of *(a)* detention, *(b)* escorting and *(c)* removing from the United Kingdom (i) any person refused entry to visit the United Kingdom and (ii) any person granted temporary admission pending removal who is removed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Those contained in paragraph 19 of schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971.

Exclusion Order (Withdrawal)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now arrange for the exclusion order issued against the president of [illegible] Fein to be withdrawn; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: No.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the planned expenditure on the criminal injuries compensation scheme for each future financial year to 1997-98 at 1993-94 prices.

Mr. Maclean: Forecast expenditure on criminal injuries compensation, including the costs of administration, in the next three financial years is currently as follows:

	In cash terms *£ million*	*At 1993-94 prices* *£ million*
1994-95	212	204
1995-96	223	206
1996-97	170	153

No estimate has yet been made in respect of 1997-98.

Prisons (Drugs)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to introduce legislation to facilitate drug testing in prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The Government believe it is essential to take action to deal with the problem of illicit drug use in our prisons. I therefore intend to bring forward a clause for inclusion in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill which will allow the Prison Service to test prisoners for drug abuse. In addition to this a new prison rule will be made by statutory instrument under the Prisons Act 1952 which will make the use of illicit drugs a disciplinary offence. I understand my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland, will bring forward a similar measure.

We believe that these measures will play a significant part in tackling illicit drug use and its deleterious effect on the maintenance of good order and discipline in our prisons.

Prison Education

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he has set a minimum standard of education for prisoners to reach before leaving prison; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the curriculum for prison education for specified prisoners throughout the prison system; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will make a policy statement on standards of prison education;

(4) what is *(a)* the target and *(b)* average actual number of education hours per week for prisoners in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 3 February 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the provision of education in penal establishments in England and Wales.

The policies and standards for prison education are set out in the White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice" (Cm 1647), in Prison and Young Offender Institution Rules, in Prison Standing Orders and in supplementary guidance.

Education programmes should enable prisoners to learn effectively, should particularly identify and provide help for those prisoners who have difficulty reading or writing and who are unable to do simple arithmetic, and should provide appropriate help to those prisoners who have inadequate social skills. Over and above fulfilling these basic needs, programmes aim to develop a broad based educational experience for people in custody.

Education in prison is provided under contract by Further Education Colleges and other direct education providers in the community and to comparable standards. The curriculum at any individual prison establishment is agreed between the governor and the education provider and will take account of the assessed learning needs of the inmate population. The capabilities and needs of individual prisoners vary, but programmes encourage prisoners to acquire not only worthwhile qualifications but also wider exposure to the arts and handicrafts. Education, other than for young offenders under the age of 17, is not compulsory and setting a minimum educational standard for all prisoners to reach before release would not be appropriate.

The Prison Service sets overall targets for the number of hours each prisoner should spend on a range of purposeful activities, including work, education and training, but not for individual regime activities. The number of hours that prisoners are engaged in education has, however, increased in recent years from 5·56 million in 1987-88 to 7·57 million in 1992-93.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions were agreed on the post election review on arrangements for inspecting marked registers after elections in their home electoral district rather than in London.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) on 20 January at column 747. Home Office officials are in consultation with officials in the Lord Chancellor's Department about the suggestion.

Prison Building

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons have completed all the design, town planning and public inquiry stages and are ready to commence building in the next financial year; and how many new prisons are in the course of construction.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, dated 3 February 1994.

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the new prison building programme.

There is one new prison currently under construction at Doncaster. This is due to open in the summer this year and will be the twenty-first prison to be built under the current programme.

A further six new prisons have been announced but it is not planned to begin construction of any of these in the next financial year, 1994-95.

Sites at Fazakerley in Merseyside and at Bridgend in South Wales have been identified for the first two prisons. The proposal to build a prison on the Fazakerley site was the subject of a non-statutory public local inquiry held between 26 October and 10 November 1993 and we are awaiting the outcome. We have outline planning clearance to build a prison on the site at Bridgend.

Prostitutes

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women who were engaged in prostitution activities were murdered or severely assaulted in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Maclean: The information available relates to homicide offences in which the relationship between the victim and the suspect has been recorded as prostitute and client, and is set out in the table.

Similar information on assaults is not recorded centrally.

Recorded homicides where relationship was prostitute/client

Year	*Number*
1983	2
1984	—
1985	2

Year	Number
1986	3
1987	—
1988	3
1989	2
1990	2
1991	—
1992	—

Probation and Bail Hostels

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each of the past three years and estimate for the next three years, the number of probation and bail hostels, the number of places and the occupancy rates; if he will estimate the cost for each place and for each used place; and what are the comparable figures for the cost of gaol.

Mr. Maclean: The available information is as follows:

1. Numbers

Year	Number of hostels	Number of places	Average occupancy per cent.
1990-91	108	2,190	79
1991-92	111	2,444	74
1992-93	114	2,656	64
1993-94	115	2,690	70
1994-95	107	2,560	83
1995-96	107	2,680	83

2. Costs (expressed annually in terms of 80 per cent. Home Office grant towards running costs)

Year	Cost per place (£)	Cost per used place (£)
1990-91	7,352	9,306
1991-92	7,447	10,061
1992-93	9,130	14,265
1993-94	9,803	14,005
1994-95	9,887	11,912
1995-96	9,974	12,019

Figures for the cost of prison places are not readily available in a comparable form.

Road Accidents

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the number of road accidents *(a)* per police officer and *(b)* per 100,000 population for each year since 1979 for the South Wales, Thames Valley, Kent, Lancashire, Avon and Somerset and Hampshire police authority areas; and what were the comparable totals for all non-metropolitan and Welsh non-metropolitan police authority areas.

Mr. Key: The information requested is shown in the following two tables.

Accidents by Police Force area: 1979-1992

Rate

	Rate per Police Officer					
Year of Accident	*Lancashire*	*Thames Valley*	*Hampshire*	*Kent*	*Avon and Somerset*	*South Wales*
1979	1·9	2·8	2·5	2·4	1·9	1·6
1980	1·9	2·2	2·4	2·4	1·9	1·5
1981	1·8	2·5	2·4	2·4	1·8	1·5
1982	1·9	2·6	2·5	2·4	1·9	1·5
1983	1·8	2·6	2·4	2·4	1·8	1·4
1984	1·9	2·8	2·7	2·4	1·8	1·4
1985	1·9	2·6	2·6	2·2	1·7	1·4
1986	1·8	2·6	2·5	2·2	1·7	1·5
1987	1·7	2·4	2·4	2·1	1·6	1·5
1988	1·7	2·4	2·6	2·0	1·7	1·6
1989	1·9	2·4	2·6	2·1	1·6	1·7
1990	1·9	2·3	2·5	2·1	1·6	1·7
1991	1·8	2·0	2·2	2·0	1·5	1·5
1992	1·9	2·1	2·1	2·0	1·4	1·5

Accidents by Police Force area: 1979-1992

Rate

	Rate per 100,000 population					
Year of Accident	*Lancashire*	*Thames Valley*	*Hampshire*	*Kent*	*Avon and Somerset*	*South Wales*
1979	430·3	438·8	507·2	465·0	410·6	371·4
1980	425·1	380·0	496·1	466·4	406·9	363·6
1981	415·7	433·4	493·7	468·3	407·7	361·3
1982	430·2	446·4	519·9	472·9	416·8	366·4
1983	405·8	449·2	496·1	455·7	389·5	342·8
1984	430·2	499·4	536·4	465·1	378·7	346·6
1985	434·1	459·3	514·2	426·4	364·8	340·9
1986	404·4	467·5	508·9	428·2	360·6	355·0
1987	391·5	432·4	486·5	405·8	344·9	356·0
1988	395·3	438·9	507·9	388·7	357·1	379·8
1989	426·6	448·8	520·5	414·3	342·6	409·9
1990	435·1	434·8	501·8	407·1	337·2	394·0
1991	413·0	383·0	449·8	387·3	317·3	349·4
1992	428·6	395·0	445·0	402·1	296·7	346·9

Accidents in non-metropolitan areas 1979-92

	Rate per police officer		*Rate per 100,000 population*	
Year of accident	*England—non metropolitan areas*	*Wales—non metropolitan areas*	*England—non metropolitan areas*	*Wales—non metropolitan areas*
1979	2·3	1·8	452	403
1980	2·2	1·8	442	391
1981	2·2	1·7	441	386
1982	2·3	1·8	454	394
1983	2·2	1·6	432	367
1984	2·3	1·7	454	375
1985	2·2	1·6	439	362
1986	2·3	1·7	443	373
1987	2·1	1·7	424	371
1988	2·2	1·8	436	391
1989	2·3	1·8	454	411
1990	2·2	1·8	446	411
1991	2·0	1·7	399	375
1992	1·9	1·6	393	361

ENVIRONMENT

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evaluation he has made of the use of management agreements as a means of protecting sites of special scientific interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend considers that the United Kingdom's existing system for preventing damage to notified sites under the SSSI provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the land-use planning system together provide effective safeguards. The financial guidelines, which provide a basis for calculating payments in management agreements, are currently under review. The revised guidelines will be the subject of public consultation before they come into force.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times he has granted nature conservation orders for the protection of sites of special scientific interest under section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; how many are still in operation; how many he has refused in England since 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: At 31 December 1993, 29 orders had been made. Of these, 10 have been revoked after satisfactory protection for the site was agreed with the owners, one was revoked after a local inquiry as the site did not meet the legal requirements for an order and 18 are in place. In the majority of these, negotiations towards a management agreement are continuing. Orders have been refused on three occasions. It is a measure of the success of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and of the voluntary principle policy that the Secretary of State has used his powers on so few occasions.

Local Government Review

Mr. Marland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the Government's intentions for the local government review following the High Court judgment of the Lancashire challenge.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking in response to the High Court judgment in the action brought by Lancashire and Derbyshire county councils which deletes as unlawful a sentence from the November 1993 policy guidance to the local government commission.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional guidance he intends to give to the Local Government Commission on the conduct of the review following the High Court decision on Lancashire and Derbyshire on 28 January.

Mr. Gummer: The review of local government in England and the work of the Local Government Commission will continue. The Government are not appealing against the court ruling, which makes it clear that the Local Government Commission exercises its own judgment—something that has never been in dispute. The commission's reviews will continue on the basis of the policy guidance issued in November 1993 with the omission of the final sentence of paragraph 3. The aim of the local government review continues to be to provide effective and convenient local government which takes account of community identities. The Government believe that unitary authorities will often be the best way of achieving these objectives. In those cases they will be able to reduce costs and improve the quality and co-ordination of services. They will therefore often provide the best form of local government. Decisions will be taken on commission recommendations in that light. However, there is no national blueprint and the Government do not rule out consideration of two tiers in particular cirumstances, with or without changes to the status quo, where a strong case for that is made.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance he proposes to make available to London boroughs and the common council during 1994-95 in respect of extra costs which those authorities may face as a result of decisions on housing revenue account subsidy in respect of debt inherited from the former Greater London council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: For 1993-94 my right hon. Friend announced a scheme of special assistance for London boroughs and the common council facing extra costs that year as a result of his decision that housing revenue account subsidy and housing subsidy is not payable under the statute in respect of certain debts inherited from the former Greater London council. Should the House of Lords uphold the judgments of the divisional court and the Court of Appeal in respect of his decision, he proposes to make similar arrangements for 1994-95.

Betterment Levy

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the collection of betterment levy imposed by the Land Commission Act 1967.

Mr. Baldry: It is no longer cost effective to continue pursuing collection of betterment levy. In the 1992-93 financial year, £232,595 has been written off. There remain 52 outstanding cases in England and Wales, totalling £85,676·53. Against this background, I have decided that these cases should also be written off.

Hydrofluorocarbons

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will make a statement about the production of HFCs.

Mr. Atkins: The Government have no plans to ban the production of HFCs because we regard them as important alternatives for some uses of CFCs and HCFCs, particularly in refrigeration. Their production is bound to increase as those substances are phased out. They are, however, greenhouse gases and, subject to the decisions of next year's conference of parties, the climate change convention requires developed countries to take actions aimed at returning their emissions to 1990 levels by 2000. Such actions must not damage our efforts to phase out CFCs and HCFCs as quickly as possible. The United Kingdom's climate change programme, published last week, therefore commits the Government to explore with HFC producers and consumers the scope for agreements to ensure that, where HFCs are used, emissions to the atmosphere are minimised, and that HFCs are not used where emissions are unavoidable if safe, practical and more environmentally acceptable alternatives are available.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the implication for the operation of local authority waste disposal companies of the recent Court of Appeal judgment on Avon county council's award of a waste disposal contract under the statutory tendering process.

Mr. Atkins: The formation of local authority waste disposal companies to which waste disposal authorities transfer the relevant part of their undertakings is envisaged in part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Act also obliges waste disposal authorities to let waste disposal contracts through competitive tender to waste disposal contractors, which may include local authority waste disposal companies. Where a contractor believes that a waste disposal authority has not followed the competitive tendering provisions contained in the Act, the contractor may take action through the courts. The contractor has exercised that option in this instance. There is still the possibility of further legal process, and therefore it would not be appropriate for me to comment more fully on this specific case.

Housing (Publicity Expenditure)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide details of the breakdown of expenditure on departmental publicity relating to housing matters for 1993-94.

Sir George Young: As at 2 February 1993, my Department has committed £767,361·88 for publicity expenditure on housing policies. The breakdown is as follows:

	£
Advertising	356,340·99
Printing	293,643·77
Exhibitions	26,587·13
Audio Visual	2,120·88
Promotions	3,841·54
Fulfilment	33,710·34
Conferences	12,014·28
Distribution	8,435·45
Research	30,667·50

Living Over the Shop Project

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect his consideration of the report by the housing consultants, Chapman Hendy Associates, on "Living Over the Shop", has had on the Government's policy on the living over the shop project.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* In considering applications for funding under the Department's special grants programme, which was again this year oversubscribed, we took into account all supporting information provided. Unfortunately, the application by the living over the shop project was not successful. The project has previously received grants of £113,000 over three years from the Department and the Housing Corporation.

The Government remain committed to encouraging the use of empty residential space above shops. Some £10 million of supplementary credit approvals will be available to local authorities for 1994-95: bids amounting to about £40 million have been received and allocations will be announced shortly. In addition, the Housing Corporation will be supporting schemes by housing associations.

Vacant Properties

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many vacant properties he wishes to bring back into the affordable rented housing sector; and if he will provide a breakdown by *(a)* Government properties, *(b)* private sector properties and *(c)* local authority properties.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* On 1 April 1993 there were around 900,000 empty dwellings in England, of which 26,683 were owned by housing associations, 70,909 were owned by local authorities, around 12,400 were owned by the Government and other public sector bodies, and around 765,000 were in private sector ownership, according to statistical returns from local authorities and housing associations. My answer of 24 January to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), *Official Report,* columns 23-26, gives further details. The Government wish to see the best possible use made of empty property, regardless of its ownership. They offer encouragement to local authorities and private owners to do so, and have set up a task force on Government Departments' empty homes to help to bring residential property back into housing use. The task force is expected to present its final report to Ministers shortly.

Building Management

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out *(a)* by region the proceeds from the sale of the constituent parts of Building

Management, *(b)* the amount of money set aside to cover possible redundancy costs and *(c)* the total number of redundancies and the cost involved.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction on 19 January, *Official Report*, column 675, in respect of the Noreast Building Management business. The information on the remaining four businesses is set out in the table.

		Building Management Scotland	*Building Management Manchester*	*Building Management South East*	*Building Management South and West*
(a) Proceeds from the sale including some phased payments	(£ million)	3·5	−11·5	Net 10·4	
(b) Agreed limit to the Department's liability for severance costs for those made redundant in the first five years post sale, including staff who did not transfer with the business	(£ million)	15·0	26·0	30·0	25·0
(c) (i) Total numbers of redundancies to date		125	139	191	97
(ii) Of these, total number of staff made redundant by the Purchasers		0	0	2	1
(iii) Estimated cost of redundancies to date	(£ million)	4·5	4·5	6·0	3·5

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much funding has been made available to each TEC in 1992-93 and 1993-94, expressed in cash terms and real terms, and giving a real-terms percentage change from the previous year, for *(a)* youth training and credits, *(b)* training for work and the programmes it replaced and *(c)* business start-up allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Funding made available to each training and enterprise council in 1992-93 and 1993-94 for *(a)* youth training and credits, *(b)* training for work and the programmes it replaced, and *(c)* business start-up schemes are given in the following tables. Figures for 1993-94 are also shown in 1992-93 prices.

TEC budgets shown for employment training, employment action and higher technology national training in 1992-93 exclude allowances paid to participants, while budgets for training for work in 1993-94 include these allowances. TEC budgets for the BSUS in 1992-93 include an element for business enterprise training. This is funded through the Department of Trade and Industry in 1993-94.

In addition to the budgets shown in the following tables additional funding has been made available in 1993-94 to TECs to extend BSUS and to provide special measures in coal closure areas. Details by TEC are not yet available.

YT and Credits

	1992-93 Cash terms £ million	*1993-94 Cash terms £ million*	*1993-94 1992-93 prices £ million*	*1992-93 prices Per cent. +/−*
Hampshire	17·54	16·05	15·54	−11·38
Heart of England	5·70	5·24	5·08	−10·96
Isle of Wight	1·86	1·74	1·69	−9·40
Kent	18·00	18·06	17·49	−2·82
Milton Keynes and North Bucks.	3·99	5·14	4·98	24·77
Surrey	4·40	4·41	4·27	−2·93
Sussex	11·26	10·29	9·97	−11·49
Thames Valley Enterprise	9·23	12·60	12·20	32·21
AZTEC	3·62	3·69	3·57	−1·27
CENTEC	6·54	7·43	7·20	10·03
CILNTEC	7·25	8·04	7·79	7·41
LETEC	12·54	14·17	13·72	9·44
North London	4·14	3·89	3·77	−9·00
North West London	2·46	2·90	2·81	14·18
SOLOTEC	9·09	8·51	8·24	−9·33
South Thames	9·15	11·76	11·39	24·48
West London	6·56	7·41	7·18	9·40
Bedfordshire	5·30	5·60	5·42	2·33
CAMBSTEC	2·64	3·20	3·10	17·40
Essex	16·02	16·53	16·01	−0·06
Greater Peterborough	4·50	4·69	4·54	0·94
Hertfordshire	13·19	13·13	12·72	−3·59
Norfolk/Waveney	10·73	10·30	9·98	−7·03
Suffolk	9·53	9·45	9·15	−3·96
Avon	11·81	11·99	11·61	−1·67
Devon/Cornwall	26·31	23·83	23·08	−12·28
Dorset	7·30	6·66	6·45	−11·64
Gloucestershire	6·58	6·41	6·21	−5·65
Somerset	6·39	5·79	5·61	−12·24

	1992-93	*1993-94*		
	Cash terms £ million	*Cash terms £ million*	*1992-93 prices £ million*	*1992-93 prices Per cent. +/-*
Wiltshire	6·76	5·93	5·74	-15·04
Birmingham	20·64	18·56	17·98	-12·91
Central England	5·11	4·16	4·03	-21·15
Coventry/Warwickshire	11·86	11·85	11·48	-3·23
Dudley	5·20	4·96	4·80	-7·62
HAWTEC	5·47	5·57	5·39	-1·38
Sandwell	5·46	5·01	4·85	-11·13
Shropshire	7·66	6·30	6·10	-20·34
Staffordshire	20·57	20·62	19·97	-2·91
Walsall	4·32	3·78	3·66	-15·25
Wolverhampton	5·24	5·06	4·90	-6·47
Greater Nottinghamshire	9·66	9·26	8·97	-7·16
Leicester	13·34	12·98	12·57	-5·76
Lincolnshire	10·19	10·73	10·39	1·98
North Derby	5·09	4·96	4·80	-5·62
North Nottinghamshire	7·37	7·42	7·19	-2·49
Northamptonshire	6·75	7·48	7·24	7·33
South Derby	8·63	8·42	8·15	-5·50
Barnsley/Doncaster	12·90	12·83	12·43	-3·67
Bradford and District	10·60	10·69	10·35	-2·33
Calderdale/Kirklees	9·70	12·54	12·15	25·21
Humberside	17·90	16·23	15·72	-12·18
Leeds	8·80	7·65	7·41	-15·80
North Yorkshire	8·00	7·26	7·03	-12·11
Rotherham	5·60	5·71	5·53	-1·25
Sheffield	9·50	9·56	9·26	-2·54
Wakefield	5·30	4·89	4·74	-10·64
Bolton/Bury	6·88	6·86	6·64	-3·43
Manchester	16·41	16·21	15·70	-4·33
METROTEC	5·31	5·35	5·18	-2·42
Oldham	4·83	4·71	4·56	-5·55
Rochdale	3·77	4·04	3·91	3·79
South and East Cheshire	6·48	7·28	7·05	8·81
Stockport	4·73	5·30	5·13	8·52
CEWTEC	9·46	9·25	8·96	-5·30
Cumbria	9·65	9·74	9·43	-2·24
ELTEC	9·31	9·62	9·32	0·08
LAWTEC	12·79	13·25	12·83	0·34
Merseyside	22·75	27·64	26·77	17·67
NORMID	7·17	7·72	7·48	4·28
QUALITEC	5·07	5·62	5·44	7·36
Durham	12·99	12·86	12·46	-4·12
Northumberland	7·75	7·52	7·28	-6·02
Teeside	15·66	13·75	13·32	-14·96
Tyneside	17·04	18·33	17·75	4·18
Wearside	7·35	7·78	7·54	2·52

ET/EA/HTNT (1992-93) TFW (1993-94)

	1992-93	*1993-94*		
	cash terms £ million	*cash terms £ million*	*1992-93 prices £ million*	*1992-93 prices percentage +/-*
Hampshire	6·64	11·67	11·30	70·22
Heart of England	2·15	3·86	3·74	73·88
Isle of Wight	0·81	1·38	1·34	65·01
Kent	7·72	14·23	13·78	78·52
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire	1·58	2·83	2·74	73·48
Surrey	2·36	5·06	4·90	107·66
Sussex	6·27	11·04	10·69	70·53
Thames Valley Enterprise	3·28	8·48	8·21	150·40
AZTEC	3·37	6·83	6·62	96·29
CENTEC	8·42	15·61	15·12	79·56
CILNTEC	7·42	14·46	14·00	88·74
LETEC	13·02	24·00	23·24	78·53
North London	7·20	13·16	12·75	77·02
North West London	2·83	7·14	6·92	144·36
SOLOTEC	4·22	8·24	7·98	89·11

	1992-93		*1993-94*	
	cash terms £ million	*cash terms £ million*	*1992-93 prices £ million*	*1992-93 prices percentage +/–*
South Thames	12·90	25·17	24·38	88·97
West London	3·38	7·40	7·17	112·04
Bedfordshire	2·73	5·29	5·12	87·67
CAMBSTEC	1·02	2·30	2·23	118·39
Essex	10·07	12·67	12·27	21·86
Greater Peterborough	2·22	4·59	4·45	100·25
Hertfordshire	4·02	7·16	6·93	72·50
Norfolk/Waveney	5·57	11·29	10·93	96·31
Suffolk	2·11	4·65	4·50	113·44
Avon	8·00	14·97	14·50	81·23
Devon/Cornwall	11·24	25·53	24·73	119·99
Dorset	3·58	6·70	6·49	81·26
Gloucestershire	2·54	5·07	4·91	93·32
Somerset	2·81	5·26	5·09	81·30
Wiltshire	2·68	5·62	5·44	103·10
Birmingham	18·60	22·33	21·63	16·27
Central England	2·78	5·08	4·92	76·98
Coventry/Warwickshire	6·41	13·16	12·75	98·84
Dudley	3·11	5·79	5·61	80·31
HAWTEC	2·41	4·87	4·72	95·71
Sandwell	3·33	6·42	6·22	86·72
Shropshire	2·95	5·52	5·35	81·23
Staffordshire	6·71	11·91	11·54	71·91
Walsall	2·81	4·83	4·68	66·48
Wolverhampton	3·36	5·44	5·27	56·81
Greater Nottinghamshire	5·35	10·31	9·99	86·64
Leicester	5·13	8·88	8·60	67·65
Lincolnshire	5·27	11·78	11·41	116·49
North Derbyshire	2·30	5·01	4·85	110·97
North Nottinghamshire	5·84	7·46	7·23	23·72
Northants	2·32	3·84	3·72	60·31
South Derbyshire	4·60	7·74	7·50	62·96
Barnsley/Doncaster	7·10	13·74	13·31	87·43
Bradford and District	5·00	8·35	8·09	61·74
Calderdale/Kirklees	6·00	10·80	10·46	74·33
Humberside	10·90	17·75	17·19	57·72
Leeds	5·90	13·38	12·96	119·64
North Yorkshire	3·60	6·76	6·55	81·87
Rotherham	3·50	6·11	5·92	69·08
Sheffield	7·00	14·27	13·82	97·44
Wakefield	3·70	6·88	6·66	80·09
Bolton/Bury	3·04	5·47	5·30	74·27
Manchester	11·24	18·17	17·60	56·57
METROTEC	2·81	4·72	4·57	62·68
Oldham	1·90	3·70	3·58	88·61
Rochdale	2·58	4·69	4·54	76·06
South and East Cheshire	2·68	4·36	4·22	57·57
Stockport	1·95	3·81	3·69	89·23
CEWTEC	5·90	11·03	10·68	81·06
Cumbria	3·35	6·38	6·18	84·45
ELTEC	3·91	7·42	7·19	83·80
LAWTEC	7·34	12·37	11·98	63·22
Merseyside	16·73	30·04	29·09	73·91
NORMID	3·05	5·51	5·34	74·97
QUALITEC	2·42	4·72	4·57	88·90
Durham	9·30	16·79	16·26	74·85
Northumberland	3·57	6·67	6·46	80·95
Teeside	10·80	18·31	17·73	64·20
Tyneside	13·14	25·15	24·36	85·38
Wearside	6·64	12·56	12·16	83·20

BES (1992-93) BSUS (1993-94)

	1992-93	*1993-94*		
	cash terms £ million	*cash terms £ million*	*1992-93 prices £ million*	*1992-93 prices percentage +/−*
Hampshire	3·12	2·04	1·98	−36·67
Heart of England	1·20	0·36	0·35	−70·94
Isle of Wight	0·49	0·31	0·30	−38·73
Kent	2·75	2·34	2·27	−17·59
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire	0·76	0·36	0·35	−54·12
Surrey	1·85	0·86	0·83	−54·98
Sussex	3·98	1·18	1·14	−71·28
Thames Valley Enterprise	2·40	1·13	1·09	−54·40
AZTEC	1·46	0·76	0·74	−49·58
CENTEC	4·18	1·24	1·20	−71·27
CILNTEC	2·82	1·80	1·74	−38·18
LETEC	2·75	1·06	1·03	−62·67
North London	2·56	1·38	1·34	−47·79
North West London	1·34	0·66	0·64	−52·30
SOLOTEC	1·98	1·89	1·83	−7·55
South Thames	3·36	1·81	1·75	−47·83
West London	1·92	0·95	0·92	−52·08
Bedfordshire	1·11	0·45	0·44	−60·74
CAMBSTEC	0·88	0·34	0·33	−62·58
Essex	2·69	1·05	1·02	−62·20
Greater Peterborough	0·60	0·30	0·29	−51·57
Hertfordshire	3·00	1·40	1·36	−54·80
Norfolk/Waveney	2·16	1·30	1·26	−41·71
Suffolk	1·36	0·87	0·84	−38·04
Avon	3·60	1·55	1·50	−58·30
Devon/Cornwall	5·44	3·27	3·17	−41·78
Dorset	2·10	0·74	0·72	−65·87
Gloucestershire	1·80	1·59	1·54	−14·45
Somerset	1·80	0·58	0·56	−68·79
Wiltshire	1·90	1·60	1·55	−18·44
Birmingham	3·91	2·28	2·21	−43·52
Central England	1·36	0·97	0·94	−30·92
Coventry/Warwickshire	2·65	1·52	1·47	−44·45
Dudley	0·97	0·56	0·54	−44·09
HAWTEC	1·53	0·92	0·89	−41·76
Sandwell	1·01	0·54	0·52	−48·22
Shropshire	1·43	0·84	0·81	−43·11
Staffordshire	3·17	1·37	1·33	−58·14
Walsall	0·87	0·38	0·37	−57·70
Wolverhampton	1·00	0·56	0·54	−45·76
Greater Nottinghamshire	1·80	1·37	1·33	−26·28
Leicestershire	2·90	1·93	1·87	−35·54
Lincolnshire	1·95	1·23	1·19	−38·91
North Derby	1·11	0·57	0·55	−50·27
North Nottinghamshire	1·46	0·90	0·87	−40·30
Northamptonshire	1·60	0·90	0·87	−45·52
South Derby	1·75	0·51	0·49	−71·77
Barnsley/Doncaster	1·50	1·16	1·12	−25·10
Bradford and District	1·80	1·20	1·16	−35·43
Calderdale/Kirklees	2·00	1·53	1·48	−25·91
Humberside	3·20	1·77	1·71	−46·43
Leeds	2·30	1·44	1·39	−39·36
North Yorkshire	2·20	1·63	1·58	−28·24
Rotherham	1·10	0·68	0·66	−40·13
Sheffield	2·20	1·04	1·01	−54·22
Wakefield	1·20	0·75	0·73	−39·47
Bolton/Bury	1·53	0·97	0·94	−38·60
Manchester	4·32	2·81	2·72	−37·00
METROTEC	1·15	0·76	0·74	−35·99
Oldham	0·78	0·46	0·45	−42·88
Rochdale	0·74	0·27	0·26	−64·66
South and East Cheshire	1·36	0·57	0·55	−59·41
Stockport	1·52	0·84	0·81	−46·48
CEWTEC	2·40	1·21	1·17	−51·17
Cumbria	1·60	1·12	1·08	−32·20
ELTEC	1·89	1·09	1·06	−44·14
LAWTEC	2·76	1·12	1·08	−60·70
Merseyside	4·30	2·35	2·28	−47·07
NORMID	1·45	0·78	0·76	−47·90
QUALITEC	0·62	0·44	0·43	−31·27
Durham	2·48	1·48	1·43	−42·20
Northumberland	1·30	0·66	0·64	−50·83
Teeside	2·38	1·39	1·35	−43·44
Tyneside	3·49	1·27	1·23	−64·76
Wearside	1·29	0·50	0·48	−62·46

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister on 1 February 1994, *Official Report,* column *611.*

Labour Statistics

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were in employment in the Amber Valley constituency, for its nearest equivalent, in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983, *(c)* 1987 and *(d)* 1992; and what is the latest figure.

Miss Widdecombe: The information on employees in employment in the Amber Valley parliamentary constituency is available from the periodic censuses of employment, and is given in the following table:

Employees in employment in the Amber Valley constituency in September of each year.

	Number
1981	[1]29,300
1984	32,000
1987	34,300
1989	35,900
1991	36,700

[1] The boundary for this parliamentary constituency was revised in 1983 and therefore the information for 1981 is not directly comparable with that in later censuses.

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current rate of unemployment in the Amber Valley constituency; what is the latest figure for the south-east; and what is the current average figure for each of the EC countries.

Miss Widdecombe: In December 1993, the seasonally adjusted rate of claimant unemployment stood at 9·7 per cent. of the workforce in the South East region. Claimant unemployment rates are not available for areas smaller than the self-contained labour markets known as travel-to-work areas. No figure is available for the Amber Valley constituency.

Internationally comparable unemployment figures based on the internationally standardised ILO definition of unemployment are published by EUROSTAT in its monthly "Unemployment Bulletin", copies of which are available in the Library. The United Kingdom ILO unemployment rate is below the EC average and is falling.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were placed in employment by *(a)* Kilwinning and *(b)* Irvine jobcentres in each month since April 1992.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 3 February 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of people placed into employment by Kilwinning and Irvine Jobcentres each month since April 1992.

Tables are attached which show this information.

I hope this is helpful.

Placings achieved by Irvine and Kilwinning Jobcentres April 1992 to March 1993

Month	*Irvine jobcentre*	*Kilwinning jobcentre*
April 1992	342	175
May 1992	309	188
June 1992	341	180
July 1992	299	124
August 1992	366	90
September 1992	285	135
October 1992	434	224
November 1992	393	99
December 1992	155	58
January 1993	304	137
February 1993	318	138
March 1993	226	78

Placings achieved by Irvine and Kilwinning Jobcentres April 1993 to December 1993

Month	*Irvine jobcentre*	*Kilwinning jobcentre*
April 1993	321	117
May 1993	344	137
June 1993	388	146
July 1993	351	139
August 1993	332	151
September 1993	356	142
October 1993	448	154
November 1993	428	129
December 1993	219	44

Unemployed People, Cornwall

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much central Government money was spent on schemes to help unemployed people in Cornwall in each year since 1979 in total and per person unemployed; and if he will list which schemes are included in these totals for each year.

Miss Widdecombe: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Industrial Disputes

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of days lost in industrial disputes in relation to the size of the work force in each EC country in *(a)* the latest year for which information is available and *(b)* 10 years previously.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The latest available data are given in the following table:

Working days lost per thousand employees in employment[1, 2]

	1992	*1982*
United Kingdom	20	250
Belgium	40	[3]70
Denmark	30	50
France	30	130
Germany (Federal Republic)	60	[4]—
Greece	[5]2,910	830
Ireland	220	500

	1992	*1982*
Italy	[6]200	1,280
Netherlands	10	50
Portugal	60	170
Spain	670	360

[1] It should be noted that there are some differences in coverage between each country's statistics. More details can be found on page 550 of Employment Gazette December 1993.

[2] Data are not available for Luxembourg.

[3] Data relates to 1980.

[4] Less than five days lost per thousand.

[5] Data relates to 1991.

[6] Data relates to 1991.

Lettuce Growing

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspections were made by the Health and Safety Executive agricultural inspectorate of lettuce-growing establishments in each month since January 1993; and how many cases of misuse of pesticides were found by the agriculture inspectorate in each month since January.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Between 1 April 1992 and 31 March 1993, the latest year for which information is available, inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive's agricultural inspectorate made a total of 40,051 visits which includes visits to lettuce and other salad production establishments. During the same period agricultural inspectors investigated 206 pesticides incidents.

Unemployment Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost of administering unemployment benefit in the Greenock travel-to-work area in each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 3 February 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the cost of administering unemployment benefit in the Greenock travel-to-work area in each of the past five years.

Perhaps I should make it clear that as the Employment Service is responsible for administering several other benefits in addition to Unemployment Benefit, it is not possible to provide information on the payment of Unemployment Benefit only. Therefore the figures relate to the administration costs for all benefits paid to clients. In addition, as our records of local office running costs are retained for only the last three complete financial years, I am consequently unable to provide information in respect of those financial years prior to 1990-91. The information below is in respect of the area covered by the Greenock and Port Glasgow offices, which more or less approximates to the Greenock travel-to-work area.

Given these provisos, the relevant costs, which include staff salary and other running costs, such as fuel and telecommunications, are as follows:

Financial year	*Non-integrated* £	*Integrated* £	*Total costs* £
1990-91	606,942	Nil	606,942
1991-92	300,208	561,186	861,394
1992-93	Nil	1,235,560	1,235,560

These figures give a total cost for the three years of £2,703,896 broken down into £907,150 for costs related to Unemployment Benefit Offices (UBO) and £1,796,764 for those related to Employment Service Jobcentres (ESJ).

However, I must emphasise that these figures are not strictly comparable. As you may be aware, since 1990 the Employment Service has been pursuing a policy of bringing together Unemployment Benefit Offices and Jobcentres with the aim of providing a more efficient and effective service to our clients. Our Inverclyde offices have featured as part of this programme of integration, Greenock in November 1991 and Port Glasgow in March 1991. The figures provided for the periods after integration, therefore, include job broking costs as well as benefit administration costs.

Given the fact that staff in our integrated offices are responsible for all aspects of Employment Service work, it is not possible to provide any further accurate or meaningful breakdowns in these costs.

I hope this is helpful.

Essex Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how much total funding has been made available for the Essex TEC expressed in cash terms and with the percentage change from the previous year for each financial year of its existence;

(2) how much funding has been made available for the Essex TEC in 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94 expressed in cash terms and with the percentage change from the previous year for *(a)* youth training and credits, *(b)* training for work and the programme it replaced and *(c)* business start-up allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The following table provides the information requested for each full year of the training and enterprise council's existence.

Funding for TECs is negotiated annually by officials from the Department who ensure that budgets are sufficient to meet priority local needs. Officials also ensure through regular reviews that TECs deliver quality training and enterprise support in a cost-effective way.

Essex TEC

	1991-92 £ *million*	*1992-93* £ *million*	*1993-94* £ *million*
Youth/training credits	13·712	15·313	16·712
Per cent. change	—	11·68	9·14
Training for Work	5·637	6·026	6·133
Per cent. change	—	6·9	1·78
Business start up allowance	0·424	0·670	0·863
Per cent. change	—	58·0	28·8
Total	19·773	22·009	23·708

Note:

All figures except 1993-94 are based on actual spend.

1993-94 figures are estimated, based on contracted amounts.

TfW figures include the programmes replaced by TfW, including Employment Training, Employment Action and HTNT.

BSU figures are based on the amounts paid for starts and survivors.

Figures do not include the following interest-free loans:

(i) a Working Capital Loan of £1,774K the balance of which was repaid in 1992-93.

(ii) Fixed Asset Loans totalling £650K which are written off over five years between July 1990 and July 1995. The balance of these loans is currently £168K.

Jobcentre, Brixham

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will instruct his agents in Brixham to engage in the fullest consultation on the building of a new job centre in the old bus station site; and what is his policy on *(a)* leasing or *(b)* building new buildings for the purposes of employment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 3 February 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about a new Jobcentre in Brixham, and about our policy on leasing or building new buildings.

For commercial reasons it is our policy not to comment on specific locations for prospective sites for new jobcentres. I can however, confirm that the Employment Service (ES) is considering a number of options in the Brixham area, and that all of these will be subjected to the fullest consideration and fully evaluated.

All options, including leasing and purchase of new buildings, will be subject to an investment appraisal in accordance with Treasury guidelines.

I hope this is helpful.

Job Shops

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his annual budget for running job shops in England; how many staff are employed; and how many of the premises are owned by his Department or leased by it and at what annual cost.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 3 February 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the annual cost of running Jobcentres in England, the number of staff employed and how many offices are owned or leased.

The annual budget provided for running the Employment Service (ES) Local Offices' in England for 1993-94 was some £729 million, which includes premises operating costs of £122 million.

The ES employs around 43,000 staff in 1,021 offices in England. Of these buildings 607 are Departmental Estate properties, administered by the ES, and 414 are Common User Estate properties, administered by Property Holdings.

I hope this is helpful.

DEFENCE

Airmisses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the date, location, altitude, aircraft types and joint airmiss working group determination of cause, for all category C airmiss reports involving military aircraft in the period from 1 January 1990.

Mr. Hanley: A list of all category C airmiss reports involving military aircraft in the period from 1 January 1990 will be placed in the Library of the House.

"Feedback"

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the current issue of the Royal Air Force inspectorate of flight safety publication "Feedback".

Mr. Hanley: No. "Feedback" is an internal Royal Air Force document for official use only. It is intended to provide early and practical guidance to service air and ground crews in their particular environment.

Harrier Jet (Wirestrike Incident)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the wirestrike incident involving a Royal Air Force Harrier in north Norway on 15 November 1993.

Mr. Hanley: The aircraft was on a routine training exercise and struck power cables while flying through a fjord at 335 ft. The aircraft suffered minor damage and was able to land at a diversion airfield. The cause of this incident is currently under investigation by an RAF board of inquiry.

Skyguard Radar

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the purpose of Royal Air Force Provost and Security Service monitoring by Skyguard radar of aircraft flying at altitudes higher than 2,000 ft.

Mr. Hanley: The purpose of deploying the Skyguard radar system in its low flying monitoring role is to observe military aircraft flying below 2000 ft. However, some tracking of military aircraft flying above 2000 ft is unavoidable. The Skyguard system comprises two radars; a search radar and a tracking radar. Aircraft in the area of monitoring are picked up on the search radar initially before the tracking radar is set to observe a particular aircraft in detail. Only when the tracking radar has locked on to an aircraft can its height be established. Once an aircraft has been identified as flying above 2000 ft, attention is turned to monitoring other aircraft in the area.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the system for reporting of breaches of low flying regulations recorded by Skyguard radar; to which units or offices such breaches are reported; and what are the mechanisms for instituting disciplinary proceedings.

Mr. Hanley: Following any apparent breach of low flying regulations recorded by Skyguard, the RAF police conducts further inquiries to identify the aircraft concerned and interview the aircrew. A report is then passed to my Department's secretariat—Air Staff—and copied to other interested parties, including the commanding officer of the aircrew concerned. Where breaches of low flying regulations are not the subject of court martial or summary disposal proceedings under the service discipline Acts, responsibilty for action lies with the commanding officer of the aircrew.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what equipment is carried by RAF police in covert monitoring of low flying without use of Skyguard radar; how many aircraft have been observed by such non-radar covert monitoring in each year since 1990; and how many apparent breaches of low flying regulations were detected by these monitoring deployments.

Mr. Hanley: Covert monitoring of low-flying aircraft without the use of Skyguard is carried out visually by experienced RAF Police observers following a survey of the chosen site. The relative heights and distances of local landmarks are taken into account when conducting the survey.

The number of aircraft observed using these methods since 1990 are as follows:

Year	*Number of aircraft observed*
1990	177
1991	533
1992	276
1993	347

Four apparent breaches of low flying regulations were detected during these covert monitoring deployments.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the changes in policy since February 1992 concerning the release of statistical information on the results of Skyguard monitoring of low flying; and what were the reasons for those changes.

Mr. Hanley: Since November 1992 it has been my Department's policy to notify hon. Members in advance when Skyguard low flying monitoring is planned to take place in their general area and arrange for the equipment to be available for the public to see at the end of the deployment. The decision to release statistical information on the results of the monitoring flowed from the revised arrangements.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the equipment used by the RAF police on Skyguard radar deployments to monitor low flying includes radio equipment capable of receiving transmissions on the common radio frequency for the United Kingdom low flying system.

Mr. Hanley: No.

Flying Hour (Definition)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what definition of flying hour is used in the recording of flight time by British military aircraft.

Mr. Hanley: British military aircraft record flight time as being from the moment an aircraft takes off to the moment it lands, as opposed to commercial aircraft where flight time includes the time the aircraft taxies for departure and on arrival.

Tornado Accident, County Durham

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the accident involving a Royal Air Force Tornado F3 aircraft in County Durham on 21 October 1993.

Mr. Hanley: The aircraft, on a routine training sortie flying at 2,000 ft and 300 knots, suffered a major fuselage fuel leak and an associated engine flame-out. Shortly afterwards, the aircraft caught fire. Both crew members ejected safely. The cause of the accident is currently being investigated by a RAF board of inquiry and a summary of its findings will be produced in the normal way. A copy of the summary will be placed in the Library of the House.

Harrier Accident, Evesham

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the accident involving a Royal Air Force Harrier near Evesham on 14 January.

Mr. Hanley: The aircraft was on a routine training sortie when it crashed near the village of Aston Somerville. The pilot, a member of the United States Marine Corps on an exchange tour with the RAF, unfortunately died in the accident. An investigation into the cause of the accident is being conducted by an RAF board of inquiry.

Harrier Accident, Bristol Channel

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the accident involving a Royal Navy Sea Harrier in the Bristol channel on 5 January.

Mr. Hanley: The accident involved a Royal Navy Sea Harrier FRS2 from 899 Squadron, based at RNAS Yeovilton. The aircraft was flying low over the sea when an engine malfunction caused the pilot to eject. The aircraft came down approximately 15 miles west of Chivenor. The pilot was uninjured. The cause of the accident is currently under investigation.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the current issue of the Royal Air Force publication "Low Flying Update".

Mr. Hanley: The document is classified and cannot therefore be released.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reports have been received from aircrew on operational low flying training sorties in the tactical training areas, of sightings of other military aircraft on non-operational low flying training sorties flying at less than 500 ft minimum separation distance.

Mr. Hanley: Central records of such reports are not maintained. However, the indications are that such reports have been received on only a very small number of occasions.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify the nature of each of the breaches of low flying regulations listed in his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley of 18 October 1993, *Official Report*, column 57, and the height at which each aircraft was recorded as flying.

Mr. Hanley: All of the apparent breaches of low flying regulations listed in my answer to the hon. Member of 18 October 1993, *Official Report*, column 57, were in respect of height, except for the following which were apparent breaches of an avoidance:

Date	Location	Type of aircraft	Nationality
16 July 1991	Eshott Airfield	F4	German Air Force
2 July 1992	Beverly/Linley Hill Aerodrome	Tornado	RAF

It is not my Department's policy to release detailed information such as the recorded height of aircraft involved in apparent breaches of low flying regulations.

British Goods

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to increase the purchase of British-manufactured goods for the armed services.

Mr. Aitken: To achieve the best value for money, wherever possible, we place contracts by means of open competition. British companies have proved highly competitive to the extent that, over the past five years, we estimate that some 90 per cent. of defence equipment expenditure was spent with United Kingdom industry. My Department provides British defence industry with as much information as possible about its future procurement plans, and Ministers and officials meet regularly with representatives of defence industry trade associations.

Garelochhead Training Centre

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many training man days were spent on the Garelochhead training area in each year since 1985.

Mr. Hanley: Details for Garelochhead are available only from the financial year 1987-88 onwards:

Financial year	Man training days
1987-88	54,500
1988-89	67,183
1989-90	73,289
1990-91	56,621
1991-92	63,342
1992-93	79,182
[1]1993-94	31,308

[1] To December.

The lower than average figure for 1993-94 is due to a reduction in capacity on account of works services.

Prescription Charges

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those categories of armed forces personnel whose national health service prescription charges are reimbursed from his Department's funds; and what was the total cost of this provision in the latest year for which data are available.

Mr. Hanley: All armed forces personnel are entitled to free medical and dental treatment. As a part of this condition of service national health service prescription charges paid by service personnel based in the United Kingdom may be reimbursed from funds within my Department. Figures relating to the cost of this provision are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The entitlement to free medical and dental treatment is one of the many factors taken into account by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body when comparing pay levels in the armed forces with those in civilian employment.

Glen Douglas Depot

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future use of the Glen Douglas armaments depot.

Mr. Hanley: The NATO armaments depot—NAD—at Glen Douglas is currently used for ammunition storage by the Royal Navy, the US and the Netherlands. Following the United States' decision to withdraw its holdings, it was announced on 2 December 1993 that the task of storing and maintaining RAF ammunition would be transferred from RAF Chilmark to NAD Glen Douglas. Work has already commenced on the transfer which should be completed, on current plans, by the end of 1994.

Hercules Accident

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the summary of the report on the accident to a Royal Air Force Hercules aircraft on 27 May 1993.

Mr. Hanley: A summary of the RAF board of inquiry's findings will be placed in the Library of the House shortly.

T80U Tank

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's receipt of a tank from Russia for research purposes.

Mr. Aitken: In 1992 a Russian T80U tank was imported for defence research and development purposes.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any department of his Ministry has taken delivery of a T80U main battle tank.

Mr. Aitken: Yes. A Russian T80U tank was imported for defence research and development purposes.

Defence Cuts

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage reductions have been made in the total number of *(a)* armed forces, *(b)* military establishments, *(c)* naval craft, *(d)* aircraft, *(e)* munitions factories, *(f)* naval dockyards and *(g)* regiments since 1979; and what were the numbers in each case in 1979 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

(a) *Armed Forces*

	1979		*Latest*	
Royal Navy and Royal Marines				
Regulars	73,500	(1 January 1979)	57,427	(1 November 1993)
Reserves	35,300	(1 January 1979)	31,100	(1 April 1993)
Total	108,800		88,527	
Total percentage change	−19			
Army				
Regulars (including Gurkhas)	156,200	(1 April 1979)	130,900	(1 January 1994)
Reserves	59,400	(1 April 1979)	64,100	(1 December 1993)
Total	215,600		195,600	
Total percentage change	−10			
Royal Air Force				
Regulars	85,400	(1 January 1979)	78,900	(1 April 1993)
Reserves	30,600	(1 January 1979)	47,800	(1 April 1993)
Total	116,600		126,700	
Total percentage change	+9			

(Date of information in brackets).

(b) *Military Establishments.* There are several possible definitions of the term "Military Establishment". On any definition, the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Records for 1979 are not held.

(c) *Naval Craft.* The figures for the number of major warships (vessels of frigate size and above) are as follows:

1979	*Latest*
[1]103	[2]65

[1] As at 1 January 1979.

[2] As at 31 December 1993.

Total percentage change: −37.

(d) *Aircraft.* Figures available for 1979 only cover squadrons, flights or regiments, and do not give numbers of individual aircraft. Because the numbers of aircraft within units has changed over the years, a percentage change figure based on the numbers of units would not be meaningful. The available figures are as follows:

Royal Navy

1 January 1979

13 squadrons plus 49 flights

1 April 1993

18 squadrons plus 34 flights

Army

1 April 1979

6 Army Air Corps regiments

1 January 1994

5 Army Air Corps regiments

Royal Air force

1 April 1979

14 Strike/Attack squadrons
5 Offensive Support squadrons
4 Maritime Patrol squadrons
5 Reconnaissance squadrons
16 Air Defence squadrons
1 Airborne Early Warning squadron
9 Air Transport squadrons
2 Tanker squadrons
2 Search and Rescue squadrons
Total: 58

1 February 1994

7 Strike/Attack squadrons
5 Offensive Support squadrons
3 Maritime Patrol squadrons
5 Reconnaissance squadrons
7 Air Defence squadrons
1 Airborne Early Warning squadron
14 Air Transport squadrons
1 Tanker squadron
2 Search and Rescue squadrons
Total: 45

(e) *Munitions Factories.* Records of royal ordnance factories in 1979 are not held. Royal Ordnance ceased to be part of the Ministry of Defence in January 1985.

The figures are as follows:

(f) *Naval Dockyards*

1979	*1994*
5	2

Percentage change: −60 per cent.

(g) *Regiments* Taking "regiments" to mean front-line units, the figures are as follows:

Regular Army front-line units

	1 April 1979	*1 January 1994*
Royal Armoured Corps Regiments	19	10
Royal Artillery Regiments	22	15
Royal Engineer Regiments	9	12
Infantry Battalions	56	45
SAS Regiment	1	1
Army Air Corps Regiments	6	5
Total	113	88

Total percentage change: −22 per cent.

TA Front-line units

	1 April 1979	*1 January 1994*
Royal Armoured Corps Regiments	5	5
Royal Artillery Regiments	5	5
Royal Engineer Regiments	7	9
Infantry Battalions	37	36
SAS Regiments	2	2
Total	56	57

Total percentage change: +2 per cent.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is the Government's policy to seek the negotiation of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty by September 1996.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), on 31 January, *Official Report*, column *481*.

RAF Byelaws

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what directions or guidance of a general nature now apply in respect of the arrest, detention, charge and prosecution of a person under either the RAF Lakenheath Byelaws 1986—SI 1986/480—or the RAF Mildenhall Byelaws 1986—SI 1986/479;

(2) what directions or guidance of a general nature have been given to the Ministry of Defence police and the Crown Prosecution Service in the last five years concerning the arrest, detention, charge and prosecution of a person under either the RAF Lakenheath Byelaws 1986—SI 1986/480—or the RAF Mildenhall Byelaws 1986—SI 1986/479.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence police is an operationally independent body responsible for policing the defence estate in accordance with the provision of the Ministry of Defence Police Act 1987. One of its duties is to enforce military byelaws. Those applicable at RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall are extant but under review. In November 1993 general guidance was given to MDP by its chief constable not to arrest for byelaws offences at these sites until the review process is complete.

MDP continues, however, to escort trespassers off the premises for their own safety or may make arrests if other non-byelaws offences such as criminal damage are committed or suspected.

The Crown Prosecution Service is an independent prosecuting authority which does not accept instructions from outside agencies.

Paveway III Bomb Fuse

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research is being conducted by his Department on collateral damage to humans caused by the use of the Paveway III multi-function bomb fuse in laser-guided bombs deployed by the RAF.

Mr. Aitken: My Department conducts research into a wide range of weapon technologies and effects, many of which are relevant to precision-guided systems, with the aim of improving performance in line with evolving military requirements for increased reliability and accuracy and reduced collateral damage. The RAF is currently equipped not with Paveway III but with the Paveway II guidance kit which provides a precision bombing capability and can be used in conjunction with the multi-function bomb fuse, and the UK 1,000 lb bomb.

Plutonium

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much plutonium British Nuclear Fuels plc has stockpiled at Sellafield on behalf of the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Aitken: The United Kingdom does not hold significant stocks of weapons-grade plutonium which is not required for our operational stockpile of weapons.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions it has been necesssary for him to appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment against a local authority's refusal of planning permission for the destruction of listed buildings or properties regarded as having heritage importance; and whether he consults the Department of National Heritage before deciding how to dispose of Ministry of Defence property of heritage significance.

Mr. Hanley: To date, there have been no occasions when it has been necessary for my Department to appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment against a local authority's refusal to grant permission to demolish an historic building. Kennet district council has refused a recent application for consent to demolish Gore Cross farmhouse, grade II listed building. We are awaiting the outcome of an appeal which was submitted and subsequently heard by means of an informal planning inquiry during December 1993. Currently the Department does not consult the Department of National Heritage as a matter of routine when considering proposed disposals of historic buildings, although this is currently under review by my officials.

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the buildings, docklands, barracks, sites or premises that have a significant heritage value and that have become or are likely shortly to become redundant to the requirements of his Department; what action he is taking to dispose of each of these properties; from whom and at what stage he obtains advice with regard to the preservation of properties of heritage importance; and what factors dictate whether heritage aspects should be subordinated to financial considerations.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows. The listed and scheduled properties have been identified as redundant by the Department and the current position over their disposal is shown:

Property and location	*Disposal position*
28A Colliergate—ex. Sandhill Hotel—York, Yorkshire	With defence land agent for disposal
29 Pembridge Gardens, London W11	Group value grade II
33 Upton Scudmore, Wiltshire	Being offered to tenant for purchase
ACIO Edinburgh, 73 Hanover Street, Edinburgh	Will be sold during 1995

Property and location	*Disposal position*
Bawdsey Manor, Bawdsey, Suffolk	With defence land agent for disposal
DRA Christchurch	With defence land agent for disposal
East Camp, RAF Hendon, Hendon	Officers' mess has been offered to Middlesex university. The entrance way, control tower and Grahame White hanger are currently up for sale
Hilton Farm, Steading, Rosyth	Sale expected to be completed during 1994-95
Horseshoe Barracks, Shoeburyness, Essex	Planning negotiations in progress with Southend council. Site cannot be sold until accommodation has been provided for the Sergeants' mess and an archaeological survey undertaken
Peninsula Barracks, Winchester, Hampshire	Joint MOD/Crown estate disposal
RAF Greenham Common, Newbury, Berkshire	Greenham lodge sold subject to contract Mews cottage sold subject to contract West lodge to be remarketed as original offers too low
Royal Arsenal Woolwich, Woolwich, London	With defence land agent for disposal
Royal Marine Barracks, Eastney, Hampshire	Eastney fort and north wing of museum to be sold to Hampshire county council. Remainder of museum to be sold to the trustees of the museum. Both sales to be completed mid-1994
Royal Naval Armaments Depot, Priddy's Hard, Gosport, Hampshire	Heritage area and Palmerston fortifications to be sold to Gosport borough council
St. George Barracks (North), Gosport, Hampshire	Disposal linked to future of Royal Clarence yard
Waltham Abbey	Steering committee preparing case for transfer of heritage holding to a trust

These properties have been identified for disposal but not action has yet been taken:

Property and location	*Proposed action*
ACIO Tunbridge Wells, Tunbridge Wells, Kent	To be sold on relocation of explosive ordnance unit.
Angelsey House, Aldershot, Hampshire	
Carlton House, Stirling	Two listed buildings currently used by the Army will be declared surplus.
HMS Nelson—Gunwharf—Portsmouth, Hampshire	
RAF Hullavington	
Royal Naval Hospital, Stonehouse, Plymouth, Devon	

We are conducting a systematic review of all our historic buildings to determine which should be retained by the Ministry of Defence, in their current or alternative use, and which should be disposed of expeditiously to ensure their preservation by finding a suitable alternative use.

Following the transfer of responsibility for the upkeep of its property, including historic buildings, from the Property Services Agency in 1990, the Department has been putting in place new arrangements. An official has also been nominated to be the focal point for policy on hisoric buildings and is in active consultation with the Department of the Environment conservation unit, Department of National Heritage and the national heritage bodies over the preservation of properties of heritage importance. Defence Works Services has appointed a conservation architect who is available to advise all of our property managers, who also call upon specialist conservation consultants to produce quadrennial reports on each listed and scheduled historic building.

When disposing of historic buildings the Department aims to achieve sympathetic and suitable alternative uses which assure their preservation whilst retaining a duty to secure the best price that can reasonably be obtained.

Staff Requirement (Air) 1242

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the progress of staff requirement (air) 1242;

(2) when he expects to announce the result of the contest for the low-level laser-guided bomb under staff requirement (air) 1242.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 17 January 1994, *Official Report,* column *441.* I hope to be able to announce the results of the competition by April 1994.

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department or any agencies for which he is responsible has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Mr. Aitken: My Department, including its agencies, has placed six contracts with Touche Ross since 1 July 1993. These exclude local purchase orders, of small value, information on which is not held centrally.

Arms Sales

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the levels of arms sales to *(a)* Malaysia, *(b)* Indonesia, *(c)* Jordan, *(d)* Oman, *(e)* Thailand, *(f)* Nigeria and *(g)* India for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Aitken: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to reveal details of arms sales to individual countries. However, "Defence Statistics 1993" gives information on the value of sales by region in table 1.11. A copy of this has been placed in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

NHS (Staff Cars)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each year since 1990 the expenditure on staff cars for each *(a)* health board and *(b)* NHS Trust in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Leisure Facilities

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement listing in descending order the net changes in the leisure and recreation and sports facilities and swimming pools grant-aided expenditure assessment for 1994-95 for each Scottish local authority; and if he will similarly list the amounts awarded to each Scottish local authority for this element of grant-aided expenditure in 1993-94 and in 1992-93.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is set out in the table. The treatment of this GAE assessment has been changed for 1994-95 following a decision by the joint Scottish Office—COSLA distribution committee of the working party on local government finance to discontinue the secondary indicator for the assessment. This indicator—the number of unemployment benefit recipients per 1,000 population—was no longer considered to be plausible.

Leisure and Recreation: Sports Facilities and Swimming Pools
Table 1: Changes in GAE (Ranked)

	Net change in GAE 1993-94 to 1994-95 (Ranked) £ 000
Aberdeen	819
Gordon	410
Perth and K	349
Banff	306
Edinburgh	298
Kincardine	284
NE Fife	236
Moray	234
Eastwood	194
Angus	177
Bearsden	175
Stirling	126
Strathkelvin	124
Inverness	117
East Lothian	115
Shetland	107
Dunfermline	106
Ettrick	104
Roxburgh	73
Midlothian	71
Orkney	69
Kyle and C	66
Annandale	62
Nithsdale	57
Stewartry	56
Berwick	56
East Kilbride	54
Badenoch	51
Ross and C	45
Argyll and Bute	44
Clydesdale	41
Nairn	26
Tweeddale	25
Lochaber	25
West Lothian	18
Cumbernauld	15
Skye and L	3
Caithness	−5
Sutherland	−6
Clackmannan	−12
Falkirk	−16
Dumbarton	−26
Western Isles	−30
Wigtown	−34
Hamilton	−79
Renfrew	−96
Clydebank	−104
Kilmarnock	−115
Cumnock	−142
Kirkcaldy	−160
Monklands	−173
Cunninghame	−185
Motherwell	−213
Inverclyde	−243
Dundee	−261
Glasgow	−3,008
Scotland	232

Table 2: GAE 1992-93–1994-95

	Grant aided expenditure 1992-93 £000	*Grant aided expenditure 1993-94 £000*	*Grant aided expenditure 1994-95 £000*
Berwick	216	222	278
Ettrick	382	424	528
Roxburgh	383	436	509
Tweedale	181	191	216
Clackmannan	745	772	759
Falkirk	2,156	2,236	2,221
Stirling	1,184	1,211	1,338
Annandale	431	489	551
Nithsdale	751	824	881
Stewartry	299	301	357

	Grant aided expenditure 1992-93 £000	*Grant aided expenditure 1993-94 £000*	*Grant aided expenditure 1994-95 £000*
Wigtown	488	489	455
Dunfermline	1,884	2,011	2,117
Kirkcaldy	2,260	2,440	2,280
Nefife	831	888	1,124
Aberdeen	2,562	2,869	3,688
Banff	1,036	1,052	1,358
Gordon	772	839	1,250
Kincardine	550	597	881
Moray	1,074	1,124	1,358
Badenoch	161	168	218
Caithness	404	421	416
Inverness	895	973	1,090
Lochaber	334	354	379
Nairn	132	134	160
Ross and C	766	760	804
Skye and L	200	199	203
Sutherland	212	205	199
East Lothian	1,171	1,158	1,273
Edinburgh	6,412	7,168	7,466
Midlothian	1,165	1,171	1,243
West Lothian	2,335	2,402	2,420
Argyll and Bute	988	999	1,044
Bearsden	458	469	643
Clydebank	828	816	711
Clydesdale	814	849	890
Cumbernauld	1,009	1,060	1,075
Cumnock	760	802	660
Cunninghame	2,261	2,373	2,188
Dumbarton	1,252	1,320	1,294
East Kilbride	1,178	1,311	1,365
Eastwood	706	700	893
Glasgow	14,001	14,402	11,394
Hamilton	1,701	1,794	1,715
Inverclyde	1,660	1,638	1,395
Kilmarnock	1,242	1,370	1,255
Kyle and C	1,591	1,658	1,724
Monklands	1,793	1,856	1,683
Motherwell	2,403	2,528	2,314
Renfrew	3,104	3,253	3,157
Strathkelvin	1,215	1,231	1,355
Angus	1,235	1,273	1,450
Dundee	2,768	2,954	2,693
Perth and K	1,557	1,579	1,928
Orkney	224	233	302
Shetland	258	265	372
Western Isles	464	483	453
Scotland	77,844	81,742	81,974

Local Government Finance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland where the membership of the distribution committee of the working party on local government finance is drawn from; and if he will indicate specifically what representation Scottish local authorities have on this committee.

Mr. Stewart: Membership of the committee comprises Scottish Office officials, members of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities' secretariat and representatives of a number of local authorities. Each regional authority provides one member. There are six members from district authorities and one representing the islands authorities. Additionally there are four technical advisers to the committee who are also local authority officials. The local authority representatives are nominated by COSLA.

Community Charge

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines his Department has issued to Scottish local authorities in respect of pursuing unpaid community charge where the costs of pursuing the debt exceed the amount owed; what representations he has received from local authorities on this matter; and what plans he has to amend the current guidance to allow local authorities to write off community charge in situations where the costs involved in pursuing amounts owed exceed the amount being owed.

Mr. Stewart: My Department has not issued any guidance to local authorities on this matter which is for each authority to consider in consultation with its auditor. My right hon. Friend last received representations from local authorities on this issue in 1991.

Health Boards

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list any voting members of health boards who are also employed by those boards as managers or administrators showing the salaries paid in each case.

Mr. Stewart: Executive members of health boards are those who are employees of the board. They are all voting members. The present executive members are listed. Salaries are determined by the boards and details are not held centrally.

Argyll and Clyde Health Board
Mr. I. C. Smith
Dr. A. A. Reid

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board
Mr. J. M. Eckford, OBE
Mr. N. R. Lammie
Mrs. M. Durie
Dr. D. Walker

Borders Health Board
Mr. D. A. Peters, OBE
Dr. I. A. McDonald
Mr. J. S. Wilson
Mrs. A. Weston

Dumfries and Galloway Health Board
Mr. D. J. Banks
Mr. D. McEachran
Mr. P. J. Kelly
Mr. A. P. Milligan
Dr. I. H. MacLean

Fife Health Board
Miss P. Frost
Mr. M. D. Murray
Mrs. J. Edey
Dr. I. G. Jones

Forth Valley Health Board
Mr. D. F. Hird
Dr. D. C. Moir

Grampian Health Board
Mr. F. E. L. Hartnett, OBE
Mr. A. J. Cumming
Dr. H. R. M. Wilson
Dr. J. G. Paterson

Greater Glasgow Health Board
Mr. C. M. Gordon
Mr. T. A. Divers
Dr. H. J. G. Burns

DEFECTIVE PRINTING

Highland Health Board
Mr. R. R. W. Stewart
Dr. G. V. Stone
Mr. M. S. Iredale
Mr. D. T. Wright

Lanarkshire Health Board
Professor F. Clarke, CBE
Dr. J. B. P. Ferguson
Mr. M. Docherty
Mr. B. Gill
Miss E. Hastings, OBE

Lothian Health Board
Mr. J. Lusby
Dr. H. Zealley
Mr. P. Wilson
Dr. L. Burley
Mr. P. White

Orkney Health Board
Mr. G. W. Jackson
Mr. R. L. Allan

Shetland Health Board
Mr. B. J. Atherton
Dr. F. C. Cox
Mr. D. P. P. Eva
Mrs. M. S. Henderson, OBE

Tayside Health Board
Miss L. Barrie
Mr. J. R. Hudson
Miss E. A. Edwards

Western Isles Health Board
Mr. R. Mullan
Mr. G. N. Stobbs

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on expenditure by Lothian Health on *(a)* the refurbishment of its headquarters building and *(b)* the appointment of waiting list managers, contracts managers and any other administrative staff in connection with recent reorganisations.

Mr. Stewart: The refurbishment of Lothian health board's headquarters building will cost approximately £950,000, the bulk of which is expected to fall in the current financial year.

The appointment of staff is a matter for the board and the trust in Lothian.

Apprentices

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many 16 to 18-year-olds were undergoing apprenticeship training in Scotland in the 12-month period ended *(a)* December 1990, *(b)* December 1991, *(c)* December 1992 and *(d)* December 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not available in the form requested. However, information from the labour force survey shows the numbers of 16 to 18-year-olds involved in apprenticeships in Scotland in the spring of each year from 1990 to 1993 as set out in the table:

Numbers of 16 to 18-year-olds involved in apprenticeships

Period	*Number*
Spring	
1990	23,824
1991	26,825
1992	25,996
1993	19,495

Private Nursing Homes

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many elderly persons were living long term in private nursing homes in Scotland in the 12-month period ended *(a)* December 1992 and *(b)* December 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Information is not available centrally on persons in private nursing homes. The number of beds in private nursing homes in Scotland, as at 31 March 1993, was 16,477. It is estimated that over 85 per cent. of nursing home residents are persons over the age of 65.

Youth Training

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the trend in the numbers of persons in Scotland availing themselves of youth training including credits and training for work schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Youth training is demand-led. There is a downward trend in the number of young people in training due in part to the effect of demography. In addition more young people leaving school are moving into further or higher education, which has the effect of further reducing the potential client group. This can be seen when comparing those who entered youth training for the first time between April and September in 1992 and 1993 respectively. In 1992 over 15,000 joined youth training for the first time while in the same period in 1993 only around 12,500 did so.

The number of persons in training under training for work has also decreased since the programme started in April 1993. The introduction of the programme took place at the same time as the launch of an increased range of opportunities available to unemployed people through the Employment Service.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will release additional funds to Scottish local authorities to enable them to increase their sheltered housing facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Substantial resources totalling some £405 million have been made available to local authorities for capital investment in public sector housing in 1993-94. For 1994-95 additional resources will be made available to enable local authorities to contribute to the care in the community policy including the provision of sheltered housing. I will announce these allocations shortly.

Nursery Education

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children received pre-five education in state schools in Scotland in the academic years 1991-92 and 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of children attending education authority nursery schools and Departments in Scotland in 1991-92 was 45,238 and in 1992-93, 46,992. This confirms that the year on year rise in children receiving nursery education since 1979 is continuing.

Elderly People (Day Care)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will release additional funding to Scottish health boards to enable them to increase the numbers of day care places they provide for the elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Health boards receive generous financial resources to allow them to purchase all health services for which they are responsible. It is for health boards themselves to set priorities for spend in accordance with the needs of their area. Other agencies, principally social work departments, have a part to play in the provision of day care.

Health boards and social work departments are aware that day care is one of the priorities set out in the White Paper, "Caring for People".

Nurse to Patient Ratio

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average nurse to patient ratio in Scottish NHS hospitals in the 12-month periods ended *(a)* December 1992 and *(b)* December 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The ratio of qualified nurses working in hospitals to 1,000 weighted patients was 10·9 in 1992 and 10·7 in 1993. The change reflects improvements in the deployment of staff, improvements in the management of patient care in hospitals and increases in day case surgery.

Heart Surgery

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons aged 65 years and over received major heart surgery in Scottish hospitals in the 12-month period ended December 1990 and in the 12-month period ended December 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The number of cardiac procedures performed in Scottish hospitals on people aged 65 and over in 1990 and in 1993 is set out in the table.

Number of cardiac procedures in Scottish hospitals by age (65 and over) and procedure 1990 and 1993

Year procedure	*Total*
1990	
Valve Surgery Procedures	216
Coronary Bypass Procedures	446
Other Ischaemic Heart Disease Procedures	18
Other Cardiac Procedures	12
Total Procedures	692
1993[1]	
Valve Surgery Procedures	210
Coronary Bypass Procedures	615
Other Ischaemic Heart Disease Procedures	5
Other Cardiac Procedures	18
Total Procedures	848

[1] 1993 Totals are provisional.

The figures show an increase of 22·5 per cent. in the total number of procedures performed in this age group.

Nurse to Carer Ratio

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the ratio of trained nurses to carers working within Scottish NHS hospitals in the 12 months ended December 1992 and in the 12 months ended December 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The number of carers working in the NHS in Scotland cannot be identified centrally. The ratio of qualified nurses, including midwives but excluding teachers and senior nurse managers, to unqualified nurses was 1·78:1 on 30 September 1992 and 1·76:1 on 30 September 1993, the most recent dates for which information is available.

Care in the Community

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional support facilities have been given to the elderly in Scotland who are cared for under Her Majesty's Government's community care provisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Older people form one of a number of client groups to benefit from our community care arrangements. These include involving users and carers in planning services, individual assessment of needs, greater choice of services and, where appropriate, the appointment of a care manager to ensure that appropriate packages of care are developed to meet the individual's assessed needs.

To date we have made available to local authorities over £80 million to implement our reforms. This will enable local authorities to provide and develop a wide range of services for elderly people including residential care, day and domiciliary services, aids and adaptations to houses. It is, however, for individual local authorities to decide for themselves the particular services which they provide in response to their assessment of local needs.

I believe that elderly people will be among the principal beneficiaries of our reforms.

Geriatric Patients

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase funding to Scottish health boards for the dedicated purpose of providing physiotherapy treatment to long-stay geriatric patients in NHS hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: It is for health boards themselves to organise physiotherapy services in accordance with the assessed needs of their area.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that all Scottish health boards guarantee to retain a minimum number of long-stay geriatric beds within hospitals which currently have a geriatric facility; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The distribution of NHS facilities is a matter for health boards to decide in the light of their assessment of needs.

The national health service will continue to provide long-stay care for patients who need continuing consultant led medical and nursing care. People whose needs are primarily for social care and whose health needs can be met by the primary care services will be the responsibility of the local authority and resources will transfer to them from the national health service. Health boards and social work authorities are developing joint strategies which fully reflect this policy.

Health Centres

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will release to Scottish health boards additional funding to be used for redecorating local health centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Capital and revenue allocations for 1994-95 to Scottish trusts and health boards were announced in December 1993. For small-scale expenditure, priorities are determined locally.

School Boards

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools within each Scottish education authority area currently have school boards; and what were the figures for 1993.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the current number of school boards is not available. The most recent information relates to May 1992, based on the 1991-92 round of biennial parental elections. The figures for 1992 are taken from statistical returns made to the Scottish Office Education Department by education authorities:

Education Authority	*Number of Primary School Boards*	*Number of Secondary School Boards*
Borders	52	9
Central	90	16
Dumfries and Galloway	81	16
Fife	95	17
Grampian	182	31
Highland	138	25
Lothian	163	47
Strathclyde	770	169
Tayside	120	31
Orkney	15	6
Shetland	21	9
Western Isles	24	13
Strathclyde Divisions		
Argyll and Bute	63	9
Ayr	133	30
Dumbarton	104	23
Glasgow	186	42
Lanark	183	36
Renfrew	101	29

Assisted Places

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which private schools in Ayrshire have pupils under the assisted places scheme; how many pupils are supported at each institution; and what is the cost to the Scottish Office of this support.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information for school year 1992-93 is as follows:

School	*Number of assisted pupils*	*Total cost £*
Drumley House	3	10,790
Wellington School	55	183,265

Departmental Information Points

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement outlining progress in establishing the Scottish Office's information points; and what costs have been incurred so far.

Mr. Lang: Twenty information points have been established in existing Department offices throughout Scotland. Two have been set up in citizens advice bureaux offices in Airdrie and Kirkaldy, and four more information points will be opened shortly. Estimated set up operational costs amount to some £26,000. This sum was included in the figure of £175,000 quoted in my reply of 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *71-2*.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many secretarial staff employed by agencies are presently doing work at those hospitals which have been granted trust status but where the changeover has not yet come into effect.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

NHS (Staff Cars)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure that when official cars are provided for senior executives in the NHS the recipients will be required to pay for their private motoring.

Mr. Stewart: NHS senior executives on NHS Whitley Council conditions of service are required to pay for the private use of officially supplied cars in accordance with these conditions of service. For those on NHS trust conditions of service, arrangements for the use of cars will be determined by the trust remuneration committee.

SSSIs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many times he has granted nature conservation orders for the protection of sites of special scientific interest under section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; how many are still in operation; how many he has refused in Scotland since 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend has made 14 nature conservation orders under section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and 11 are still in force. On no occasion has he refused a request from the Nature Conservancy Council, the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland or Scottish Natural Heritage to make such an order.

Tourist Boards

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what study he has made of the costs of tourist boards between local authorities in the last two decades; and what is his future estimate of the cost of tourist boards.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The network of area tourist boards was extended throughout Scotland from 1983 onwards. Their funding position has been as follows:

	Non-Commercial Income						
Year	*STB/HIE Grant*		*LA Grant*		*Commercial Income*		*Total*
	£	*per cent*	*£*	*per cent*	*£*	*per cent*	*£*
1983-84	[1]n/a		[1]n/a		[1]n/a		[1]n/a
1984-85	1,218,247	27	1,974,932	44	1,280,958	29	4,474,137
1985-86	1,328,925	26	2,168,955	42	1,642,070	32	5,139,950
1986-87	1,423,850	25	2,361,628	41	1,947,374	34	5,732,852
1987-88	1,470,972	22	2,682,548	40	2,609,998	39	6,763,518
1988-89	1,513,739	19	3,182,322	40	3,216,361	41	7,912,422
1989-90	1,957,940	21	3,942,270	42	3,532,980	37	9,433,190
1990-91	2,227,720	17	5,706,580	43	5,365,490	40	13,299,790
1991-92	2,185,090	14	6,901,290	45	6,290,160	41	15,376,540
1992-93	2,443,000	14	7,329,000	44	7,063,000	42	16,835,000
1993-94	n/a		n/a		n/a		n/a

[1] Figures not compiled for first year of operation.

I expect funding arrangements to continue to follow roughly the same pattern.

Enterprise Companies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the public relations companies employed by each of Scotland's local enterprise companies; and what is the annual cost of these services to each of the companies.

Mr. Stewart: Services contracted for by the local enterprise companies are an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I will ask the chairmen of those bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which agency is employed by Scottish Enterprise to handle its public relations; and what is the annual cost of these services to Scottish Enterprise.

Mr. Stewart: This is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise. I will ask its chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the set-up costs of each of Scotland's enterprise companies.

Mr. Stewart: On 1 April 1991 Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise took over the resources, including staff and buildings, formerly administered by the Scottish development agency, the Highlands and Islands development board and the Training Agency in Scotland. Set-up costs were subsumed within the overall running costs of the new networks and cannot be identified separately. No additional provision was made available to take account of the set-up costs of the new bodies.

Telephone Information Line

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report,* columns *71-72,* what assessment has been made of the inquiries received by the Scottish Office's information line; what was the nature of the inquiries raised; what were the main subjects raised; and what percentage of calls related to these main subject areas.

Mr. Lang: Calls received on the Scottish Office enquiry line form a small proportion of the 8,000 or so calls per week dealt with by the Scottish Office central enquiry unit. Calls relate to a wide variety of the subjects for which the Scottish Office is responsible. No central record is kept of the details of individual calls received since the central enquiry unit's task is to put the caller in touch as quickly as possible with the person in the Department who can best deal with the subject of the enquiry.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report,* column *71,* how many calls have been received by the Scottish Office's information line in each month since its establishment.

Mr. Lang: The number of calls to the Scottish Office enquiry line each month since its introduction has been:

	Number
October 1993	797
November 1993	740
December 1993	452
[1]January 1994	155

[1] 1st to 21st.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Lang: The information is set out in the table, which covers the Scottish Office—excluding the Scottish Prison Service—and the associated departments:

1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
£	*£*	*£*
328,374	256,418	291,390

Diabetics

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is *(a)* the total budget for diabetic care, *(b)* the budget for education work among diabetics and *(c)* the expenditure for each health board in these categories.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not collected centrally.

Universities (Academic Staff)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a profile of academic staff at Scottish universities in terms of age and department.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Figures for full-time non-clinical academic staff whose salaries are wholly met from general university funds are given for the eight traditional universities in the following table. Figures for the four new universities are given for full-time academic staff by age only as a departmental breakdown is not available.

Full-time non-clinical academic wholly university funded staff in the eight traditional Scottish universities, 1992-93

Cost centre	*Age under 25*	*25-29*	*30-34*	*35-39*	*40-44*	*45-49*	*50-54*	*55-59*	*60 and over*	*Total*
Education	—	2	7	13	21	25	17	19	3	107
Medicine, dentistry and health	4	28	28	59	62	70	45	40	8	344
Engineering and Technology	3	22	64	58	81	94	95	48	27	492
Agriculture, forestry and veterinary science	4	25	24	26	27	35	20	13	11	185
Biological, mathematical and physical sciences	3	48	101	138	180	272	258	168	67	1,235
Administrative, business and social studies	12	71	109	147	165	221	149	66	32	972
Achitecture and planning	—	5	6	7	5	10	13	9	3	58
Language, literature and area studies	6	34	42	35	45	102	116	30	27	437
Other Arts	1	11	29	36	56	78	78	54	26	369
Other	—	—	4	—	2	3	3	2	—	14
Total	33	246	414	519	644	910	794	449	204	4,213

Full-time academic staff in the four new Scottish universities, 1992-93

Age	*Under 30*	*30-34*	*35-39*	*40-44*	*45-49*	*50-54*	*55-59*	*60 and over*	*Total*
	98	177	252	295	334	231	145	61	1,593

Local Authority Boundary Changes

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish representations received regarding local authority boundary changes for Dumbarton district.

Mr. Stewart: It is not normal practice to publish correspondence received by Government Departments unless the correspondent has agreed to this. Since publication of the White Paper, "Shaping the Future—The New Councils", a number of representations have been received in relation to the Government's proposals as they effect Dumbarton district. Most of these have been in support of the proposed inclusion of Helensburgh and Cardross withn Argyll and Bute. Some letters have also requested that the Luss and Arden area be included within Argyll and Bute.

Paintings and Photographs

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to buy or borrow photographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: None.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* paintings and *(b)* photographs there are on the walls of his rooms.

Mr. Lang: There are six paintings on the walls of my room in Dover house, London, none in my room in St Andrew's house, Edinburgh, and one in my room at the House of Commons. I have no photographs on the walls.

Ambulances (Response Times)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest figures for response times by ambulances to 999 calls for each of the health authorities or trust areas within Scotland; and what is the average for Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Stewart: The response times for the latest period available are as follows:

Health Board Area	*Responses (1 April 1993 to 30 November 1993)* 0-8 minutes per cent.	14-21 minutes per cent.
Argyll and Clyde	55	95
Ayr and Arran	45	92
Borders	58	94
Dumfries and Galloway	62	89
Fife	61	97
Forth Valley	56	96
Grampian	63	90
Greater Glasgow	47	86
Highland	61	96
Lanarkshire	46	95
Lothian	62	96
Tayside	66	95
Orkney	49	82
Shetland	44	72
Western Isles	59	84
Scotland Average	56	91
Target	(50)	(95)

Queensferry (Second Road Bridge)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the results of the feasibility study ready into a second road bridge at Queensferry; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Feasibility studies into aspects of the proposals for a second Forth road bridge at Queensferry and associated road links are nearing completion. The findings will be made available to interested parties, subsequently we will consider whether or not to proceed with the proposals in due course.

European Affairs (Responsibility)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many engagements he has carried out in his role as Minister responsible for European affairs; and what engagements he has planned for the next six months;

(2) what additional resources were made available in terms of staff and finance to his Department upon a Minister being appointed to be responsible for European affairs; how often this Minister has travelled abroad to discharge his responsibilities; which countries have been visited; and for what purpose.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* In view of the importance of the European Union and of European Community policies to Scotland and to Scottish interests, in May of last year I invited my noble Friend the Minister of State to take responsibility for general European issues within the Scottish Office. In addition, all Ministers in the Scottish Office continue to look after European affairs within their own areas of responsibility, and I myself continue to be actively involved in European issues.

In the course of their responsibilities all Scottish Office Ministers have undertaken engagements with European dimensions and will continue to do so as the opportunity arises. For example, in November last year I addressed the annual general meeting of the Scottish Council of the European Movement and in December opened the Europartenariat in Glasgow and my noble Friend the Minister of State attended a meeting in December held by the Local Government International Bureau for the United Kingdom members of the Committee of the Regions.

In addition to domestic engagements, Ministers have also visited other member states to further Scottish interests in the European context. Last year, I visited Brussels in January and September to attend meetings of the joint Environment and Transport Council, of the joint Foreign Affairs and Agriculture Council and of the Agriculture Council and to undertake other engagements relating to Scotland's interests in Europe including meetings with Commissioners Millan and Brittan and with the Scottish European Association and Scotland Europa.

In November last year my noble Friend the Minister of State visited Brussels to attend a meeting of Justice and Interior Ministers, to meet Scottish MEPs and to undertake other engagements relating to his responsibilities for general European issues; and in December he visited Strasbourg to participate in Scottish Week at the European Parliament. My hon. Friend the Minister for Fisheries in Scotland visited Brussels or Luxembourg on four occasions in 1993 to attend meetings of the Fisheries Council; in addition he visited Cologne to promote Scottish exports at the ANUGA food fair and in January this year visited Brussels for a meeting with Commissioner Paleokrassas.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism in Scotland visited Bavaria in February last year to promote Scotland as a tourist destination. My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry in Scotland visited Lille in June last year to support the Scottish presence at the Europartenariat event and Munich in December to participate in discussions about employment issues.

In response to the growing importance of the European dimension, the Scottish Office undertook a thorough review in 1991 of the way in which it conducts its European business. This resulted in the establishment of a European central support unit within the Scottish Office, currently staffed by one official at grade 7 level, one at higher executive officer level and one at executive officer level with clerical support. The unit is responsible for advising Ministers on general European issues of concern to Scotland.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland from which legally qualified persons he has had requests to see the evidence which he alleges he has in respect of two Libyans alleged to be involved in the crash of Pan Am 103.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* My noble and learned Friend, the Lord Advocate, has received requests from one Justice Zawi of the Libyan Supreme Court and from the noble Lord, Lord Macaulay of Bragar QC and Mr Alistair Duff, solicitor, acting on behalf of the two Libyan accused. My noble and learned Friend Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, the then Lord Advocate, made a full statement of facts available to the Libyan authorities when the arrest warrants were issued in November 1991. That statement contained more detail than would be required for extradition in most European countries.

The Lord Advocate has received a number of private requests from lawyers representing different interests, in the main civil, for information concerning the case and he has, in accordance with normal practice, declined to make evidence relating to the case against the two Libyans available to third parties.

Old People's Homes

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of old people's homes, and the number of nursing homes in the Blairgowrie cottage hospital and Meigle cottage hospital catchment areas.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1994]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, the number of old people's homes and nursing homes in Tayside at 31 March 1993 is as follows:

Residential Care Homes

	Number
Local Authority	30
Private	60
Voluntary	59
Nursing Homes	37

NHS Computers

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the NHS computer system pilot scheme at Crosshouse and Ayrshire Central hospitals is being funded; what assessment he has made of the impact on existing service provision at the hospitals; what plans there are to change the existing staff structures in hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 1 February 1994]:* The funding of the outpatients administration system pilot scheme at Crosshouse and Ayrshire central hospitals is being provided jointly by the site and from central funds in accordance with normal practice. The new computer system will automate a number of outpatient administration functions which are presently done manually and introduce other functions not currently available with a view to making more efficient uses of hospital services and resources.

I understand that there are no plans to change the existing staff structure of the outpatient services in these two hospitals.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new jobs have been created in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow in each year since 1975.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The information requested is not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list job losses in each year since 1975 in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow; and what was the level of youth unemployment in the same year.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* Information in the form requested is not available. No data are available for parliamentary constituencies on redundancies.

With regard to youth unemployment, data by age are only available quarterly from October 1983. The information is available on the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information.

Police Officers (Assaults)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of *(a)* murders, *(b)* murders of police officers, *(c)* assaults upon police officers, giving degrees of seriousness of injury and *(d)* policemen and policewomen in post in each year since 1975 in (i) Inverclyde, (ii) Strathclyde and (iii) Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The information in respect of Strathclyde and Scotland is set out in the tables. Statistics for Inverclyde, and information on the degrees of seriousness of injury resulting from assaults on police officers, are not held centrally.

Strathclyde

	Number of murder victims	*Number of murders of police officers*	*Number of officers in post*		*Number of assaults on police officers*[1]
			Male	*Female*	
1975	32	0	6,070	386	N/A
1976	38	1	6,007	424	N/A
1977	37	0	5,725	422	142
1978	27	0	5,947	405	549
1979	25	0	6,454	405	470
1980	35	0	6,509	373	211
1981	21	0	6,484	361	264
1982	34	0	6,491	342	278
1983	30	1	6,474	342	N/A
1984	31	0	6,449	343	170
1985	26	0	6,463	353	102
1986	34	0	6,390	379	104
1987	32	0	6,347	426	272
1988	23	0	6,305	463	544
1989	29	0	6,353	534	2,989
1990	20	0	6,249	555	2,854
1991	30	0	6,203	587	2,827
1992	53	0	6,172	625	2,786

[1] Figures for 1977 to 1987 record number of officers assaulted.
N/A—Not Available.

Scotland

	Number of murder victims	*Number of murders of police officers*	*Number of officers in post*		*Number of assaults on police officers*[2]
			Male	*Female*	
1975	43	0	11,656	676	N/A
1976	57	1	11,533	740	N/A
1977	60	0	11,105	767	811
1978	42	0	11,477	748	1,157
1979	40	0	12,280	736	1,122
1980	47	0	12,419	771	924
1981	42	0	12,379	749	876
1982	48	0	12,433	719	824
1983	54	1	12,495	713	N/A
1984	53	0	12,415	722	922

	Number of murder victims	*Number of murders of police officers*	*Number of officers in post*		*Number of assaults on police officers*[2]
			Male	*Female*	
1985	41	0	12,455	761	718
1986	48	0	12,504	838	745
1987	48	0	12,470	933	1,058
1988	[1]35	0	12,434	1,020	1,397
1989	41	0	12,593	1,157	4,131
1990	36	0	12,520	1,257	4,306
1991	53	0	12,493	1,353	3,989
1992	79	0	12,576	1,460	4,422

[1] Excludes Lockerbie air disaster.

[2] Figures for 1977 to 1987 record number of officers assaulted.

N/A—Not Available.

Substance Abuse

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the number of people who died in each of the past seven years as a result of the abuse or the misuse of *(a)* tobacco, *(b)* alcohol, *(c)* heroin, *(d)* cocaine and *(e)* cannabis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The available information is as follows. It is estimated that some 10,600 people in Scotland die each year from smoking-related illnesses, including lung cancer, coronary heart disease and stroke. In some 600 cases a year the cause of death, as recorded on the death certificate, is a disease identified as being alcohol-related; however alcohol plays a part in the deaths of many more people through its contribution, for example, to hypertension, violence and road accidents. In the year from 1 November 1991 it is estimated that between 80 and 120 habitual misusers of controlled drugs died as a direct result of drug misuse; many of these cases will have resulted from the misuse of several drugs and reliable estimates cannot be offered in relation to the role of particular drugs.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what recent representations he has received concerning funding for drug and alcohol addiction treatment centres; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what proposals he has concerning the funding of drug and alcohol addiction treatment centres; whether money obtained by way of European Community structural funds can be used for such purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The drugs task force, led by my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State, has received reports from health boards, social work departments, drug liaison committees and other organisations about facilities for drug misusers. This subject will be considered by the task force at a future meeting.

No recent representations have been received about the funding of alcohol addiction treatment centres.

The principal aim of the European structural funds is to assist the economic development of areas experiencing particular structural and economic difficulties. Drug and alcohol addiction treatment centres would not therefore be eligible for support from this source.

Psychiatric Hospitals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* long-stay and *(b)* short-stay psychiatric beds have been closed in each year of the health board areas in each of the past seven years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The information requested is not available in the form requested. The bed complement for psychiatric beds in total and the percentage of patients using psychiatric beds on 31 March each year from 1987 to 1993 is as follows.

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*Change 1987-93*	
								Number	*Per cent.*
Bed complement, Number									
Scotland	16,237	15,910	15,343	14,689	13,878	13,199	12,283	-3,954	-24·4
Argyll and Clyde	1,463	1,462	1,264	1,264	1,197	1,196	1,180	-283	-19·3
Ayrshire and Arran	878	878	861	861	756	744	740	-138	-15·7
Borders	288	276	270	255	255	249	248	-40	-13·9
Dumfries and Galloway	617	617	617	617	451	457	430	-187	-30·3
Fife	1,070	1,050	925	925	857	754	730	-340	-31·8
Forth Valley	857	820	850	800	750	740	714	-143	-16·7
Grampian	1,641	1,573	1,520	1,499	1,396	1,345	1,271	-370	-22·5
Greater Glasgow	3,536	3,533	3,495	3,195	2,914	2,744	2,488	-1,048	-29·6
Highland	655	655	579	499	489	489	444	-211	-32·2
Lanarkshire	1,468	1,405	1,405	1,302	1,346	1,204	954	-514	-35·0
Lothian	2,220	2,184	2,175	2,131	2,122	1,993	1,789	-431	-19·4
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	17	17	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	1,536	1,449	1,374	1,333	1,312	1,259	1,227	-309	-20·1
Western Isles	8	8	8	8	33	25	51	43	537·5
Length of stay of patients resident percentage									
1 year or less	35·6	35·6	36·3	37·4	38·1	39·3	[1]38·4	—	—
Over 1 year	64·4	64·4	63·7	62·6	61·9	60·7	[1]61·6		

[1] As at 31 December 1992.

Inverclyde Royal Hospital

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the persons appointed to the posts of members of the Inverclyde Royal Hospital Trust, with the dates of appointments, length of such appointments and remuneration.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The information requested on the appointments made by my right hon. Friend to the board of the Inverclyde Royal and Rankin Memorial hospital NHS trust is set out in the table. Details of the executive members of the board, who are appointed by the non-executive directors, are not held centrally.

	Date of appointment	*Appointed until*	*Annual remuneration £*
Chairman			
Mr. James Kinloch	6 December 1993	30 November 1997	17,145
Non-executive Directors			
Mrs. Margaret Bruce	23 December 1993	31 March 1996	5,000
Mr. Norman Cunningham	23 December 1993	31 March 1996	5,000
Mr. Robert Henderson	23 December 1993	30 November 1997	5,000
Mr. Martin McGeehan	23 December 1993	31 March 1996	5,000
Mrs. Jane MacMillan	23 December 1993	30 November 1997	5,000

Cervical Smears

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the number of women who have had to undergo medical and/or surgery treatment as a result of the reported misreading of cervical smear test slides at the Inverclyde Royal hospital; what forms of treatment have been taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* The re-reading of the cervical smear slides at Inverclyde Royal hospital led to around 440 women requiring further investigation and/or treatment. It is not possible to say how many of these patients required treatment as a result of the original misreporting of the smear results.

The forms of treatment include colposcopy without biopsy, colposcopically-directed selective biopsy, cold coagulation and conization of the cervix.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the procedures adopted by the Argyll and Clyde health board in response to the misreporting of the cervical smear tests at the Inverclyde Royal hospital, Greenock.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* Argyll and Clyde health board accepted the main thrust of the recommendations directed at them by the Inverclyde inquiry report and a task force was set up to advise the board on the action to be taken.

The proposals by the task force are to be implemented through a comprehensive purchasing plan based on service specification for all components of the board's cervical screening programme including targets and quality control procedures. The purchasing plan is to be presented to the board for approval at its meeting in February and it will be for provider units to deliver the service required through contracts.

The task force is also currently considering the implications of the rationalisation of the cervical cytopathology services. An extensive consultation exercise is currently underway involving relevant laboratory consultants, clinicians and outside experts. The task force is expected to complete this exercise and report with recommendations to the board by May.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women underwent cervical smear tests in each of the health board areas for the latest available year; what these figures are as percentages of women of the appropriate age range; what is the proportion of those who develop carcinomas before being recalled; and what is the recall period for each region.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* Information is available only on the number of smears processed and not the number of women examined. Figures for 1992—the latest available—are as follows:

	Number of cervical smears examined	*Percentage of eligible population*
Scotland	485,368	84·6
Argyll and Clyde	41,769	80·5
Ayrshire and Arran	33,925	85·8
Borders[1]	—	91·6
Dumfries and Galloway	12,921	91·2
Fife	32,656	88·0
Forth Valley	30,658	85·6
Grampian	54,897	90·2
Greater Glasgow	87,424	80·1
Highland	24,290	88·1
Lanarkshire	45,177	79·7
Lothian	86,294	85·4
Orkney[1]	—	91·8
Shetland[1]	—	91·6
Tayside	35,357	87·3
Western Isles[1]	—	78·8

[1] Smears of women in Borders, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles health board areas are included in figures for Lothian, Grampian (Orkney and Shetland) and Highland health boards respectively.

Information on the proportion of women who develop carcinomas before being recalled is not available.

All health boards in Scotland are now operating a three-year call/recall system.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 759, whether the target time of 14 days for the processing and notifying the results of cervical smear tests includes the processing time for general practitioners, hospitals or clinics to report the results to their patients.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* Yes.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women living, or formerly living, in the catchment area of the Inverclyde Royal hospital have as yet not been traced in relation to the recall programme following the discovery of the misreporting of cervical smear test slides at the hospital's cytology laboratory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 2 February 1994]:* As of 31 January 1994 there were 16 women with non-negative results on rescreening still to be traced. Of these 15 are believed to be in the United States, and one woman in Europe. The health board is continuing to pursue links to trace the remaining women. Approaches have been made to the United States internal revenue service to ascertain whether they can help in tracing the women.

Scottish Enterprise

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of the report by the Monitor Group into the future of the electronics sector in Scotland by the Monitor Group; if the report will be made public; and what action Scottish Enterprise has taken following the report.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* The report was prepared by the monitor group as part of a wider task to develop, with the Scottish electronics forum, a strategy for the electronics sector in Scotland. The total cost of that work was £480,000.

The text of the report has not yet been published since Scottish Enterprise does not consider the report on its own to be fully representative of all the associated work undertaken to develop the wider strategic approach. But I understand that its plans to pull this wider range of material together with the report itself, with a view to publication.

It is for Scottish Enterprise to decide how the work it commissioned from the monitor group should be taken forward; and I understand it is considering, with the Scottish Electronics forum, how that might best be done. Scottish Enterprise is willing to provide further details about the current position, or to meet the hon. Member to discuss the matter further, if that would be helpful. I have therefore written to the chairman of Scottish Enterprise asking him to write direct to the hon. Member about this matter.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 4 February 1994

EDUCATION

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what arrangements have been made for the publication of audited accounts for grant-maintained schools; and where details are available for inspection.

Mr. Robin Squire: The governing body of a grant-maintained school is required to present each year's accounts to the anual parents' meeting falling next after the submission of the accounts to the Secretary of State. The governing body must also ensure that the accounts are available at the school for inspection by any member of the public.

Cash Limits

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what changes he plans to announce to cash limits and running costs limits on votes within his responsibility for 1993-94.

Mr. Patten: Subject to parliamentary approval of the related supplementary estimates, the cash limits for class X, vote 1, schools, research and miscellaneous services; vote 2, higher and further education; vote 4, administration; and vote 6, office of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in England, will be amended. The changes are as follows:

Class and Vote	*Current cash limit* £	*Change* £	*Revised cash limit* £
X.1	741,282,000	-32,300,000	708,982,000
X.2	5,404,831,000	+1,006,000	5,405,837,000
X.4	94,301,000	+47,000	94,348,000
X.6	48,819,000	-1,266,000	47,553,000

The reduction to the cash limit on class X, vote 1 includes a reduction of £18,500,000 as a contribution towards offsetting the increase of £155 million sought via a supplementary estimate for class X, vote 3, student awards, loans and compensation payments, which is not cash limited; a reduction of £13,000,000 to offset wholly payments to universities and colleges of further education in respect of grants from the European regional development fund towards capital projects; and a transfer of £800,000 to class X, vote 2 to increase provision in respect of bursaries for the training of teachers in shortage subjects.

The net increase of £1,006,000 on class X, vote 2 takes account of an increase of £1,306,000 in gross provision for grant in aid to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, offset by a transfer of £828,000 from the Home Office for the costs of students sponsored to attend extended and upgraded courses in social work in universities, less a transfer of £622,000 to class X, vote 3 to increase provision for student loans associated with these courses; and the appropriation in aid of receipts of £1,100,000 from proceeds of sale of redundant properties at the Royal College of Art. The remainder of the vote 2 increase is offset by the transfer of £800,000 from class X, vote 1.

The increase on class X, vote 4 is the net result of a transfer of £127,000 from Property Holdings in respect of buildings maintenance and an increase of £80,000 in receipts of payments arising from services supplied by the Teachers Pensions Agency which are to be appropriated in aid of the vote. The running costs limit has been increased by £127,000 from £90,323,000 to £90,450,000.

The decrease on class X, vote 6 is the net result of a reduction of £1,300,000 in forecast outturn on programme and a transfer of £34,000 from Property Holdings in respect of buildings maintenance. The running costs limit has been decreased by £29,000 from £31,960,000 to £31,931,000. This is the net effect of the transfer from Property Holdings and a transfer of £63,000 for non-running costs provision in the same vote.

The increases on class X, votes 2 and 4 are wholly offset elsewhere and will not therefore add to the planned total for public expenditure.

School Governors

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what right school governors have to visit and inspect schools of which they are governors.

Mr. Forth: The Education Acts do not give governors an express right to visit their schools; but governors have a range of statutory duties and powers, and are entitled to expect reasonable access to schools as necessary to allow them to carry out their functions.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what assessment was made of the previous employment record of the new property controller of the Further Education Funding Council before he was appointed;

(2) who was consulted about the conduct of the new property controller of the Further Education Funding Council while he was employed by the Welsh Development Agency before his appointment to the Council.

Mr. Boswell: In accordance with its normal recruitment procedures, the Further Education Funding Council made an assessment of the previous employment record of the newly appointed head of property services on the basis of information obtained from his application form, from discussion with him at interview and from references taken up prior to his interview and the subsequent offer of employment. The references, which were provided in confidence, provided sufficient information about his conduct during his employment with the Welsh Development Agency to satisfy the council.

Office for Standards in Education

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many Ofsted contracts have been awarded to local education authority-based registered inspectors; what is their total value; in how many cases the contract was awarded to an LEA-based registered inspector when there was a lower bid entered by a registered inspection from outside the LEA sector; and what is the sum of the amounts by which the awarded contracts exceeded the value of lowest bid submitted by a non-LEA-based inspector in the financial year 1993-94 to date;

(2) how many Ofsted contracts were awarded to registered inspectors based outside local education authorities; what is their total value; in how many cases the contract was awarded to a registered inspector from outside the LEA sector when there was a lower bid entered by an LEA-based registered inspector; and what is the sum of the amounts by which the awarded contracts exceeded the value of the lowest bid submitted by an LEA-based inspector, in the financial year 1993-94 to date.

Mr. Robin Squire: The arrangements for inspecting schools under the Education (Schools) Act 1992, including the awarding of contracts to registered inspectors, are a matter for Ofsted.

I have asked Professor Sutherland to write to the hon. Member.

City Technology Colleges

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if the policy of parental preference applies to city technology colleges.

Mr. Robin Squire: All parents of children within the catchment area of a city technology college are free to express a preference for a place at the college. So many do so that inevitably many are disappointed not to receive the offer of a place. CTCs have a duty as far as possible to ensure that the pupil intake is representative of the full range of ability among pupils within the catchment area.

Dyslexia

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will set out the actions taken by his Department over the past five years to help children with dyslexia.

Mr. Forth: The Department has provided over £300,000 to support research into the early identification of dyslexia and ways in which information technology can assist dyslexic pupils.

The Education Act 1993 and the code of practice which subject to Parliament's approval my right hon. Friend hopes to issue this summer will significantly improve the arrangements for the education of all children with special needs. The code offers guidance to all schools and LEAs on their responsibilities towards all pupils with special needs of all kinds, including those with dyslexia.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Burma

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government are giving to alleviate the plight of the Rohingya refugees from Burma who fled to Bangladesh at the end of 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Her Majesty's Government have provided some £1·2 million for the Rohingyas via the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Red Cross-Crescent movement. My noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has approved a further £1 million in response to recent UN appeals for both care and maintenance programmes and for the official repatriation programme now expected to get under way, following agreements between the Burma authorities and UNHCR.

ENVIRONMENT

Cash Limits

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he proposes to make to the cash limits on the two PSA services votes in 1993-94.

Mr. Curry: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VII, vote 13—sale of the PSA businesses—will be increased by £4,540,000 from £39,351,000 to £43,891,000. The increase will not constitute a claim on the reserve as it will be netted off the proceeds from the Government's privatisation programme.

The provision is sought mainly to fund a payment to the purchaser of PSA projects, as provided for in the sale agreement, to adjust the consideration payment one year after completion of the sale depending on the numbers of transferred staff still employed by the business.

In addition, the cash limits for class VII, vote 11—PSA services—will be reduced by £43,535,000 from £163,760,000 to £120,225,000. This takes account of earlier recoveries of works expenditure from customer departments and a reduction in forecast severance expenditure. The net running cost limit on this vote will reduce by £7,512,000 from £103,596,000 to £96,084,000.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he has to announce to his Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. Gummer: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

(i) the cash limit for class VII, vote 5—central environmental services, etcetera—will be reduced by £6,300,000 from £391,336,000 to £385,036,000. This change reflects a saving of £6,300,000 in forecast expenditure on grant in aid to the National Rivers Authority;

(ii) the cash limit for class VII, vote 6—Property Holdings and other services to government—will be increased by £1,000 to £2,000. This reflects the token supplementary estimate taken for this vote. The gross running cost limit will be increased by £614,000 from £20,062,000 to £20,676,000 to meet early retirement costs and consultancy fees, and is partly funded by take up of running cost end-year flexibility entitlement—covered by the increase in the running costs limit announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1993, *Official Report*, columns *512-17*. The net running cost limit for the Security Facilities Executive agency will be reduced by £271,000 from £1,101,000 to £830,000. This reflects changing levels of business within SAFE. The net running cost limit for the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre will be increased by £5,624,000 from £1,200,000 to £6,824,000. This reflects increased business for the QEIICC and the introduction of an accommodation charge for the centre itself. This increase will be offset by increased receipts;

(iii) the cash limit for class VII, vote 7—DOE administration—will be increased by £357,000 from £225,544,000 to £225,901,000. This change reflects a number of small transfers to and from other votes, the most significant being an increase of £353,000 from Property Holdings—class VII, vote 6—in respect of maintenance charges. The Department of the Environment's gross running cost limit on class VII, vote 7 will be reduced by £2,864,000 from £226,578,000 to £223,714,000. In the main, this reduction is necessary to match the projected shortfall in Planning Inspectorate executive agency receipts;

(iv) the cash limit for class VII, vote 8—revenue support grant, payments of non domestic rates, Valuation Office services, etcetera, England—will be reduced by £666,000 from £28,808,799,000 to £28,808,113,000. This reflects the transfer of £155,000 in manpower savings from valuation tribunals to class VII, vote 12, for disabled persons' rate relief, emergency financial assistance to local authorities and rate rebates in enterprise zones, and a saving of £511,000;

(v) the DOE/Housing Corporation non-voted cash limit will be increased by £9,113,000 from £1,786,093,000 to £1,795,206,000, to reflect the transfer of £14,404,000 from the city challenge programme—to fund housing associations in city challenge areas—and an increase of £741,000 following the full take-up of end-year flexibility entitlement—announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1993, *Official Report*, columns *512-17*. It included the switching of £6,032,000 from capital to revenue to cover increased costs in demand-driven revenue programmes for which the Housing Corporation is responsible;

(vi) the DOE/urban aid non-voted cash limit will be reduced by £18,380,000 from £996,672,000 to £978,292,000. The change reflects a transfer of £14,404,000 to the housing vote—vote VII, 1—to meet an equivalent increase in city challenge housing association expenditure. A transfer of £1,376,000 to the Department of Transport is necessary in order to refund resources originally transferred to DOE for the London Docklands development corporation, but which are now no longer required. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will announce an equivalent increase in his cash limit today. The London Docklands development corporation's external financing limit for 1993-94 will be correspondingly reduced to £105,388,000. A further reduction of £2,600,000 will be made to reflect an excess carry-over of resources by the docklands light railway in 1992-93. The docklands light railway external financing limit for 1993-94 will be correspondingly reduced to £32,017,000.

(vii) the DOE/local authority capital non-voted cash limit will be reduced by £3,677,000 from £2,461,475,000 to £2,457,808,000. This change reflects reductions in provision for minor current expenditure grants for private sector renewal which have been partly offset by full take-up of end-year flexibility entitlement of £1,470,000. The original entitlement of £61,000 announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1993, *Official Report*, columns *512-17*, has been increased following revision of the forecast outturn figures;

(viii) the DOE/new towns non-voted cash limit will be increased by £20,613,000 from minus £116,938,000 to minus £96,325,000. This change reflects a shortfall in receipts of £39,607,000 and a reduction in expenditure of £17,912,000. The external financing limit for Letchworth Garden City development corporation will be reduced from zero to minus £1,082,000; and

(ix) the housing action trusts external financing limit will be reduced by £8,678,000 from £86,779,000 to £78,101,000. This change reflects a reduced borrowing requirement by housing action trusts.

Any cash limit increases will be offset by savings within the DOE, or transfers within DOE or from other Departments and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Steel and Newsprint (Energy Costs)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new measures he proposes to assist the steel and and newsprint industries to reduce their energy costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Government's best practice programme produces guides and case studies showing the successful implementation of energy efficiency technology and techniques in different industrial sectors, including steel and paper and board—covering newsprint. These have already helped stimulate take-up of measures leading to energy savings. Further projects are in the pipeline and proposed for the future.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Baldry: The figures are:

	£
1990-91	350,406
1991-92	246,508
1992-93	180,237

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's Office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon;

(2) which appointments since 1979 to public bodies or posts to which he is responsible have included candidates nominated by the Chief Whip's Office; if any nominees by this source have been appointed; and if he will give details.

Mr. Baldry: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of government relating to public appointments.

Groundwork Trusts

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funding has been allocated nationally to Groundwork trusts in each year since 1990-91; and what is the expected allocation for 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Atkins: The Groundwork Foundation has allocated the following funds to Groundwork trusts in England from its grant in aid as contributions to their approved running costs:

Year	*Amount £*	*Number of Trusts*
1990-91	1,292,407	22
1991-92	1,622,319	25
1992-93	1,521,017	25
1993-94[1]	1,994,318	28

[1] Estimated outturn.

For 1994-95 the foundation has made an initial provision of £2,889,000 for a target of 37 trusts in England.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funding has been allocated to each of the individual Groundwork trusts in Yorkshire and Humberside in each year since 1990-91; and what are the expected allocations for 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Atkins: There are two Groundwork trusts in the Yorkshire and Humberside region—South Leeds and Wakefield. Grants paid from the Groundwork Foundation's grant in aid as a contribution towards the trusts' approved running costs have been allocated as follows:

	South Leeds £	*Wakefield* £
1990-91	178,000	57,692
1991-92	150,000	48,444
1992-93	55,000	42,275
1993-94	55,000	15,000

Allocations for 1994-95 have not yet been made.

The trusts are also able to apply for grants for projects under departmental programmes, but details of these payments are not readily available.

Integrated Pollution Control

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to respond to the report by Environmental Data Services on integrated pollution control, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Atkins: The Government welcome the comprehensive review of the operation of integrated pollution control up to April 1993 by Environmental Data Services. I am pleased to note that the results of this study confirm that IPC has resulted in improved environmental performance.

Officials in the Department of the Environment and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution are currently considering the findings of the report in detail and will receive a presentation from the authors.

Ozone Layer

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the average percentage thinning of the stratospheric ozone layer over *(a)* Shetland and *(b)* northern Europe generally, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Atkins: The table sets out, for each year for which data are available, estimates of the average percentage departure of the thickness of the stratosperhic ozone layer over Shetland, from the long-term mean.

Year	*Shetland (Lerwick)*
1981	+5·2
1982	+7·0
1983	−2·6
1984	+2·1
1985	−1·8
1986	+0·9
1987	+0·6
1988	−2·1
1989	+1·5
1990	−0·9
1991	−0·3
1992	−3·2
1993	−6·7

Analysis of global ozone data is carried out by the World Meterological Office—United Nations Environment Programme ozone scientific assessment panel. Its latest estimate of the average depletion of the ozone layer at northern European latitudes is 3 per cent. per decade from 1979 to 1991. Large departures of 1 to 2 per cent. from this trend from late 1991 to May 1993 were reported by the United Kingdom stratospheric ozone review group, whose report has been placed in the library of the House. These years were greatly influenced by atmospheric dynamics and Mount Pinatubo volcanic aerosol and the low figures for 1992 and 1993 therefore do not necessarily imply an acceleration of ozone loss.

Environmental Information

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new classes of environmental information held by his Department were made available to the public between July 1992 and July 1993; what new rights to participate in the decision-making process on environmental issues were extended by his Department to the public in this period; and what new rights to seek remedies in the event of breach of environmental laws or failure to provide environmental services were introduced by his Department for the public.

Mr. Atkins: Since December 1992 the public have had statutory rights of access to all classes of environmental information subject to safeguards on confidentiality. In addition, a comprehensive system of public registers was already in place to enable the public to inspect information relating to the work of the pollution control authories. The environmental information regulations introduced the right of appeal to the courts for failure to release environmental information and the White Paper "Open Government"—Cm 2290—announced that the Government are considering whether an independent tribunal should be established to hear disputes.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his assessment of the adequacy of stabilisation of carbon dioxide emissions at 1990 levels as a United Kingdom contribution to the global restriction of carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Atkins: The United Kingdom's programme of measures aimed at returning emissions of carbon dioxide to 1990 levels by 2000 fully meets our commitments under the United Nations framework convention on climate change. The adequacy of the convention's commitments is due to be reviewed by the conference of parties to the convention in 1995, and again by 1998.

Living Over the Shop Campaign

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce his decision in respect of the living over the shop campaign; and how he proposes to implement that decision.

Sir George Young: I propose to make up to £10 million in supplementary credit approvals available to local authorities in 1994-95, to enable them to carry out flats over shops schemes. I am pleased that we have received over 500 separate bids from local authorities for resources totalling £40 million. I shall announce the allocations by the end of February. In addition, the Housing Corporation is funding such schemes from its approved development programme.

I am encouraged by increasing interest from authorities, housing associations and property owners in bringing spare space above shops back into residential use.

Disabled People

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure the provision of easy access for the disabled to all public buildings and spaces in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: In England and Wales, building regulations made under the Building Act 1984 make provision for access by disabled people to new public buildings. I have asked the Building Regulations Advisory Committee to advise me on whether these provisions should be extended to cover certain alterations and changes of use in such buildings. I hope to make a statement on this before Easter.

Elsewhere in the United Kingdom this is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Council Housing

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many families currently on local authority waiting lists need *(a)* one bedroom, *(b)* two bedrooms and *(c)* three or more bedroom properties.

Sir George Young: Information on the number of households on council housing waiting lists is reported by local authorities on their annual housing investment programme—HIP1—returns.

The latest available figures show a total of 1,208,790 households on council housing waiting lists in England on 1 April 1993.

No information is collected centrally on the size of dwellings required by families on the housing waiting lists.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* one bedroom, *(b)* two bedroom and *(c)* three or more bedroom properties local authorities manage; and how many are currently available in (i) Greater London and (ii) south-east England.

Sir George Young: Local authorities report each year on the number of dwellings that they manage in their subsidy claim form returns.

The latest available figures are for 1 April 1993 and show that local authorities managed 980,106 properties with one bedroom, 1,204,067 with two bedrooms and 1,577,847 with three or more bedrooms.

The number of local authority owned dwellings that were available for letting immediately, or after minor repairs, on 1 April 1993 totalled 9,663 in Greater London and 5,172 in south-east England—excluding London—as reported by local authorities in their latest annual housing investment programme—HIP1—returns. Information is not centrally available on size of local authority-owned dwellings that are vacant.

Building Regulations

Ms. Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received from housing associations regarding the review of part M of the Building Regulations and its application; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has received from *(a)* consumer groups and *(b)* Age Concern regarding the review of part M of the Building Regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have received a number of representations regarding the review of part M of the Building Regulations, including some from housing associations, consumer groups and Age Concern who consider that the requirements in the Building Regulations relating to access for disabled people should be extended to cover new dwellings. The Building Regulations Advisory Committee is at present examining the desirability and practicability of this. I hope to be in a position to make a statement on this before Easter.

Homelessness

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report,* column *438,* which local authorities formally made representations to him in writing seeking restrictions on the rights of access of homeless persons to social housing before October 1993.

Sir George Young: Over the years, as part of our continuing dialogue with local authorities, we have received a steady flow of representations on different aspects of housing policy, including the homelessness legislation. We do not keep a separate record of the sort of representations that the hon. Member appears to have in mind.

Packaging Waste

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received a plan from the companies of the packaging chain to recover packaging waste.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology and I will be meeting the producer responsibility group on Monday 7 February. We expect to receive a plan from the group at that meeting. I will ensure that copies are placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers of 20 January, *Official Report,* columns *798-99,* what target he has set for the time to process an appeal by the independent tribunal service; how many appeals were processed after this target time; and how many appeals in total were dealt with during this period.

Mr. Scott: The responsibility for the administration of the independent tribunal service lies with its president, His Honour Judge Anthony Thorpe. I am informed by Judge Thorpe that in his view there was until recently insufficient information on which to base a target for disability appeal tribunals. The independent tribunal service is currently collecting information to enable Judge Thorpe to set targets for this work for 1994-95.

Invalidity Benefit

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many men aged 55 years and over, have had their entitlement to invalidity benefit withdrawn in the last six months.

Mr. Scott: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lung Cancer

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the criteria for diagnosis of asbestos-related lung cancer.

Mr. Scott: We have no such plans.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which appointments since 1979 to public bodies or posts for which he is responsible have included candidates nominated by the Chief Whip's Office; if any nominees by this source have been appointed; and if he will give details.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 3 February, *Official Report,* column *838.*

Child Dependency Additions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what saving in the cost of child dependency additions will result from deferring entitlement from 28 to 52 weeks of incapacity, in 1995-96 and each subsequent year for which estimates are available; and what are the average numbers of families and children expected to be affected in each year.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the table:

	1995-96	*1996-97*
Estimated Savings[1]	£5 million	£5 million
Estimated number of families affected[2]	10,000	10,000
Estimated number of children affected[2]	20,000	20,000

[1] Estimates expressed in constant 1993-94 prices, rounded to the nearest £5 million, and are net of offsetting expenditure on income-related benefits.

[2] Figures given are the average number of cases affected at a point in time in the years concerned, rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Advisory Panel on Assessment of Incapacity

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will consult the members of the Advisory Panel on Assessment of Incapacity as to their willingness to have their identity revealed to hon. Members; and if he will publish the names of those who have no objection;

(2) if he will make the briefing and background papers which are supplied to members of the Advisory Panel on Assessment of Incapacity available on request to organisations not represented on the panel;

(3) which organisations are represented on the Advisory Panel on Assessment of Incapacity; and by what criteria they were selected.

Mr. Scott: I am not willing to consult or publish as suggested. The assessment panel members have not been selected as representatives of particular organisations. I explained my reasons in Standing Committee E on the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill on 1 February at columns 27-28.

I can reassure the hon. Member that copies of the background paper used by the assessment panel are available from this Department.

European Law

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report,* column *265,* if he will outline what is meant by the referral to the European Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling on questions of European Law; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: If a court or tribunal isa member state is unclear on a question of European law in a case before it, the issue can be referred to the European Court of Justice for a definitive interpretation of the provisions of European law in question. Such a referral can be made by any court or tribunal if it considers that a decision on the issue is necessary to enable judgment to be given. Once the European Court of Justice has answered the question, it is sent back to the national court or tribunal, which then applies the ruling to the case before it. Such a ruling by the European Court of Justice, interpreting provisions of European law at the request of a national court or tribunal, is called a preliminary ruling.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the projected expenditure in 1993-94 on staff wages for the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 3 February 1994:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking for details about the projected expenditure on staff wages in the Child Support Agency in 1993/94.

Of the total budget of £116 million allocated for the Agency's capital and running costs in 1993/94, approximately £74 million is for staffing costs.

I hope you find this information useful.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions since April 1993 the Child Support Agency has issued letters alleging parenthood which have been subsequently withdrawn as being in error.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ros Hepplewhite to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 3 February 1994:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking about maintenance enquiry forms (MEFs) sent in error by the Child Support Agency.

The information requested is not collected. It is estimated, however, that of the 344,000 MEFs issued to the end of December 1993, less than 0·05 per cent. have been withdrawn owing to error.

I hope that you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Act 1991

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish the report in connection with the operation of the Child Support Act 1991 in relation to ethnic minorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 28 January 1994]:* Prior to the launch of the Child Support Agency, the Department of Social Security commissioned surveys on the new system of child maintenance among a number of groups, including Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities. These surveys were carried out with a view to developing specific publicity campaigns and were taken into account in addressing the information needs of the communities but were not intended for publication.

Elderly People

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's estimate of the number of people who will be aged *(a)* 65 years and over and *(b)* 80 years and over for each year to 2010.

Mr. Hague *[pursuant to his reply, 28 January 1994, c. 446]:* The information contained a typographical error. The estimate for the number of people—in thousands—aged 80 and over in 2001 should read "2,499".

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Industrial Research Establishments

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date he received a copy of the KPMG report on his Department's industrial research establishments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 4 May 1993, *Official Report*, column 4, when I undertook to report the conclusions of the KPMG report to the House. An initial report was received from KPMG in November 1993 and further work has been commissioned which I expect to be completed in the near future.

Coal and Steel Industries

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total budget allocated by the European Community, under the European Coal and Steel Community treaty, to assist the improvement of economic and social conditions in the coal and steel-producing regions of the EC, giving figures separately, and in each year since their establishment, for *(a)* industrial loans, *(b)* conversion loans in areas where coal and steel industries have suffered severe job losses, *(c)* housing loans to improve living conditions for coal and steel workers, *(d)* readapation grants for workers made redundant in coal and steel industries, *(e)* RECHAR, *(f)* RESIDER and *(g)* coal and steel research; and what proportion of each of these grants has been awarded to (i) the northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information is as follows:

	EC *(million ecu)*	*All member states (million ecu)*	*United Kingdom share (million ecu)*	*United Kingdom percentage share*
Total ECSC loans advanced 1952-92	19,670·4	—	4,792·[illegible]	24·0
Total disbursement of conversion loans at 31 December 1992	—	5,485·2	1,893·8	34·5
Total disbursement of article 54 loans at 31 December 1992	—	13,624·7	2,862·8	21·0
Total loans for workers' houses disbursed at 31 December 1992	—	560·5	36·2	6·5

Research Programmes

A total figure for the period 1952-92 and a breakdown by country is not readily available, figures for the last three years are given:

Million ecu

	Steel industry	*Coal industry*
1990	43	36
1991	62	48
1992	58	48

	RECHAR (million ecu[1])	*RESIDER (million ecu[1])*
Total EC	325	131
United Kingdom share	158	5
Northern England	26	5

[1] at 1993 prices.

	£ million
	ECSC contribution
Iron and steel employees readaptation benefits scheme at 1990 prices—1974 to 1992	282
Readaptation benefits to coal workers—1984 to 1993	266

Source: Evaluation report EMIS 6.

A more detailed breakdown is not readily available but some further information is available in the ECSC financial report for 1992, which I am arranging to be placed in the Library of the House.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report,* column *986,* what are the special adviser Lady Strathnaver's particular qualifications, expertise or experience relating to his departmental responsibilities.

Mr. Heseltine: She does her job well.

Pension Funds

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many court cases have involved superannuation scheme transfers by state-owned industries since 1988; and what were their outcomes;

(2) which state-owned industries have used superannuation scheme surpluses for uses other than those for which the funds were established since 1988; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how state-owned industries' pension fund trustees are consulted over changes to the funds;

(4) how many trustees are appointed to each of the state-owned industries' pension funds; how they are selected; and if he will name the current trustees in each case.

Mr. Eggar: The management of the pension funds of state-owned industries is a matter for the individual industry concerned and for the fund trustees.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 1 February 1994, *Official Report,* column *611.*

British Gas

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total grant aid received by British Gas from the European Community for key infrastructure improvements prior to privatisation.

Mr. Eggar: This subject is a matter for the board of British Gas. I have therefore passed on this request to the chairman of British Gas.

Insurance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what review he makes of insurance companies' participation in block insurance schemes of insurance companies premium rate policies in respect of geographical areas and of insurance discounts for neighbourhood watch and allied schemes.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: None. The Secretary of State's powers under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 are primarily concerned with the solvency of insurance companies and, except where such matters are concerned, he does not intervene in their day-to-day business.

Cash Limits

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes will be made to his Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. Heseltine: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV, vote 1—support for business, consumer and investor protection, energy programmes and administration—will be increased by £1,789,000 from £1,237,111,000 to £1,238,900,000.

An increase in the gross running costs limit for the Department of Trade and Industry from £328,299,000 to £330,088,000 fully accounts for this amount. The increase largely results from the take-up of £1,528,000 under the end year flexibility arrangements announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1993, *Official Report,* columns *512-17.* The balance is accounted for by transfers from Property Holdings of £245,000 and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of £28,000 offset by a transfer to the Office of Public Service and Science of £12,000 in respect of machinery of government changes.

There are some other changes in the allocation of provision. This includes a net increase of expenditure by the Warren Spring Laboratory and United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority merger costs amounting to £5,591,000 and £200,000 towards support for the mining equipment industry. These amounts are offset by a corresponding reduction on the fast reactor energy programme.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Cryer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what quantity of CFCs was exported from the United Kigdom for each year from 1990 to 1993.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1990 the United Kingdom exported 48,400 metric tonnes of CFCs. These are defined as chlorinated and fluorinated derivatives of acylic hydrocarbons and comprise commodity codes 290340100 to 290340600 of the combined nomenclature. More recent information is not available due to commercial confidentiality.

WALES

Teachers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time teachers were employed by Welsh local education authorities in the years 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest available data are for 1992-93. The information for that and earlier years is contained in "Statistics of Education and Training in Wales: Schools", No. 2, 1994,—tables 6.03 and 6.06—published on 2 February 1994.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made as to the effect the operation of the channel tunnel will have on transport in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Road transport will have good access to the tunnel via the trunk road and motorway network. It is for the railway operators to assess the needs of their customers. Connections with the inter-capital services from Waterloo are expected this year. Services are expected to develop as British Rail's schedules become fully operational.

Gross Domestic Product

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current gross domestic product per head by constituency in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: Estimates of gross domestic product are not available for areas smaller than counties.

A470

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when plans will be brought forward to upgrade the A470 road between Betws y Coed and Blaenau Ffestiniog; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The draft orders for the first stage of the improvement, between Cancoed and Minffordd, were published on 30 November 1993. Further stages are being progressed.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Ieun Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the total amounts spent on redundancy payments for each Welsh health authority or trust, and for Wales as a whole, for each year since 1987.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available centrally.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what he is doing to promote equal opportunities for women entrepreneuses in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Assistance for business start-ups and for existing businesses is of course available on an equal opportunities basis throughout Wales, but women entrepreneuses can face additional challenges and I am funding the consortium Chwarae Teg to report on the appropriateness of existing business support services in meeting the particular needs of women. In the light of these findings, Chwarae Teg will develop an action plan for improving those services.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the landfill refuse disposal sites in Wales *(a)* which are licensed for co-disposal and *(b)* for which applications for licences for co-disposal have been made but not yet granted.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not maintained centrally. I would refer the hon. Member to the district councils which are responsible for licensing waste disposal facilities.

Breast Cancer

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of women in the eligible target group have been screened for breast cancer in the last three years in Wales; how many women have breast cancer; and how many women died from breast cancer in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As at 31 March 1993, 39 per cent. of the eligible women in Wales—women aged 50 to 64—were known to have been screened for breast cancer in the previous three years as part of the national screening programme. However, it should be noted that the screening centres for the populations in north and west Wales did not become operational until the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992 respectively.

Estimates of the number of women who currently have breast cancer are not available centrally. However, an average of 1,685 new breast cancer cases per year were registered for Welsh residents for the period 1984 to 1988.

In the three years to 31 December 1992 there were 2,365 deaths of Welsh female residents from breast cancer.

Health Promotion Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales concerning the calling in of the district auditor to investigate fraud and embezzlement in the authority;

(2) on what date the district auditor was requested to investigate the travel budget of the health promotion for Wales; and on what date he expects to receive the auditor's report.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: On 13 December 1993, following an internal enquiry, the chairman of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales requested the district audit service to carry out a full investigation of all expenses claims for international travel. Its investigation is continuing and a report is expected in mid-February. The chairman has kept the Department informed throughout and is continuing to do so.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales, the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority and the provost of the Welsh National School of Medicine in relation to the total cumulative salary and terms and conditions of employment present and future of the executive director of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Professor Catford has resigned from both his authority and college posts with immediate effect from Wednesday 2 February 1994. He therefore has no present or future terms and conditions of employment in relation to the Health Promotion Authority for Wales.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in relation to the travel expenses of the executive director of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To date, I have received one letter and 11 parliamentary questions from the hon. Member.

Cervical Cancer

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of women in the target group have had a cervical cancer smear test in Wales within the last five years; how many women in Wales have cervical cancer; and how many women died of cervical cancer.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As at 31 March 1993 an estimated 84 per cent. of women in the target group—women aged 20 to 64 resident in the district but excluding those no longer required to be screened—were known to have had a cervical smear test in the previous five years as part of the national recall system.

Estimates of the number of women who currently have cervical cancer are not available centrally. However, an average of 373 new cervical cancer cases per year were registered for Welsh residents for the period 1984 to 1988.

In the five years to 31 December 1992 there were 611 deaths of Welsh residents from cervical cancer.

Cash Limits

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he proposes to make to the cash limits for his Department in the current financial year.

Mr. Redwood: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit on class XV, vote 2 will be increased by £4,500,000 from £173,940,000 to £178,440,000; the cash limit on class XV, vote 8 will be reduced by £22,145,000 from £1,381,726,000 to £1,359,581,000; and the cash limit on class XV, vote 9 will be increased by £404,000 from £65,142,000 to £65,546,000. The local authority capital cash limit—WO/LACAP—will be increased by £358,000 from £409,185,000 to £409,543,000 and the cash limit on the European regional development fund—WO/ERDF—will be reduced by £18,116,000 from £50,650,000 to £32,534,000. The running costs limit for the Department will be increased by £165,000 from £77,284,000 to £77,449,000.

The increase in the cash limit for class XV, vote 2 is required partly to offset a forecast shortfall in receipts by the Welsh Development Agency.

The net reduction in the cash limit for class XV, vote 8 arises mainly from the transfer of provision to class XV, vote 7 in respect of (i) a revised estimate of drug expenditure for GP fundholders—£6,750,000—and (ii) NHS trusts—£16,182,000. These transfers comprise part of a spring supplementary estimate for class XV, vote 7 of £46,178,000.

The increase in the cash limit for class XV, vote 9 comprises mainly a transfer of £147,000 from the Property Services Agency and additional resources for capital expenditure of £250,000.

There are also changes to two non-voted cash limits. The increase in the cash limit for WO/LACAP is in respect of a transfer from HO/LACAP in respect of the replacement of fire service mobilisation and communication systems. The reduction in the cash limit for WO/ERDF reflects lower than expected expenditure on ERDF projects in 1993-94.

None of the proposed changes will add to the planned total of public expenditure.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 16 December, *Official Report,* column *871,* what are the particular qualifications, experience or expertise relating to Northern Ireland of the special adviser Mr. Jonathon Caine.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is not my practice to comment on the qualifications, expertise or experience of my special adviser.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 1 February, *Official Report,* column *611.*

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Amount* £
1990-91	93,269·04
1991-92	60,164·56
1992-93	63,817·38

Cash Limits

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cash and running costs limits for the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland departmental services, the independent living fund and certain national agricultural schemes for 1993-94.

Sir John Wheeler: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, it is proposed that the cash limit for class XVI, vote 1—the Northern Ireland Office—will be increased by £29,526,000 from £895,440,000 to £924,966,000.

The cash limit for most Northern Ireland departmental services will be decreased by £46,165,000 from

£3,628,922,000 to £3,582,757,000. This decrease arises from the transfer of £22,333,000 to the Northern Ireland Office cash limit and other technical changes of £23,832,000 net.

The cash limit for the independent living fund will decrease by £52,000 to reflect a reduction in provision earlier in the year.

The cash limit covering national agricultural capital grant schemes and certain assistance for production, marketing and processing and the fishing industry will decrease by £1,063,000 from £11,027,000 to £9,964,000 mainly as a result of transfers to non-cash-limited areas.

The combined running cost limit for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland departments will be increased by £6,869,000 from £723,455,000 to £730,324,000. This reflects the take-up of £3,582,000 end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1993, *Official Report*, columns *511-17*, a net transfer of £1,610,000 from the Department of Social Security, mainly in respect of child support costs, a transfer of £1,657,000 from the Inland Revenue in respect of services provided and minor transfers totalling a net £20,000. Of the revised running cost provision, £174,692,000 is for the NIO and £555,632,000 is the NI departments.

These changes will not add to the planned total of PE.

Benefits

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentages of adults and children, distinguishing between claimants, adult dependants and child dependants, received *(a)* supplementary benefit or income support, *(b)* family income supplement or family credit, *(c)* rent rebates or rent allowances or *(d)* rate rebates or community charge benefit or council tax benefit in each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Ancram: The available information is set out in the tables. Housing benefit is the Northern Ireland equivalent to community charge benefit and council tax benefit.

Supplementary Benefit and Income Support

Year ending	*Type of Benefit*	*Claimants*	*Dependent Partners*	*Children*
December 1978	Supplementary Benefit	116,446	29,279	70,545
December 1979	Supplementary Benefit	115,359	26,326	64,790
December 1980	Supplementary Benefit	128,993	32,443	80,308
December 1981	Supplementary Benefit	149,977	38,133	93,595
December 1982	Supplementary Benefit	164,888	44,888	109,863
December 1983	Supplementary Benefit	174,515	48,812	117,083
December 1984	Supplementary Benefit	180,806	49,091	116,258
February 1986	Supplementary Benefit	184,374	52,802	135,251
May 1987	Supplementary Benefit	190,780	51,815	134,052
May 1988	Income Support	184,140	44,940	118,240
May 1989	Income Support	183,400	42,420	121,900
May 1990	Income Support	179,000	38,500	118,580
May 1991	Income Support	180,773	Figures Not Available	
May 1992	Income Support	199,820	40,400	139,420
May 1993	Income Support	Figures Not Yet Available		

NB. Income support replaced supplementary benefit on 11 April 1988.

Family Income Supplement and Family Credit

Year and type of benefit	*Families*	*Children*
1978 Family Income Supplement	8,426	30,402
1979 Family Income Supplement	7,898	27,493
1980 Family Income Supplement	8,534	28,857
1981 Family Income Supplement	11,295	36,378
1982 Family Income Supplement	12,678	38,734
1983 Family Income Supplement	13,357	39,557
1984 Family Income Supplement	figures not available	
1985 Family Income Supplement	14,277	42,613
1986 Family Income Supplement	14,941	41,322
1987 Family Income Supplement	14,818	40,399
1988 Family Credit	13,451	34,897
1989 Family Credit	14,224	36,204
1990 Family Credit	14,039	35,073
1991 Family Credit	15,244	37,294

Year and type of benefit	*Families*	*Children*
1992 Family Credit	17,984	42,532
1993 Family Credit	figures not yet available	

NB: Family credit replaced family income supplement on 11 April 1988.

Housing benefit recipients

Financial year	*Rent/rates rebates [housing executive tenants]*	*Rent/rates allowances [private tenants]*	*Rates rebates [owner occupiers]*	*Totals*
1984-85	119,200	19,000	49,200	187,400
1985-86	117,600	19,200	47,600	184,400
1986-87	117,600	20,100	51,700	189,400
1987-88	118,300	21,100	54,000	193,400
1988-89	109,273	20,253	35,538	165,064
1989-90	109,113	21,585	28,200	158,898
1990-91	109,113	21,519	35,471	166,103
1991-92	110,206	17,595	32,598	160,399
1992-93	110,439	26,162	28,512	165,113

NB: Housing benefit was introduced on 21 November 1983

Note: Figures for 1984-85 to 1987-88—inclusive—rounded to nearest hundred

Family income supplement and family credit
Families and children receiving FIS/family credit as proportion of families and children receiving child benefit

Year and type of benefit	*Families Per cent.*	*Children Per cent.*
1978 Family income supplement	4	6
1979 Family income supplement	4	6
1980 Family income supplement	4	6
1981 Family income supplement	5	8
1982 Family income supplement	6	8
1983 Family income supplement	6	8
1984 Family income supplement	Figures not available	
1985 Family income supplement	7	9
1986 Family income supplement	7	9
1987 Family income supplement	7	9
1988 Family credit	6	8
1989 Family credit	7	8
1990 Family credit	6	8
1991 Family credit	7	8
1992 Family credit	8	9
1993 Family credit	Figures not yet available	

Note: Family credit replaced family income supplement on 11 April 1988.

Supplementary Benefit and Income Support

Year and type of benefit	*Mid-year total adult (16+) population estimates*	*Supplementary Benefit/ Income Support claimants and dependent partners as a percentage of the adult population Per cent.*	*Total number of children in receipt of Child Benefit*	*Children dependent on Income Support/ Supplementary Benefit as a percentage of children receiving Child Benefit Per cent.*
1978 Supplementary Benefit	1,034,061	14	481,349	15
1979 Supplementary Benefit	1,043,306	14	488,114	13
1980 Supplementary Benefit	1,051,772	15	489,050	16
1981 Supplementary Benefit	1,065,301	18	478,712	20
1982 Supplementary Benefit	1,071,588	20	474,086	23
1983 Supplementary Benefit	1,080,683	21	470,528	25
1984 Supplementary Benefit	1,091,449	21	467,556	25
1985 Supplementary Benefit	1,101,960	[1]—	465,144	[1]—
1986 Supplementary Benefit	1,112,556	21	463,178	29
1987 Supplementary Benefit	1,122,715	22	459,962	29

Year and type of benefit	*Mid-year total adult (16+) population estimates*	*Supplementary Benefit/ Income Support claimants and dependent partners as a percentage of the adult population Per cent.*	*Total number of children in receipt of Child Benefit*	*Children dependent on Income Support/ Supplementary Benefit as a percentage of children receiving Child Benefit Per cent.*
1988 Income Support	1,128,038	20	461,056	26
1989 Income Support	1,135,388	20	459,274	27
1990 Income Support	1,142,825	19	459,646	26
1991 Income Support	1,156,767	[1]—	461,314	[1]—
1992 Income Support	1,171,347	21	463,098	30
1993 Income Support	1,180,000	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—

[1] Figures not available.

[2] Figures not yet available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commowealth Affairs how many times property on St. Helena has fallen forfeit to Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which this occurs.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We are aware of one case in which a real property has technically fallen forfeit to Her Majesty. However, under the relevant legislation the Government of St. Helena would have to follow further procedures in order to give effect to that forfeiture. The Government of St. Helena have declared that they have no plans to take these steps. I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly setting out the legal background.

Ministers (Travel)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* actual expenditure by his Department on (1) internal and (2) overseas travel by the Secretary of State in 1989-90 and after 26 October 1989, 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93 and so far in 1993-94.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There is no separate budget for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' internal travel, which is minimal. Similarly, his overseas travel is paid from a budget shared with other FCO Ministers. The figures for actual expenditure since 1989 on his overseas travel are:

	£
1 April 1989 to 26 October 1989	287,856·86
27 October 1989 to 31 March 1990	506,903·44
1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991	694,404·04
1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992	1,037,373·50
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	1,569,712·00
1 April 1993 to date	1,021,503·70

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the overseas visits that have been made by Foreign Office Ministers since June 1987; and what was the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information is available in a table of 30 pages which has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what ministerial visits have been made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, over each of the last three years to *(a)* Indonesia, *(b)* Jordan, *(c)* Oman, *(d)* Nigeria, *(e)* Ecuador, *(f)* Malaysia and *(g)* India; and what was their main purpose in each case.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Over the last three years, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers including the Minister for Overseas Development have made the following visits to the named countries.

Country	*Minister*	*Date*	*Purpose of visit*
Indonesia	Lord Caithness	April 1991	Bilateral
	Mr. Goodlad	October 1992	Bilateral
	Secretary of State	April 1993	Bilateral
Jordan	Secretary of State	January 1991	Bilateral
	Mr. Hogg	March 1991	Bilateral
	Mr. Hogg	July 1993	Bilateral
	Secretary of State	January 1994	Bilateral
Oman	Nil		
Nigeria	Mrs. Chalker	January 1991	Bilateral
	Secretary of State	January 1993	Bilateral
	Baroness Chalker	January 1993	Bilateral
Ecuador	Mr. Garel-Jones	June 1993	Bilateral
Malaysia	Lord Caithness	April 1991	Bilateral
	Lord Caithness	October 1991	Bilateral
	Secretary of State	July 1992	Bilateral
	Mr. Goodlad	April 1993	Bilateral
India	Secretary of State	May 1991	Funeral of Rajiv Gandhi
	Mr. Lennox-Boyd	September 1991	CPA Conference
	Secretary of State	January 1992	Bilateral
	Mrs. Chalker	February 1992	Bilateral
	Mr. Lennox-Boyd	March 1992	EC Troika
	Secretary of State	November 1993	Bilateral

Lockerbie Bombing

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Libya to make two of its citizens available to face charges concerning the Lockerbie bombing; what responses he has recently received from the Libyan Government on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have made no such representations. The Libyan Government are fully aware of the requirements of the United Nations Security Council, and in particular that they should ensure the apearance of those accused of the Lockerbie bombing for trial before the appropriate United States or United Kingdom court.

South Pacific Commission

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the reasons for withdrawing from the South Pacific Commission.

Mr. Goodlad: Withdrawal from membership of the South Pacific Commission will allow us to concentrate limited financial resources where they will have most effect, on maintaining a bilateral diplomatic presence in a number of south Pacific countries, and on a continuing bilateral and multilateral aid programme. Since the New Hebrides became independent as Vanuatu in 1980 the United Kingdom's right to membership of the commission has depended solely on the existence of the Pitcairn island dependency. Withdrawal will not affect support for the commission's development projects, which is met from the Overseas Development Aministration's aid programme budget.

Belize

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current security of Belize; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The sovereignty and independence of Belize are recognised by all members of the United Nations. Belize is also a member of the Organisation of American States. We have made clear our readiness to participate with others in any consultations arising from a future threat to Belize's security.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the issue of the security of Belize and the political instability in Guatemala at the United Nations Security Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no plans to do so. Belize is a member of the United Nations and would be free to raise this issue if she so wished.

Korea

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent talks have taken place between Her Majesty's Government and the United States of America concerning the current situation on the Korean peninsula.

Mr. Goodlad: We are in regular and continuous contact with the United States government on Korean matters.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula.

Mr. Goodlad: We have consistently supported efforts to achieve peaceful reunification of the two Koreas. This requires an early resumption of substantive discussions between them.

Flight ULE 966

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report,* column *145,* how many Jamaican citizens intending to travel to the United Kingdom on flight ULE 966 arriving at Gatwick on 21 December checked special travel documentation, issued by Caribbean Gold, the tour operators, with officials at the British high commission; and what advice these passengers received.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British high commission in Kingston has no record of any enquiries from Jamaican citizens holding special travel documentation from Caribbean Gold.

Azerbaijan

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the supply of arms to Azerbaijan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since February 1992 a voluntary Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe embargo has been in place in the supply of military equipment to the parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We have stood by the terms of this embargo and will continue to do so.

As I made clear in my answer to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 27 January, *Official Report,* column *467,* it would be a serious matter if a British company were found to be breaking this embargo.

European Union

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The following meetings are planned.

7-8 February: Foreign Affairs Council.
14 February: ECOFIN Council.
21-22 February: Agriculture Council.

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

(a) *Foreign Affairs Council: 7-8 February*
  Presidency priorities: open debate
  EP resolutions
  White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment: follow-up
  Accession negotiations: preparation for negotiating meetings
  CFSP financing
  Appointments to Court of Auditors
  Ombudsman decision
  Relations with Baltic countries: negotiating mandate
  Russia: progress of negotiations on partnership and co-operation agreement
  Ukraine
  Relations with EP, in particular
    Legislative programme
    Inter-institutional agreements
    Ratification of decision on EP seats
  Former Yugoslavia
  Appointment of European observer in Cyprus
  Relations with Algeria: Union position for Co-operation Council
  Council regulation on implementing EEA
Negotiating mandate for mid-term review of Lome IV
Trade policy problems
  Trade policy instruments
  Transfer of jurisdiction to Court of First Instance
  Uruguay Round: preparation for Marrakesh meeting
  Conclusion of US/EC agreement of spirits
Budget discipline
Dual use of goods
Other business: relations with Switzerland

(b) *ECOFIN Council: 14 February*
Presidency work programme (possible)
Portuguese convergence programme
Follow-up to White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment
EMU implementation
7th VAT Directive

(c) *Agriculture Council: 21-22 February*
Spanish and Portuguese accession—wine (possible)
Greek agricultural surveys (possible)
Genetic resources (possible)
European forestry information and communication system (possible)
Wine balance sheets (possible)
Milk producers compensation (possible)
Price-fixing
Wine regime reform (possible)
Plant breeders rights

Cash Limits

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further changes he proposes to make in his Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running cost limits for 1993-94.

Mr. Goodlad: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class II, vote 1—overseas representation—will be reduced by £2,027,000 from £818,609,000 to £816,582,000.

The gross running costs limit on class II, vote 1 will be reduced by £10,228,000 from £579,877,000 to £569,649,000 following a transfer of provision to class II, vote 2 and vote 4.

The cash limit for class II, vote 2—other external relations—will be increased by £100,827,000 from £301,230,000 to £402,057,000. The increase will be met by underspends of £9·2 million on vote 1, by underspends of £1·8 million on vote 2 and by increased appropriations in aid. The balance will be charged to the reserve.

The cash limit for class II, vote 4—the British Council—will be increased by £4,636,000 in respect of adverse foreign currency movements—£2,636,000—and restructuring costs—£2,000,000. The amounts will be met by a claim on the reserve and by underspends on vote 1 respectively.

As the increases will be offset by savings and charges to the reserve, they will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Cash Limits

Mr. Page: To ask the Lord President of the Council what changes he proposes to the Privy Council Office vote cash and running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. Newton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit of class XIX, vote 3 will be increased by £7,000 from £2,308,000 to £2,315,000 and the running costs by £47,000 from £2,330,000 to £2,377,000.

The increase in the cash limit reflects the transfer of funds from Property Holdings class VII vote 6 owing to increased accommodation costs and will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The increase in the running costs reflects the transfer from Property Holdings; the additional £40,000 is for the cost of the central drugs co-ordination unit and the ambit of class XIX, vote 3 is to be modified accordingly.

SCOTLAND

Diabetics

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what policy he has for targeting care towards insulin-dependent diabetics who are lone parents;

(2) what measures he has in place, or intends to introduce, to encourage diabetics to be more open about their condition and to ensure adequate support in the community.

Mr. Stewart: As part of their treatment, insulin dependent diabetics are advised of the crucial importance of maintaining an injecting and dietary routine, and of regularly measuring blood sugar levels, in order to reduce the risk of falling into a diabetic coma. It is particularly important that those living alone, and lone parents, should follow this advice closely and consider keeping neighbours or relations informed of their movements.

A joint task force of the Department of Health and the British Diabetic Association, with Scottish and other United Kingdom Health Department representation, is currently considering the implementation in the United Kingdom of the St. Vincent declaration of the World Health Organisation on the care of diabetic patients. As part of its work, the task force is considering how best to promote the self-care and community support of diabetic citizens—including those living alone and lone parents—and their fullest possible integration into society.

Tups

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the cost to the Treasury of hiring out tups under the tup and bull scheme in the crofting counties; and what are the projected savings if the tups were instead to be sold to crofters.

Sir Hector Monro: The various livestock improvement schemes for crofters, including the ram supply scheme, cost approximately £800,000 in 1992-93 of which £300,000 was offset by charges and other income generated by the stud farms. The change from a ram supply to a ram purchase scheme should reduce the net annual deficit associated with the schemes by about £125,000.

Crofter Housing Scheme

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place a copy of the PIEDA report on the crofter housing scheme in the Library when it is completed; and if he will state the cost of commissioning the report.

Sir Hector Monro: My Department has commissioned PIEDA plc to undertake an evaluation study of the crofters, etcetera, building grants and loans scheme. The report of the study will be published shortly and I shall arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I am unable to provide details of the cost of commissioning the report.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 759, if he will make it his policy to monitor centrally the amount of time taken to notify women of the results of their cervical smear tests within each health board area.

Mr. Stewart: Yes. The new national co-ordinating unit for cervical screening which is being set up, following the recommendations of the Inverclyde inquiry report, will monitor the achievement of the targets set for health boards on this programme.

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much it cost Ayrshire and Arran health board to produce and distribute its annual report and financial review 1992-93; and how much it cost the health board to produce its annual review in 1993.

Mr. Stewart: It cost Ayrshire and Arran health board £12,111 to produce its 1992-93 annual report and £17,000 to produce its annual review in 1993. The 1992-93 financial review was produced in-house and costs are not separately identifiable. Distribution costs cannot be identified. They constitute mainly internal costs and some postage expenses.

GP Fundholders

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the distinction he makes in the roles of general practitioner fundholders compared to non-fundholders in respect of NHS priorities and planning guidance for the future of the NHS; and on what specific legislation he bases this distinction.

Mr. Stewart: GP fundholders are purchasers of health care and control approximately 20 per cent of the total hospital and community health services budget for the patients on their lists. As such, they are accountable under the National Health Service (Fundholding Practices) (Scotland) Regulations 1993—SI 1993 No. 488—for their purchasing decisions and need to be aware of national priorities and targets which the Government expect purchasers collectively in Scotland—health boards and GP fundholders—to achieve, within the resources it makes available.

Other general practitioners are not accountable in the same way, although the Government have encouraged health boards to involve GPs in planning and in reaching decisions about purchasing care.

Cash Limits

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes the Lord Advocate proposes to the Crown Office cash and running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. Lang: The cash limit for class IX, vote 12—Crown Office, Scotland, procurator fiscal service and Lord Advocate's Department: administration—will be reduced by £400,000 from £39,495,000 to £39,095,000. Within this total, the running cost limit will be reduced by £400,000 from £33,722,000 to £33,322,000. The resultant saving will, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, fully offset additional expenditure on class IX, vote 13—Crown Office, Scotland: Crown prosecutions and legal services—resulting from increased court activity and consequential higher than expected witness costs.

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he intends to make to the cash limits and running costs provision for 1993-94 within his responsibility.

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, I intend to make changes to seven voted cash limits, one non-voted cash block and three running costs limit:

(a) The cash limit for class XIV, vote 2, agricultural services, Scotland, will be decreased by £6,500,000 from £123,838,000 to £117,338,000. The reduction arises mainly from lower than expected demand for structural measures and accompanying measures to CAP reform.

(b) The cash limit for class XIV, vote 7, housing and environmental services, Scotland, will be increased by £12,703,000 from £418,959,000 to £431,662,000. The increase takes account of £11,112,000 increase in Scottish Homes' grant in aid to assist housing associations in the acquistion of local authority and new town development corporation housing stock; an increase in provision of £1,589,000 in housing support grant; and an increase in provision of £2,000 to meet an unanticipated shortfall in appropriations in aid of repayment of loans and grants by first-time buyers. These increases will be partly offset by a reduction in the SO/LA2 cash block. There is also an increase of £200,000 from £12,838,000 to £13,038,000 in the running cost provision for Historic Scotland; this will be offset by an increase in the agency's appropriations in aid from £7,674,000 to £7,874,000. In effect this means that there is a net increase of £198,000 in appropriation in aid on the vote as a whole.

(c) The cash limit for class XIV, vote 12, law, order, miscellaneous health and social work services, Scotland, will be increased by a net total of £2,453,000 from £283,532,000 to £285,985,000. The supplementary estimate allows for an increase in provision of £2,371,000 for the Scottish Criminal Records Office; and an increase in running cost provision of £400,000 for the Scottish Prison Service. These will be partially offset by transfers from other votes.

(d) The cash limit for class XIV, vote 14, hospital community health, family health—part—and other health services, Scotland, will be decreased by a net total of £17,724,000 from £2,784,391,000 to £2,766,667,000. The decrease takes account of a transfer of £21,042,000 to class XIV, vote 13 for changes in the requirements for GP practice fundholders and the external financing limit for NHS trusts; and transfers of £2,000,000 to class XIV, vote 12 and £318,000 from class XII, vote 3. There is also an increase of £5,000,000 in health boards' capital expenditure which will be offset by increased receipts from the sale of land and buildings. The increase in the NHS trusts' external financing limit includes £438,000 for take-up of the end-year flexibility entitlement.

(e) The cash limit for class XIV, vote 19, administration of justice, Scotland, will be decreased by £2,300,000 from £53,005,000 to £50,705,000. The decrease is due to fewer than expected cases arising under the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1993.

(f) The cash limit for class XIV, vote 21, Scottish Office administration, will be increased by a net total of £1,142,000 from £164,436,000 to £165,578,000. The increase results from a transfer of £195,000 from the Property Holdings agency in respect of maintenance charges; a transfer of £1,000,000 from class XIV, vote 19, as a result of running costs being redeployed; a tranfer of provision of £25,000 to class XIV, vote 12, the Scottish Office Pensions Agency for the provision of security staff; and a transfer of provision of £28,000 to class XIV, vote 12 for capital provision for the Scottish fire service.

(g) The cash limit for class XIV, vote 22, Scottish Record Office, will be increased by £26,000 from £10,269,000 to £10,295,000 as a result of a transfer from the Property Holdings agency in respect of maintenance charges.

(h) The non-voted cash block SO/LA2, which covers housing capital expenditure by local authorities and capital expenditure by new towns, will be decreased by £11,112,000 from £275,414,000 to £264,302,000. This will fully offset the increase in Scottish Homes grant in aid in class XIV, vote 7.

As a result of the transfers mentioned for votes 7, 12 and 21, the Scottish Office running cost/limit will increase by £1,795,000 from £332,856,000 to £334,651,000.

The change to class XIV, vote 19, Scottish courts administration, requires a decrease in their running cost limit of £2,300,000 from £42,758,000 to £40,458,000.

The change to class XIV, vote 22, Scottish Records Office requires an increase in its running cost limit of £26,000 from £4,054,000 to £4,080,000.

The increases will be offset by savings on other votes within my responsibility and from the reserve. There will not therefore be any addition to the planned total of public expenditure.

Parole Board

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who are the members currently appointed to the Parole Board; and what is their term of appointment and their remuneration.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Members of the Parole Board for Scotland—1994

Members	*Year of first appointment*	*Designation*	
J. M. Scott	1982 (member) 1992 (Chair for 2 years	Social work	Chairman Former District Manager, Strathclyde regional Social Work Department; former member of the Local Review Committee for Dumfries Young Offenders Institution
I. McNee	1989	Independent	Vice Chairman and Managing Director, Macdonald Lindsay Pindar plc; former Chairman, Lothian Region Children's Panel
D. S. Aitchison	1989	Independent	Former Assistant Chief Constable, Strathclyde Police
Dr. J. Baird	1992	Psychiatrist	Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist, Douglas Inch Centre, Glasgow
Mrs. M. Casserly	1990	Social work	District Officer (Adult Care), Strathclyde Region, Social Work Department

Members	*Year of first appointment*	*Designation*	
W. T. Finlayson	1991	Treatment of offenders	Former HM Deputy Chief Inspector of Prison, former Governor, HM Prison, Cornton Vale
The Very Rev. G. J. T. Forbes	1991	Independent	Provost, St. Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh
Ms J. Freeman	1994	Independent	Director, APEX Trust
Mrs. D. Hutton	1993	Independent	Chairman, Scottish Consumer Council
Mrs. M. B. Kernohan	1992	Independent	Former Procurator Fiscal
Dr. J. J. McManus	1988	Criminologist	Senior Lecturer in Law, Dundee University
The Hon. Lord Milligan	1992	Judicial	Senator of the College of Justice
Sheriff Gordon Shiach	1991	Judicial	Sheriff, Edinburgh
Dr. P. Whatmore	1994	Psychiatrist	Former Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist

Members are appointed initially for a three-year term—unless otherwise specified and can be reappointed.
Members are remunerated on a fee-paid basis. Fees are payable for each meeting attended plus a further 1½ fee for the reading time involved in preparing for meetings. Fees are also payable for other Parole Board-related activities such as interviewing prisoners, representing the board at meetings etc. Rates of fees are:

Chairman—£211.
Psychiatric members—£217·40.
Lay members—£141.

Serving judicial members of the board do not receive fees.

Prisoners (Educational Qualifications)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the educational qualifications of prisoners convicted for *(a)* theft, *(b)* burglary and *(c)* violent crimes against the person in each of the past four years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have asked Mr. E. W. Frizzell, the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 4 February 1994:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the educational qualifications of prisoners convicted for theft, burglary and violent crimes against the person in each of the past four years.

Information on the educational qualifications of persons received into Scottish penal establishments is not collected by the Scottish Prison Service.

Crime Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many convictions there were in *(a)* the sheriff court and *(b)* the High Court for (i) house burglary, (ii) theft, (iii) theft from vehicles, (iv) robbery and (v) murder committed in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow in each of the past 10 years; and if he will give the total number of convictions for each of those offences committed in that area as a proportion of those committed in both Strathclyde and Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information held centrally on convictions does not indicate the location where the offences were committed but information is available for Greenock sheriff court and generally all such convictions will relate to offences committed in Inverclyde district.

The available information is listed:

Persons with a charge proved who were sentenced in Greenock sheriff court 1983-1992

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
(1) Housebreaking										
Number of persons with a charge proved who were sentenced in Greenock sheriff court	175	104	117	129	133	92	126	102	82	100
Percentage of persons with a charge proved in sheriff courts in Strathclyde who were sentenced in Greenock sherrif court	3	2	2	3	4	3	4	4	4	4
Percentage of persons with a charge proved in sheriff courts in Scotland who were sentenced in Greenock sheriff court	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
(2) Theft										
Number of persons with a charge proved who were sentenced in Greenock sheriff court	239	265	280	274	229	238	225	238	214	198
Percentage of persons with a charge proved in sheriff courts in Strathclyde who were sentenced in Greenock sherrif court	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	4
Percentage of persons with a charge proved in sheriff courts in Scotland who were sentenced in Greenock sheriff court	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
(3) Robbery										
Number of persons with a charge proved who were sentenced in Greenock sheriff court	12	4	10	13	9	12	9	7	7	5

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Percentage of persons with a charge proved in sheriff courts in Strathclyde who were sentenced in Greenock sherrif court	3	1	3	4	2	3	3	2	3	2
Percentage of persons with a charge proved in sheriff courts in Scotland who were sentenced in Greenock sheriff court	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	1

Restraints

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines have been issued to police forces concerning the use of leg restraints and body-belts with handcuffs in cases involving cases of deportation; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None. Police forces in Scotland are not equipped with leg restraints or body-belts with handcuffs.

Scottish Nuclear Ltd.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the objectives he has for Scottish Nuclear Ltd.

Mr. Lang: I have set the following objectives for Scottish Nuclear; they are listed in order of priority:

1. To continue the safe operation of Scottish Nuclear's power stations at Hunterston and Torness, and consolidate and develop their operating performance.
2. To decommission successfully Hunterston A power station.
3. To achieve an improved financial performance.
4. To improve the image and public perception of nuclear power generation.
5. To investigate improved generating methods, particularly reactor and related technologies for the future.
6. To consider prudent and relevant diversification which makes sensible use of the company's skills.

Scottish Nuclear has been working to these objectives since it was set up in 1989. They are still valid today, but may need to be reconsidered in the light of the forthcoming nuclear review of the prospects of nuclear power.

Dental Treatment

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the waiting time for children awaiting treatment under an anaesthetic at each dental hospital at the latest available date.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 3 February 1994]:* This information is not held centrally.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Law on Privacy

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Government's White Paper on the law on privacy will address the question of the confidentiality of house sale prices; and if he intends to protect such confidentiality.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The consultation document on the law on privacy, which was issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department on 30 July 1993, did not refer to house sale prices. None of the 122 consultees mentioned it and it will not be specifically referred to in the White Paper.

House Prices

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what plans there are to enable information about the price paid for a house to be made publicly available; and how the information is to be limited;

(2) what, and how many representations, he received before formulating plans to make the price paid for a house public knowledge.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are no current plans for such information to be made publicly available. A consultation document recently issued by Her Majesty's Land Registry invites views on whether to restore the practice of entering the price paid for a property on to the public land register.

Cash Limits

Mr. Heald: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what changes there will be to the Lord Chancellor's Department's running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The cash limit for class IX, vote 11—Public Record Office—will be increased by £309,000 from £37,858,000 to £38,167,000. The running cost limit for class IX, vote 11 will be increased by £309,000 from £24,200,000 to £24,509,000 to cover certain payments to Property Holdings for building maintenance. This increase will be financed by a transfer of provision from Property Holdings and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The cash limit for class IX, vote 1—Lord Chancellor's Department; administration of justice; England and Wales—will be reduced by £17,327,000 from £795,529,000 to £778,202,000 as a result of lower than anticipated expenditure on magistrates court grants and because the payment needed for the Land Registry trading fund in respect of the value of work outstanding at 1 April 1993 was £7,327,000 lower than originally estimated.

The cash limit for class IX, vote 3—Northern Ireland court service; administration of justice—will be reduced by £880,000 from £24,769,000 to £23,889,000. The reduction arises because of savings from keener than expected tenders in several building contracts and a professional services commission which have been let during the current year. The savings from the cash limit reductions on votes 1 and 3 will more than fully offset additional expenditure on class IX, vote 4, subject to approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, required for higher than estimated expenditure on legal advice and assistance and criminal legal aid.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Service Standards

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to ensure that none of the service standards specified in the charters published to date are relaxed or withdrawn during the current Parliament.

Mr. David Davis: Under the citizens charter, public services are required to set demanding but realistic standards of service. There is no intention to relax or withdraw service standards. On the contrary, as standards are met, so they are being raised.

Charles Barker

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much money was owed to Her Majesty's Stationery Office by the public relations company Charles Barker when it went into liquidation.

Mr. Waldegrave: HMSO Books was owed £1,704 when Charles Barker Ltd. went into administrative receivership.

Cash Limits

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to change the 1993-94 cash limit of running costs limit for the Office of Public Service and Science.

Mr. Waldegrave: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for the Office of Public Service and Science—class XVIII, vote 1—will be increased by £90,000 from £73,508,000 to £73,598,000 and the gross running cost limit will also be increased by £90,000 from £90,568,000 to £90,658,000. This takes account of a transfer from the Department of Trade and Industry—class IV, vote 1—of £12,000 in respect of the running costs of the Link secretariat which is being transferred from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Office of Public Service and Science. In addition, £78,000 in respect of maintenance charges is being transferred from Property Holdings—class VII, vote 6. The increase is offset by transfers from other Government Departments and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what changes are proposed to the cash and running costs limit in the year 1993-94 in respect of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and health service commissioners.

Mr. Waldegrave: As announced in the Government's White Paper on open government published in July 1993, there will be a major extension to the responsibilities of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration from 4 April 1994. From that date, complaints that Government Departments and certain other bodies have unreasonably refused access to information in contravention of the code of practice proposed in the White Paper may be referred to the commissioner. In preparation for this work, the commissioner has sought a supplementary estimate for 1993-94 for additional staff and to make accommodation and other resources available for them.

The supplementary estimate also covers additional staff, their accommodation and administrative costs to match the increasing work loads for the Parliamentary Commissioner for Adminstration and health service commissioners as more complaints are being referred by MPs and received direct from members of the public.

The increased provision sought reflects the fact that the main functions of the office of the parliamentary commissioner and health service commissioners are demand led. Accordingly the cash limit for the office has been increased to £5,123,000.

Parliamentary approval of this additional expenditure will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the office of the parliamentary commissioner and health service commissioners—class XIX, vote 4—of £659,000.

PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister which advisers to his Office are seconded from other organisations; and what are the organisations and the lengths and terms of the secondment.

The Prime Minister: Lord Poole is on secondment to the policy unit from James Capel and Co. Ltd. The terms of the secondment are covered by the normal confidentiality rules which apply to employer-employee relationships. The other advisers in my Office are not engaged on secondment terms.

Political Honours

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions since 1979 the political honours scrutiny committee has referred back names submitted to it.

The Prime Minister: The political honours scrutiny committee is a committee of the Privy Council. Its proceedings are never divulged.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister if he will arrange for future honours lists to include not only particulars of public service of recipients but information on their donations to party funds over the previous 10 years.

The Prime Minister: No.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister what is the definition of the term "for political services" as used in honours lists.

The Prime Minister: The term is used to indicate that the person honoured has rendered public service through the exercise of a political office or through a political party.

Public Appointments Unit

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what information is available to right hon. and hon. Members from the public appointments unit; how this information can be obtained; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The public appointments unit maintains a register of people who are willing to be considered for public appointments. A nomination form and a leaflet explaining the role of the unit, and giving details of the different personal qualities, skills and experience that may be required, is available from the director of the unit, which is in the Cabinet Office. The director welcomes nominations of suitable candidates from all hon. Members.

The unit also provides advice to Government Departments on public appointments policy and procedures. Details of central guidance and examples of good practice are given in the "Guide on Public Appointments Procedures", produced in September 1992, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister how many names of candidates for public appointments are held on the Chief Whip's list as described in the Cabinet Office guide on public appointments procedures.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend has a number of sources of information upon which he can draw in providing advice, when requested.

Mr. Peter Levene

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what requests his office has received for Mr. Peter Levene to give evidence to the Scott inquiry.

The Prime Minister: None.

Disabled People

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to promote the rights of disabled people within the international community.

The Prime Minister: Following the United Nations decade of disabled persons—1983 to 1992—a number of resolutions to promote the integration and equality of opportunity for disabled people have been adopted, which the Government have supported. These include standard rules on the equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities, and resolutions on the full integration of persons with disabilities and the international day of disabled persons. The United Kingdom is also involved in a number of European Community programmes designed to integrate disabled people more fully into society, including HELIOS, Horizon and TIDE.

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *610*, if he will list each category of miscellaneous indirect costs of non-official events held at 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member on 1 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *610*.

Lords-lieutenant

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what are the powers and duties of the lords-lieutenant in England.

The Prime Minister: Lords-lieutenant have no statutory powers. Their principal function is to act as the sovereign's personal representative in the county concerned. Their duties include support of the armed forces, the magistracy and voluntary organisations, as well as certain civic and social functions.

Public Appointments

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the total number of public appointments made by Ministers of the Crown or by the Crown or nominations by Ministers.

The Prime Minister: The information, as requested, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Belize

Dr. Spink: To ask the Prime Minister what recent contact he has had with the Prime Minister of Belize regarding the security situation; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I met the Belize Prime Minister during the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Limassol in October 1993. Mr. Esquivel and I have since exchanged letters.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister what proportion of civil servants were operating in agencies run along "next steps" lines as at July 1993.

The Prime Minister: Around 60 per cent. of civil servants were working in agencies and other organisations operating on "next steps" lines as at July 1993.

Cash Limits

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to change the 1993-94 cash limit or running costs limit for the Cabinet Office; other services vote.

The Prime Minister: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XIX, vote 1—Cabinet Office: other services —will be increased by £166,000 from £21,634,000 to £21,800,000 and the running costs limit increased by £166,000 from £24,414,000 to £24,580,000. The increase will be offset by the following inter-departmental transfers and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure:

(a) a reduction on Her Majesty's Treasury: administration —class XVII, vote 1—in respect of the transfer of provision for central services—£116,000;
(b) the transfer of provision for Property Holdings maintenance charges—£56,000;
(c) a transfer to Department of Social Security administration and miscellaneous services—class XIII, vote 4— for central services—£6,000.

Angela Heylin

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the appointment of Angela Heylin to the citizens charter advisory group.

The Prime Minister: Members of the panel of advisers on the citizens charter are appointed in a personal capacity and bring independent, professional expertise from the private sector. Angela Heylin was appointed on that basis.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will discuss Lockerbie when he next meets President Clinton.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 3 February 1994]:* The agenda for my meeting with President Clinton on 28 February has not yet been fixed.

Accounting Officers

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister what were the two most recent occasions on which the Prime Minister decided that a written ministerial direction should be issued to an accounting officer overruling the accounting officer's advice.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 3 February 1994]:* None, so far as I am aware.

HEALTH

NHS Hospital Admissions

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many admissions to NHS hospitals for each of the last three years for which figures are available were elective admissions; and how many were emergency admissions; (2) how many admissions to NHS hospitals there were in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many of these admissions were readmissions within a month of hospital discharge.

Mr. Sackville: The table shows the number of elective, day case and non-elective admissions in the general and acute sector. It is estimated that over 80 per cent. of all non-elective admissions are emergencies. Information on readmissions is not collected centrally.

General and Acute	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*Thousands* *1993-94 (forecast)*
Elective Admissions	2,416	2,323	2,263
Day Cases Admissions	1,536	1,784	1,958
Non-elective Admissions	3,505	3,644	3,753
Total General and Acute	7,457	7,770	7,974

Sources: Ordinary admissions, day cases and total admissions:
1991-92–1992-93: KP70
1993-94: Quarterly monitoring (Q2)

Elective, non-electives
1991-92–1992-93: Quarterly monitoring (Q4) rescaled by KP70
1993-94: Quarterly monitoring (Q2).

GP Surgeries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on rebuilding general practitioners' surgeries in each of the last three years; and what percentage has been accounted for by general practitioner fundholders.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table. Information held centrally does not differentiate between fundholding and non-fundholding practices.

1990-91 *£ million*	*1991-92* *£ million*	*1992-93* *£ million*
79·6	97·9	104·9

Dementia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps her Department is taking to encourage the joint commissioning by local authorities and district health authorities of generic home care for people with dementia and their carers.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department sees joint commissioning between local authorities and health authority purchasers of community care services as important in further strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of community care provision. To this end, copies of the report "Joint Commissioning—A Slice Through Time", prepared for the Department, were distributed to social services departments and health authorities in March 1993. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library. In addition, the Department is currently undertaking a development project aimed at spreading good practice in joint commissioning of community services in general. This should increase authorities' expertise in joint commissioning for specific client groups.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 1 February, at column *611*.

Land and Building (Sales)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Ms Jackson) on 24 January, *Official Report*, column *116*, if she will publish a table showing what total levels of capital receipts have been realised from the sale of health authority land and buildings for each of the last five financial years in each of the regional health authority areas other than Trent regional health authority.

Mr. Sackville: The table shows the total capital receipts of each region. No breakdown of these figures into land, buildings and other assets is available centrally.

Total capital receipts for regions 1988-89 to 1992-93

Region	*1988-89* *£ million*	*1989-90* *£ million*	*1990-91* *£ million*	*1991-92* *£ million*	*1992-93* *£ million*
Northern	4·8	3·8	2·8	4·8	4·3
Yorkshire	10·3	11·8	5·3	4·8	2·3
Trent	13·9	18·7	25·9	4·8	2·9
East Anglian	11·1	5·5	3·2	5·1	2·6

Region	*1988-89 £ million*	*1989-90 £ million*	*1990-91 £ million*	*1991-92 £ million*	*1992-93 £ million*
North West Thames	44·7	47·1	20·7	40·0	13·1
North East Thames	51·6	22·3	14·3	23·7	18·5
South East Thames	30·5	21·4	8·3	16·1	8·2
South West Thames	24·8	9·4	15·7	20·5	5·9
Wessex	17·8	15·5	6·4	5·6	9·3
Oxford	17·1	5·4	9·6	6·9	5·7
South Western	17·3	17·7	23·7	12·5	10·6
West Midlands	9·5	10·0	4·2	9·3	7·0
Mersey	7·3	15·9	16·0	6·0	7·5
North Western	8·7	8·3	17·1	3·1	7·5

Source: Receipts and payment returns for regional and district health authorities—England—1989 to 1992-93.
Note: Figures for 1992-93 are provisional. All figures are cash.

Ethnic Communities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes her Department has made to the health service provision for elderly members of ethnic communities in *(a)* London and *(b)* England, following her recent survey.

Dr. Mawhinney: The final reports of studies carried out by the Age Concern institute of gerontology of health and social services provision for elderly people from ethnic minorities have been carefully assessed, and executive summaries of each have been commissioned as a prelude to determining how best the research findings might be disseminated.

The 1993 Royal College of Physicians publication "Access to health care for people from black and ethnic minorities", copies of which will be placed in the Library, includes a paper by the Department's adviser in ethnic minority health which draws on the institute of gerontology's work. This sets out, for the use of health service purchasers and professionals in the field, the principles which should underline the provision of health care for black and ethnic minority elderly people. It is of course the responsibility of district health authorities to assess the health needs of their resident populations, including the ethnic communities, and to ensure that appropriate services are made available.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been private patient income of directly managed units in each year since 1990-91 nationally and by region.

Mr. Sackville: The total income figures shown in the table have decreased due to the decreasing number of directly managed units in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Directly Managed Unit Private Patient Income by Region

Region/SHA	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Northern	2,071,309	1,877,310	1,332,230
Yorkshire	5,044,191	4,541,752	2,551,178
Trent	2,877,057	3,464,673	2,615,399
East Anglia	5,278,653	7,318,941	6,068,307
North West Thames	13,377,772	13,984,258	11,082,874
North East Thames	16,267,305	11,158,170	9,893,003
South East Thames	11,023,826	11,692,162	12,558,427
South West Thames	4,150,714	3,527,592	2,966,909
Wessex	3,322,716	4,383,335	3,530,475
Oxford	9,510,480	9,724,622	10,803,281
South Western	4,821,114	2,111,512	1,484,225
West Midlands	5,612,685	6,326,507	5,525,374
Mersey	2,051,833	2,006,183	312,253
North Western	6,644,907	4,949,840	4,127,700
Special Health Authorities	16,677,193	21,512,694	23,942,774
Total Income	108,731,755	108,579,551	98,794,409

Source: Annual accounts for regional health authorities, district health authorities and London postgraduate special health authorities.
Notes:
1. The figures in the table include money received from NHS patients paying for accommodation in single rooms or small wards—section 63, NHS Act 1977—private in-patients—section 65—and private non-resident patients—section 66.
2. Overseas visitors—section 121—have been excluded as these are not separately identifiable for all the years requested.
3. The 1992-93 figures are provisional and subject to National Audit Office audit amendment.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much income by region has been generated by private patient facilities in national health service hospitals in each year since 1987-88.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 31 January at columns *531-32*.

Counselling and Condoms

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has received from the health districts which are running evaluation projects looking at the provision of counselling and condoms on a starter basis by general practices; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Since 1992 the Department has suggested that health authorities consider developing the role of general practitioners in safer sexual counselling and the provision of information and condoms on a "starter" basis. Results from these projects are generally favourable. In particular, offering sexual health advice during family planning and smear test consultations is an efficient and effective way of reaching sexually active women. On the basis of their own evaluation, some regions have decided to expand their schemes to include more GP practices. It is, however, a matter for health authorities how they choose to develop the initiative.

Voluntary Bodies

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list the organisations which are to receive section 64 funding from April 1994 and the amount each organisation will receive;

(2) if she will list the organisations, which will receive section 64 funding from April 1994, which are based outside London and indicate separately those based in the north-west.

Dr. Mawhinney: Ministers are curently considering all applications received for possible funding under the section 64 general scheme during 1994-95. Some organisations have already been notified of the outcome and the remainder will be notified as soon as decisions are taken. In addition further notifications will be issued at a later stage, where, for example, work on a project has yet to start or to accommodate slippage during the year on approved proposals. To qualify for section 64 support, an organisation must generally operate on a national basis; where its headquarters may be located is not a relevant criterion. Information on where it may be based is, therefore, not separately identified.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the reasons why the application for section 64 funding, from April 1994, by the George House trust in Manchester was unsuccessful.

Dr. Mawhinney: Bids from HIV/AIDS voluntary organisations exceeded the section 64 funding available for 1994-95 by over 100 per cent. Our priority was to continue grants to those organisations to which financial commitments had already been made.

NHS Capital Schemes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken by her Department to notify NHS directors of finance that all NHS capital schemes will in the future need to demonstrate that private sector alternatives have been fully considered before a case is made for public finance.

Mr. Sackville: In a letter dated 14 January 1993, FDL(93)03, the National Health Service Management Executive director of finance and corporate information urged NHS directors of finance to make full and appropriate use of the new scope for private capital in the NHS, so that NHS money would be used most productively on patient care, and major improvements to the environment for patients and NHS staff, and to health care services, would be possible. Many examples of private finance options were included in the information pack "Public Service, Private Finance . . . putting private capital to work for the NHS", sent with the executive letter EL(93)101 to all NHS general managers on 18 November 1993. In this executive letter the director of finance and corporate information said:

> "I expect private finance to become a standard option that is considered in planning any NHS capital scheme".

Further instructions on considering private finance options are to be included in the forthcoming NHS capital investment manual. Copies of both letters are available in the Library.

GPs (Deputising Services)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the contractual relationship between the NHS and GP deputising services.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for individual general practitioners to choose whether to enter into an arrangement with a deputising service, to obtain their family health services authority's consent, and to agree any contractual arrangement with the deputising service.

Accident and Emergency Units

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency units there were in London in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is shown in the table. From 1991-92 the numbers of national health service accident and emergency services have been recorded by management units which may provide services on more than one site. In February 1994, the London ambulance service advised that it serves accident and emergency units on 48 sites.

	Inner London	*Outer London*	*Total*
Number of hospitals providing A and E services			
1988-89	27	31	58
1989-90	27	31	58
1990-91	29	31	60
Number of NHS management units providing A and E services			
1991-92	18	25	43
1992-93	18	18	36

Source: SD2A KH03 return.

Adoption (Smokers)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to encourage local authorities to ban male or female smokers from adopting children of *(a)* under three years or *(b)* over three years of age.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no plans to encourage local authorities to ban smokers from adopting children of any age. However, the effects of passive smoking are well known and local authorities cannot ignore the information when assessing prospective adopters of young children.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on her Department's policy concerning the provision of free hearing aids on the national health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: Hearing aids continue to be available free of charge through the national health service.

Disabled Persons

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will take steps to implement the remaining sections of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no plans at present to implement the remaining sections of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. However, the Department is committed to reviewing the situation in the light of a few years' experience of community care.

AIDS

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing details of AIDS support grant allocations to local authorities for 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Sackville: 1993-94 allocations to local authorities for HIV/AIDS related services are shown in the table. Final allocations for 1994-95 have not yet been determined.

Authority	*1993-94 allocations £*
Camden	745,000
Hammersmith	1,155,000
Kensington	988,000
Lambeth	948,000
Westminster	958,000
Avon	153,000
Barnet	40,000
Birmingham	300,000
Brent	400,000
Bromley	30,000
Croydon	49,000
Ealing	290,000
East Sussex	428,000
Enfield	50,000
Greenwich	190,000
Hackney	468,000
Hampshire	140,000
Haringey	562,000
Hillingdon	120,000
Hounslow	320,000
Islington	360,000
Leeds	267,000
Leicestershire	115,000
Lewisham	245,000
Liverpool	276,000
City of London	47,000
Manchester	709,000
Merton	66,000
Newcastle	223,000
Newham	300,000
Oxfordshire	240,000
Richmond	220,000
Southwark	355,000
Sutton	57,000
Tower Hamlets	500,000
Wandsworth	190,000
Waltham Forest	140,000
Barking	28,000
Barnsley	18,000
Bedfordshire	24,000
Berkshire	40,000
Bexley	46,000
Bolton	17,000
Bradford	150,000
Buckinghamshire	17,000
Bury	50,000
Calderdale	26,000
Cambridgeshire	33,000
Cheshire	31,000
Cleveland	56,000
Cornwall	31,000
Coventry	54,000
Cumbria	31,000
Derbyshire	31,000
Devon	40,000
Doncaster	31,000
Dorset	21,000
Dudley	31,000
Durham	44,000
Essex	48,000
Gateshead	30,000
Gloucestershire	34,000
Harrow	42,000
Havering	16,000
Hereford	34,000
Hertfordshire	29,000
Humberside	62,000
Isle of Wight	22,000
Kent	74,000
Kingston	43,000
Kirklees	39,000
Lancashire	22,000
Lincolnshire	31,000
Norfolk	25,000
Northamptonshire	36,000
Northumberland	25,000
North Tyneside	54,000
North Yorkshire	31,000
Nottinghamshire	48,000
Oldham	31,000
Redbridge	30,000
Rochdale	17,000
Rotherham	31,000
Salford	26,000
Sandwell	26,000
Sefton	31,000
Sheffield	86,000
Shropshire	93,000
Somerset	24,000
South Tyneside	45,000
St. Helens	26,000
Staffordshire	31,000
Stockport	31,000
Suffolk	20,000
Sunderland	48,000
Surrey	31,000
Tameside	31,000
Trafford	31,000
Wakefield	40,000
Walsall	40,000
Warwickshire	26,000
West Sussex	23,000
Wigan	21,000
Wiltshire	31,000
Wirral	31,000
Wolverhampton	15,000

Infertility Services

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the national health service purchasing authorities which purchase infertility services according to their purchasing strategies submitted to her Department; how much each authority spends on infertility services; which national health service purchasing authorities provide each of *(a)* advanced reproductive technologies generally *(b)* in vitro fertilisation *(c)* gamete intrafallopian transfer and *(d)* infertility counselling within their infertility service purchasing plans; and how much they spend on each service.

Mr. Sackville: Individual health authority purchasing plans are monitored by the regional health authorities. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairmen of the regional health authorities for details.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the draft of the code of practice with respect to the confidentiality of medical records has been shown to the Data Protection Registrar.

Mr. Sackville: The Data Protection Registrar will be among those consulted on draft guidance on the confidentiality, use and disclosure of personal health information which we will issue shortly.

Cash Limits

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes she proposes to make to the cash limits and running costs limits for the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for 1993-94.

Mr. Sackville: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XII, vote 6—Office of Population Censuses and Surveys—will be increased by £149,000 to £33,809,000 and the running costs limit for OPCS will be increased by £149,000 to £48,288,000. This increase will be offset by transfers of £142,000 from Property Holdings and £7,000 from the Employment Department and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Community Care

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what conditions she intends to attach to the community care special transitional grant for 1994-95.

Mr. Bowis: We intend that local authorities will again be required to spend the entire grant on community care services and directly associated costs. They will also be required to spend 85 per cent. of the social security transfer element of the grant on community care services provided by the independent sector.

"Changing Childbirth"

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the implementation of the report of the expert maternity group "Changing Childbirth".

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced on 24 January the Government's intention to implement in full the recommendations in the report of the expert maternity group. The report was previously the subject of extensive consultation with consumers, national health service and professional bodies, and its recommendations for establishing a woman-centred service were widely welcomed.

EL(94)9 set out action required in the NHS, and copies are available in the Library.

Pregnant Women

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by region for the last five years the number of pregnant women who *(a)* gave birth in a hospital, *(b)* gave birth in the mother's home, *(c)* booked a midwife as their lead professional and *(d)* hold their own medical notes.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the number of pregnancies resulting in births at hospital and births at home can be found in table 8.2 of the annual reference volume "Birth Statistics", series FM1. Volumes for 1987 to 1991—series FM1, Nos. 16 to 20—are available in the Library. Information on women booking with a midwife as a lead professional and those holding their own medical notes are not available centrally.

Abortions

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions in 1992 were carried out under national health service agency agreements by district health authority of usual residence.

Mr. Sackville: This information will be placed in the Library.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the national health service hospitals closed for each year since 1980; to what subsequent use the sites have been put; and what revenue was gained from these.

Mr. Sackville: Since 1980-81 some £1,540 million has been generated by health authorities from the sales of surplus land and property. This money has been reinvested in hospital building contributing to the largest capital programme in the history of the national health service. Information on individual hospital closures is not available.

Breast Cancer

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of women in the eligible target group have been screened for breast cancer in the last three years for each health region in England; how many women have breast cancer in each region; and how many women died from breast cancer in each health region.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available in the form requested. Table A shows the uptake figures for breast cancer screening by region for 1990-91 and table B for 1991-92. Table C give regional incidence data for the latest available year of 1987. Table D gives mortality data for the years 1990 to 1992.

Table A

Breast cancer—Uptake of screening invitation by region for 1990-91

Region	*Screened*	*Compliance Per cent.*
England	625,615	71
Northern	46,855	75
Yorkshire	39,956	68
Trent	67,074	76
East Anglia	29,725	74
North West Thames	34,792	60
North East Thames	57,583	60

Region	Screened	Compliance Per cent.
South East Thames	53,213	70
South West Thames	21,076	70
Wessex	48,902	76
Oxford	27,837	81
South Western	53,527	69
West Midlands	73,757	69
Mersey	38,422	73
North Western	32,896	74

Table B

Breast cancer—uptake of screening invitation by region for 1991-92

Region	Screened	Compliance Per cent.
England	922,726	71
Northern	70,214	75
Yorkshire	64,598	74
Trent	92,257	77
East Anglia	41,939	81
North West Thames	50,484	58
North East Thames	73,439	61
South East Thames	70,868	71
South West Thames	49,176	67
Wessex	54,027	78
Oxford	60,050	77
South Western	73,001	74
West Midlands	102,011	72
Mersey	46,786	69
North Western	73,876	73

Table C

Breast cancer registrations by Regional Health Authority 1987 malignant neoplasm of female breast

	Number
England	22,026
Northern	1,352
Yorkshire	1,658
Trent	2,193
East Anglian	1,084
North West Thames	1,354
North East Thames	1,621
South East Thames	1,351
South West Thames	1,168
Wessex	1,682
Oxford	1,208
South Western	1,789
West Midlands	2,649
Mersey	1,104
North Western	1,813

Table D

Deaths—Cancer of the breast by region

Region	1990	1991	1992
England	12,824	12,980	12,804
Northern	757	801	796
Yorkshire	927	888	888
Trent	1,250	1,260	1,287
East Anglian	585	576	593
North West Thames	840	886	819
North East Thames	1,009	1,020	938
South East Thames	1,042	1,087	1,061
South West Thames	860	877	885
Wessex	856	871	871
Oxford	629	623	648
South Western	952	1,019	989
West Midlands	1,401	1,437	1,402
Mersey	674	590	646
North Western	1,042	1,045	981

Consultant Episodes

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *531-33*, when she intends to publish the number of finished consultant episodes by region for private patients in national health service hospitals in 1992-93, in-patients plus day cases; and for what reasons the revenue generated is known for 1992-93 but not the activity level.

Mr. Sackville: Information about revenue and activity comes from different information systems. Private patient treatment numbers are part of the hospital episode statistics system which are not submitted to the Department until clinical information has been added to the patient record. We expect the information on the number of private patients treated in the national health service to be available by the end of March.

Cervical Cancer

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of women in the eligible target group have had a cervical cancer smear test within the last five years for each health region in England; how many women have cervical cancer in each region; and how many women died of cervical cancer in each health region.

Mr. Sackville: The information required is not available in the form requested. Table A gives latest available Korner data from 1991-92 on the number of women tested for cervical cancer in the last 5·5 years by region. Table B gives the latest available incident data. Table C gives the latest available mortality data for 1989 to 1992.

Table A

Cervical cancer test

Status of residents aged 20 to 64 by regional health authority

	Number of women tested in last 5·5 years	Coverage Per cent.
England	11,048,444	79·9
Northern	737,788	83·5
Yorkshire	844,486	84·8
Trent	1,147,980	87·5
East Anglia	477,109	85·8
North West Thames	714,127	65·0
North East Thames	805,961	64·4
South East Thames	794,951	70·3
South West Thames	707,827	78·0
Wessex	699,260	87·6
Oxford	613,479	85·1
South Western	766,994	86·5
West Midlands	1,240,756	84·1
Mersey	556,856	82·0
North Western	940,870	83·5

Table B

Cervical cancer registrations by regional health authority 1987

Malignant neoplasm of cervix uteri

	Number
England	3,636
Northern	248
Yorkshire	397
Trent	405
East Anglian	150
North West Thames	161

	Number
North East Thames	164
South East Thames	210
South West Thames	144
Wessex	282
Oxford	152
South Western	270
West Midlands	415
Mersey	263
North Western	375

Table C

Deaths cancer of the cervix by region

Region	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
England	1,809	1,692	1,653	1,531	1,532
Northern	148	117	119	114	102
Yorkshire	144	151	135	133	131
Trent	196	177	160	175	148
East Anglian	68	63	72	62	56
North West Thames	101	109	97	83	103
North East Thames	124	123	97	103	120
South East Thames	131	146	117	107	133
South West Thames	89	80	81	76	66
Wessex	107	99	99	95	71
Oxford	81	52	56	76	57
South Western	122	121	114	76	133
West Midlands	206	172	186	152	179
Mersey	105	111	123	109	92
North Western	187	171	197	170	141

GP Fundholders

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers health authorities have to impose financial penalties on general practitioner fundholders who have patients waiting over 18 months for surgery.

Dr. Mawhinney: None. Fundholders are expected to comply with patients charter standards in the same way as district health authorities, and are providing extremely effective in improving waiting times.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the case identified by a general practitioner in a letter to the hon. Member for Congleton, a copy of which has been drawn to her attention in a letter of 11 January, about priority used by the North Staffordshire infirmary in the allocation of treatment to the patients of fundholding and non-fundholding general practices is consistent with her policies; what action she has taken in that case; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 17 January 1994]:* This was an issue about magnetic resonance imaging scanning. Patients are referred for a scan on the basis of urgent clinical need and there is no preference for the patients of either fundholders or non-fundholding general practitioners.

Accommodation Costs

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was received in total by the NHS from NHS patients paying for accommodation in single rooms or small wards in 1988-89, 1990-91 and 1992-93; what was the estimated average charge for such accommodation; and how many people paid such a charge in each of those years.

Mr. Sackville: The figures requested on income are shown in the table. Information on the number of people paying such charges are held locally. Therefore, estimated average charges are not known. Income of this sort enables hospitals to improve services for all patients.

Income from amenity beds

Year	*Sum received* £
1988-89	764,276
1990-91	1,260,313
1992-93	1,776,185

Source: Annual accounts and receipts and payments returns for regional health authorities, district health authorities and London postgraduate special health authorities.

Notes:

1. Figures for 1988-89 and 1990-91 were obtained from the annual accounts of health authorities. The figures for 1992-93 were only separately identifiable in the receipts and payments returns. The figures for 1992-93 are not, therefore, directly comparable with those for the earlier years.

2. Amenity bed income received by national health service trusts has been omitted as it is not separately identified from private patient in annual accounts.

GP Retraining

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to the NHS, for each of the last five financial years of allowances to general practitioners for retraining courses.

Dr. Mawhinney: Expenditure on the postgraduate education allowance for general practitioners, introduced in April 1990, has been:

	£ million
1990-91	44·4
1991-92	47·6
1992-93	49·1

These sums were not identified separately within GPs' remuneration prior to 1990-91. Payments made through the more limited postgraduate training allowance scheme totalled £1·3 million in 1988-89 and £2·5 million in 1989-90.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement of the criteria to be satisfied by retraining courses in order for general practitioners to qualify for reimbursement of the costs of attending those courses; and what was the date on which current department guidelines were introduced.

Dr. Mawhinney: Criteria for the approval of courses held in England which qualify for the postgraduate education allowance are not promulgated centrally. The responsibility for the accreditation of such courses is exercised centrally by the regional advisers in general practice.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of retraining courses undertaken by general practitioners for each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Locally based data are collected and held by the regional advisers in general practice.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data have been collected by her Department on the number of retraining courses for which general practitioners are entitled to be reimbursed.

Dr. Mawhinney: None. General practitioners are not reimbursed directly for attendance at training courses. GPs who maintain a balanced programme of education and training can claim the postgraduate education allowance. To qualify, GPs must attend an average of five days accredited training a year.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the total amount of financial penalties imposed on hospitals for having patients wait over 18 months for surgery; if she will break the figure down by financial year; and if she will list the hospitals concerned, by region.

Dr. Mawhinney: Regions have been given allocations from the waiting times fund on the understanding that deductions would be made for specific breaches of the patients charter guarantees. These deductions act as an incentive to good management and some regions therefore pass them on to the responsible provider units. Deductions are not collected directly from provider units.

Trust Chairs (Remuneration)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the annual remuneration paid to each trust chair.

Dr. Mawhinney: National health service trust chairmen's remuneration is paid on the basis of the following three bands, according to unit turnover:

Unit turnover 1988-89	*Band*	*Rates per annum (£)*
In excess of £50 million	Band 1	19,285
Between £20 million and £50 million	Band 2	17,145
Less than £20 million	Band 3	15,125

District Health Authorities

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who are those people currently appointed to serve on district health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney *[pursuant to his reply, 24 January, c. 117-19]:* I regret that part of the information supplied was incorrect and incomplete. The correct and additional information about chairmen of district health authorities is set out as follows:

North West Thames Regional Health Authority

East and North Hertfordshire – Mr. A. Preston
Brent and Harrow – Mrs. C. Quest

NATIONAL FINANCE

Consultants

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on which occasions since 1979 his Department has employed the services of external consultants; and if he will give details of the purposes for which they were employed and the cost of employing them.

Mr. Nelson: I regret that information going back beyond August 1991, and specific information about individual contracts after that date, can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The table gives the number of consultancies by contract type and total value awarded by Her Majesty's Treasury from August 1991 to date.

Consultant type	*Number of contracts*	*Total value £*
Management	60	1,041,053
Research	29	457,010
Job Evaluation	2	167,000
Audit	6	130,000
Computer	9	99,700
Training	10	56,501
Building/Works	8	34,642
Energy	2	30,700
Recruitment	2	20,500
Purchasing	2	10,200

Public Appointments

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the public appointments for which he is responsible require advance notice to and consultation with the Chief Whip's Office; and which appointments made since 1979 have been so notified and consulted upon.

Mr. Nelson: It is not the practice of Her Majesty's Government to answer parliamentary questions about discussions and consultations between Departments and offices of government relating to public appointments.

Unicorn Heritage plc

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on whose authority Treasury approval was given to the Heritage Department's decision to write off £200,000 owed by Unicorn Heritage plc to the English tourist board.

Mr. Portillo: Treasury officials gave their approval to a request from the Department of National Heritage to write off debts owed to the English tourist board, including that of Unicorn Heritage plc. In doing so, they acted in accordance with the procedures on losses and special payments laid down in chapter 36.2 of "Government Accounting", available in the Library of the House.

Civil Servants

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount paid out in redundancy and severance payments to civil servants in each of the past five years for which figures are available, broken down into civil service grades.

Mr. Dorrell: The total of compensation payments made to civil servants under early retirement/severance arrangements—which also cover redundancy—is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1991-92	96
1992-93	180
[1]1993-94	169

[1] to December 1993.

Figures are not separately identifiable for redundancy nor is information available by civil service grade.

Inland Revenue Forms

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Inland Revenue forms were redesigned in 1992-93.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue's corporate communications office, which is responsible for all the main tax forms, redesigned 1,148 forms in 1992-93.

Figures are not available centrally for forms which are not the responsibility of the corporate communications office.

Tax Relief

Mr. Enright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *455*, if he will give the total tax relief paid by the Treasury without naming the individuals.

Mr. Dorrell: No. The rules about taxpayer confidentiality apply to companies as well as to individuals.

Cash Limits

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the cash and running costs limits for 1993-94 in respect of the Office of HM Paymaster General.

Sir John Cope: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVII, vote 13, the Office of HM Paymaster General, will be increased by £36,000 to £4,436,000 and the running costs limit will be increased by £1,533,000 from £25,291,000 to £26,824,000. The changes reflect a transfer of £36,000 from Property Holdings—class VII, vote 6—for building maintenance costs; additional work being carried out at the request of the Office of HM Paymaster General's customers; and early retirement costs forming part of efficiency measures currently being undertaken. The cash limit increase will be financed by a transfer from Property Holdings, and the running costs increase by additional income. These increases will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Treasury's cash and running costs limits in 1993-94.

Mr. Nelson: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate on class XVII, vote 3, two changes are proposed:

(a) the cash limit for class XVII, vote 1—Her Majesty's Treasury—will be reduced by £116,000 from £76,468,000 to £76,352,000, and the running costs limit will be reduced by £116,000 from £79,621,000 to £79,505,000. The reduction reflects a transfer of central services to the Cabinet Office, class XIX, vote 1 which will be showing a corresponding increase.

(b) the cash limit for class XVII, vote 3—Forward: Civil Service Catering—will be increased by £950,000. The net running costs limit for Forward will also be increased by £950,000 and there will be an increase in appropriations in aid of £968,000. These changes are a result of increased trading activity and the impact of the sale of Forward. The cash limit increase of £950,000 is expected to be offset by receipts from the sale and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Central Statistical Office's cash and running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. Nelson: The cash limit for class XVII, vote 14 will be reduced by £309,000 from £43,551,000 to £43,242,000 and the running costs limit by £258,000 from £42,211,000 to £41,953,000. These reductions reflect the following: the surrender of £326,000 in running costs provision in respect of VAT receipts for payments to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, which are now VAT exempted; a transfer from Property Holdings—£68,000—class VII, vote 6; and extra receipts from the Department of the Environment—£51,000—class VII, vote 7. The changes will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Department for National Savings' cash limits and running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. Nelson: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit on class XVII, vote 10—expenditure of the Department for National Savings on administration, publicity costs and certain other expenses—will be increased by £734,000 from £199,300,000 to £200,034,000. The increase comprises of £579,000 take-up under the end-year flexibility arrangements for running costs—as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1993, *Official Report*, columns *512-18*—and a transfer of £155,000 from the Department of the Environment—Property Holdings—class VII, vote 6, in respect of buildings maintenance.

As a result of these changes, the running costs limit for the Department for National Savings will be increased by £734,000 from £195,142,000 to £195,876,000. The increase will be offset by a transfer and a change to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether insurance premium tax will apply to *(a)* private medical insurance, *(b)* insurance against redundancy, *(c)* permanent health insurance contracts of less than five years duration and *(d)* insurance against negative equity.

Sir John Cope: Private medical insurance, insurance against redundancy and insurance against negative equity are all forms of general insurance and, as such, will be liable to insurance premium tax. Premiums in respect of long term insurance as defined in the Insurance Companies Act 1982, including permanent health insurance for not less than five years or until retirement, will be exempt.

Taxation

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the direct and indirect tax burden in 1978-79 and in 1994-95 as a proportion of gross earnings for (i) a single person, (ii) a married couple both working, (iii) a married couple with one partner working, (iv) a married couple with two children, one partner working and (v) a married couple with two children, both working at 50 per cent., 100 per cent., 150 per cent., 200 per cent., 500 per cent. and 1,000 per cent. of average earnings.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1994]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 19 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *635-42*, for figures for 1994-95. Figures for 1978-79 were placed in the House of Commons Library in answer to a previous question by the hon. Member on 13 April 1989, *Official Report*, column *624*. The available figures for a married couple with two children where both are working are given in the table:

Percentage of combined male and female gross earnings paid in income tax and national insurance contributions in 1978-79 and 1994-95
Married couple, both working with two children[1]

	Multiples of average earnings[2]					
	½	*1*	*1½*	*2*	*5*	*10*
1978-79						
Income tax[3]	1·1	16·8	22·2	24·9	44·8	62·5
NICs	6·5	6·5	6·0	5·1	2·0	1·0
Income tax and NICs	7·6	23·3	28·1	30·0	46·9	63·5
1994-95						
Income tax[3]	4·7	14·9	18·9	22·6	33·0	36·5
NICs	7·1	8·6	7·6	6·1	2·4	1·2
Income tax and NICs	11·8	23·4	26·5	28·7	35·4	37·7

[1] Assuming that the husband earns the relevant multiple of average male earnings and the wife earns the relevant multiple of average female earnings.

[2] The earnings levels used are those for full-time workers on adult rates of pay, whose pay is unaffected by absence. Average earnings for males are assumed to be £92·80 per week in 1978-79 and £374·30 per week in 1994-95. Average female earnings are assumed to be £59·60 per week in 1978-79 and £256·40 per week in 1994-95.

[3] Income tax is shown net of child benefit in order to provide comparability with 1978-79 when support for children was partly given through child tax allowances. Both children are assumed to be under 11 years old. Households are assumed to receive no reliefs besides the standard allowances and only to have income from employment.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many more income tax payers in 1994-95 will be paying tax at the margin *(a)* at the basic rather than the lower rate as a result of his proposal to freeze personal allowances, other things being equal, *(b)* at the basic rather than the lower rate, in addition to those under *(a)*, as a result of his proposal to freeze the married couples allowance and related allowances, and *(c)* at the lower rather than the basic rate as a result of his proposal to widen the lower rate band.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1994]:* Excluding the effect of changing the width of the lower rate band and other tax changes in 1994-95, there would be about 120,000 more people paying tax at the basic rather than the lower rate in 1994-95 than there would have been if the personal allowance had been increased in line with statutory indexation. Nobody will pay tax at the basic rather than the lower rate because of the freezing of the married couple's and related allowances. About 800,000 more people will have the lower rate of tax as their marginal rate through widening the lower rate band by £500.

Inflation

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average rate of inflation between *(a)* March 1974 and May 1979 and *(b)* November 1988 to January 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 3 February 1994]:* Between March 1974 and May 1979 the average rate of inflation, as measured by the retail prices index, was 15·5 per cent. per annum. This compares with 5·1 per cent. for the period November 1988 to December 1993, the latest month for which information is available.

Bass Clef Jazz Club

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates was the value of goods taken by VAT officers from the Bass Clef jazz club in Hoxton square, Hackney N1, on 28 January; whose property it was that was taken; for what reason it was taken; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 3 February 1994]:* It would be inappropriate for me to make public the tax affairs of a particular company. In general, removal of goods under regulation 65 of the VAT (General) Regulations 1985 is seen by customs as a last resort. However, it considers that such action is necessary when businesses refuse to pay VAT debts and the debts continue to increase.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Regional Tourist Boards

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many people sit on the executive boards of each regional tourist board; and how many are *(a)* councillors, *(b)* private sector representatives and *(c)* English tourist board representatives.

Mr. Sproat: The information is as follows:

Regions	*Local Authority*	*Private Sector*	*English Tourist Board*	*Co-opted*	*Managing Director*	*Total Members*
Cumbria	18	10	1	2	—	31
East Anglia	11	6	1	—	1	19
East Midlands	10	5	1	5	—	21
Heart of England	30	12	1	16	1	60
London	3	6	1	2	—	12
Northumbria	11	3	1	—	—	15
North West	9	8	1	4	—	22
South East England	29	19	1	3	—	52
Southern	49	19	1	8	1	78
West Country	53	18	1	9	—	81
Yorkshire and Humberside	25	9	1	7	—	42

The regional tourist boards are non-statutory bodies.

This information was supplied by the English tourist board and is the most up to date available.

Tourist Authorities (Overseas Marketing)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the figures for expenditure on overseas marketing by tourist authorities in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* France and *(c)* Spain.

Mr. Sproat: Figures obtained by the British Tourist Authority from the national tourist offices of these countries show the following overseas marketing budgets for 1994.

	£ million
Germany	10·8
France	32·8
Spain	13·5

It is difficult to be sure exactly what these figures cover because of the very different ways in which each country organises its promotion of tourism. However, the figures for Germany exclude staff costs and any expenditure by the Länder.

Ministers (Travel)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* actual expenditure by his Department on (1) internal and (2) overseas travel by the Secretary of State in 1992-93 after 25 September 1992 and so far in 1993-94.

Mr. Brooke: In 1992-93, the budget for both Foreign and United Kingdom travel and subsidence for all Ministers and spokesmen in the Department was £37,000 in total. The amount spent from 25 September until the end of the financial year was £24,215. In the financial year 1993-94, the amount budgeted for the same purpose was £38,000. The spending to date is £21,053.

Royal Works of Art

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the compilation of the inventory of royal works of art will be completed.

Mr. Sproat: The Lord Chamberlain has stated that it is anticipated that the inventory of works of art in the royal collection will be completed by the end of 1997.

Broadcasting Franchises

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the recently announced changes in the regulations governing broadcasting franchises on television and radio companies based in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The only recent changes have been to the regulations governing the ownership of companies holding ITV licences. Any new owners would be bound by the terms of the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the conditions of the original licence, particularly on regional programmes and regional production.

Cash Limits

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what changes will be made to the cash limits or running cost limits for 1993-94 for which he has resonsibility.

Mr. Brooke: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made to the case limits within class XI:

(i) vote 1—museums and galleries—will be increased by £1,225,000 from £217,303,000 to £218,528,000 for additional provision to meet a payment to Inland Revenue in respect of an item accepted in satisfaction of tax. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

(ii) vote 5—film, tourism, sport and broadcasting—will be increased by £220,000 from £130,108,000 to £130,328,000. This is the net result of additional administrative costs of £340,000 in the promotion of tourism, partly offset by extra appropriations in aid to the vote of £120,000 from compensation payments. The net increase is being met from savings on class XI, vote 7—DNH administration.

(iii) vote 6—Royal palaces, Historic Royal Palaces agency, Royal Parks agency, historic buildings, ancient monuments and the National Heritage—will be reduced by £169,000 from £194,252,000 to £194,083,000. This is the net result of a transfer of £500,000 to the Department of Transport and a reduction of £700,000 in respect of an overspend on the vote in the previous financial year, offset by receipts of £994,000 from VAT refunds and admission fees, transfers of £15,000 from the Chessington Computer Centre in respect of services now provided on a repayment basis, and £22,000 from Property Holdings to cover additional property maintenance charges.

(iv) vote 7—Department of National Heritage administration—will be reduced by £486,000 from £25,334,000 to £24,848,000. This is the net result of a transfer of £350,000 to the Office of the National Lottery and £220,000 for the promotion of tourism, partly offset by extra receipts of £46,000 from the sale of statistical information and a transfer from Property Holdings of £36,000 to the Department and of £2,000 to the Royal Fine Art Commission to cover additional property maintenance charges.

(v) Vote 8—Office of the National Lottery—will be increased by £350,000 from £1,501,000 to £1,851,000. The increase is the net result of additional provision of £1,270,000 for consultancy and professional advice associated with the grant of the national lottery licence, partly offset by savings in other costs of £920,000. The net increase is being met from savings on class XI, vote 7—DNH administration.

(vi) In addition, the Department of National Heritage gross running costs limit will be reduced by £488,000 from £29,682,000 to £29,194,000. The gross running costs limit of the Office of the National Lottery will be reduced by £720,000 from £1,000,000 to £280,000.

Public Bodies

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which agencies, quangos and associated public bodies were transferred to the responsibility of his Department when it was set up; and what was the cost of transferring them.

Mr. Sproat: On being established in April 1992, my Department became responsible for the Historic Royal Palaces agency and for sponsoring 43 non-departmental public bodies—NDPBs—and other bodies, which are listed in "Public Bodies 1993" These are:

Executives NDPBs
Arts Council
British Film Institute
British Library
British Tourist Authority
Broadcasting Complaints Commission
Broadcasting Standards Council
Crafts Council
English Tourist Board
Football Licensing Authority
Historical Buildings and Monuments Commission for England
British Museum
Geffrye Museum
Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry
Horniman Museum
Imperial War Museum
Museum of London
National Gallery
Natural History Museum
National Maritime Museum
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside
National Museum of Science and Industry
National Portrait Gallery
Sir John Soane's Museum
Tate Gallery
Victoria and Albert Museum
Wallace Collection
Museums and Galleries Commission
National Film and Television School
National Film Development Fund
National Heritage Memorial Fund
Registrar of Public Lending Right
Royal Armouries
Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts
Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England)
South Bank Theatre Board
Sports Council

Advisory Bodies
Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites
Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection
Advisory Committee for the Public Lending Right
Library and Information Services Council
Reviewing Committee on the Export Works of Art
Royal Find Art Commission
Theatres Trust

In addition, my Department assumed policy responsibility for the following public corporations:

British Broadcasting Corporation
Independent Television Commission
Radio Authority
Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C)

The costs associated with their transfer are those relating to the preparation and promulgation of the Transfer of Functions (National Heritage) Order 1992.

Broadcasting Restrictions

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, whether he has completed his review of the Northern Ireland broadcasting restrictions; and what conclusions he has reached.

Mr. Brooke: The Government will keep the matter under review in the light of further developments.

DEFENCE

Bosnia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the roles of No. 39 (1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit) Squadron Royal Air Force and No. 51 Squadron Royal Air Force in operations over Bosnia.

Mr. Hanley: Aircraft of No. 39 (1 PRU) Squadron undertake photographic reconnaissance over Bosnia. Their work is of value to the NATO air forces enforcing the no-fly zone and to our forces on the ground. Aircraft of RAF No. 51 Squadron do not conduct operations over Bosnia.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft, and of what types, are scheduled to be deployed to Goose Bay for low flying training in 1994; and what are their planned dates of deployment.

Mr. Hanley: Currently, the only aircraft type planned to deploy to Goose Bay for low-flying training in 1994 is the Tornado GR1. Nine aircraft will deploy at the start of the season and will be used by each squadron in rotation. The planned deployments dates for the squadrons are:

18 April to 2 May
2 May to 16 May
16 May to 30 May
30 May to 13 June
13 June to 27 June
8 August to 22 August
22 August to 5 September
5 September to 19 September

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft, and of what types, were involved in the Italian air force deployment to West Freugh during November 1993; what were the dates of the deployment; how many low-level sorties were undertaken by Italian aircraft during the deployment, and at what minimum authorised altitudes; and if he will make a statement on the nature and scope of the agreement with the Italian authorities granting access to United Kingdom weapons range and low flying facilities for Italian military aircraft.

Mr. Hanley: The Italian air force—IAF—aircraft deployed to the test and evaluation range at West Freugh between 5 and 12 November 1993 were as follows:

2 AMX—Fast Jets
2 G-222—Transport Aircraft
1 HH-3F—Helicopter

The aircraft flew a total of 17 low-level sorties over the range area; they were authorised to fly down to a minimum height of 500 ft. No low-level sorties were flown in the United Kingdom low flying system—UKLFS.

There is no bilateral arrangement between the RAF and IAF which facilitates IAF use of RAF weapons ranges outside of a NATO exercise or squadron exchange.

Low flying in the UKLFS by the IAF is carried out under reciprocal arrangements which permit RAF aircraft to fly at low level in Italy. In general, the IAF is not authorised to fly below 500 ft in the United Kingdom.

Goose Bay

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the numbers of Royal Air Force personnel on the establishment of Royal Air Force (Unit) Goose Bay, excluding personnel on temporary training detachments, on 1 August and 1 December in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement of his plans for the future role of Royal Air Force (Unit) Goose Bay.

Mr. Hanley: Figures are not available in the form requested. Figures for the years in question are, however, as follows:

		Number
March	1990	94
March	1991	93
June	1992	99
December	1992	99
June	1993	99
December	1993	102

The RAF has a continuing requirement for the high quality low-flying training which is available to it at Goose Bay and in other parts of north America. The proven ability of the RAF unit at Goose Bay to provide the comprehensive support which squadron detachments to Canada and the USA require has ensured that such training has continued to be carried out successfully. Consequently, there are no plans to alter the future role of the unit.

Euratom Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the areas of his Department's activities covered by chapter III on health and safety of the Euratom treaty.

Mr. Hanley: None. The Euratom treaty does not apply to military activities.

Depleted Uranium Shells

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress made in environmental monitoring of depleted uranium shell test firing into the Solway firth.

Mr. Aitken: We have continued our well-established programme of analysing soil and vegetation samples from seven locations on the Kirkcudbright range every four months and seawater and silt samples from the nearby waters of the Solway firth once a year. In addition a contract was placed with an independent contractor, W. S. Atkins Environment of Epsom, on 13 December 1993 to undertake an environmental assessment of depleted uranium firing at the Kirkcudbright and Eskmeals ranges. The contractor is due to make his final report in April and, in letters to local MPs, I have recently reaffirmed my intention that as much as possible of the report should be made public.

Arms Sales (Nigeria)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consignments of United Kingdom-made arms sold to Nigeria have not yet been delivered.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested can be supplied only at disproportionate cost. I will write to the hon. Member.

Military Supplies (Exports)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military supplies have been exported from the United Kingdom over the past five years.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the information contained in table 1.11 of the 1993 edition of "UK Defence Statistics", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible have been *(a)* abolished or *(b)* created since 1979.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 1 February, *Official Report,* column *611.*

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide figures for the amount his Department has been reimbursed by the Department of Social Security in respect of statutory sick pay provision for each of the past three years.

Mr. Hanley: For the last three financial years, the Ministry of Defence has been reimbursed the following amounts by the DSS in respect of statutory sick pay provisions:

Financial year	*£*
1990-91	8,776,265
1991-92	6,473,761
1992-93	6,499,710

Cash Limits

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes he proposes to the class I cash limits and running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. Rifkind: Subject to parliamentary approval of the spring supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

Class I Cash Limits

£000

Vote	Current cash limit	Change	Revised cash limit
1	12,405,216	+264,594	12,669,810
2	3,844,613	+ 45,969	3,890,582
3	7,153,498	−383,998	6,769,500

These changes decrease the block defence cash limit by £73,435,000. They allow for increased expenditure on class I, votes 1 and 2, which will be offset by lower expenditure on class I, vote 3. The changes additionally take account of a decrease of £75,000,000 to reflect a forecast underspend against provision for recovery from Operation Granby which is subject to specific limits. Also reflected is the net effect of transfers between the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments. The running costs limit will be increased by £55,069,000 from £5,475,310,000 to £5,530,379,000, £53,232,000 of this increase results from the continued rationalisation of activities to meet the new force structure. This involves the transfer of certain administrative tasks into the running costs total and does not add to the overall level of defence expenditure. The increase also reflects minor changes of £1,837,000 principally due to interdepartmental transfers.

EMPLOYMENT

Ministers (Travel)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* actual expenditure by his Department on (1) internal and (2) overseas travel by the Secretary of State since 27 May 1993.

Mr. David Hunt: Ministers in this Department do not have individual travel budgets. However, since my appointment on 27 May 1993, I have spent £3,354 on travel within the United Kingdom and £10,241 on travel overseas. These figures do not include the cost of my official car.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the proportion of workers in *(a)* temporary or contract employment and *(b)* part-time work in each EC country, in (i) the latest year for which information is available and (ii) 10 years previously.

Miss Widdecombe: Latest comparable estimates of the proportion of employees in temporary employment and the proportion working part time across all EC countries are for spring 1991 and are given in the table. No comparable figures exist prior to 1983, so proportions for this year have also been supplied in the table.

In addition, a footnote to the table provides spring 1993 figures for the United Kingdom.

Proportion of employees in temporary and part-time employment

Percentage

Country	Proportion of employees in temporary employment 1983	1991	Proportion of employees working part-time 1983	1991
Spain	—	32	—	4
Greece	16	15	5	3
Portugal	—	14	—	4
Denmark	—	12	26	24
France	3	10	9	12
Federal Republic of Germany	—	9	12	15
Ireland	6	8	6	9
Netherlands	6	8	21	32
Italy	7	5	4	5
United Kingdom[1]	5	5	19	23
Belgium	5	5	8	13
Luxembourg	2	3	6	7
Europe 10	—	8	12	16
Europe 12	—	10	—	14

Source: Eurostat "Labour Force Survey 1983-91".

"—" information not available.

[1] More recent figures for the United Kingdom, from the spring 1993 labour force survey, show 6 per cent. of employees in temporary employment and 25 per cent. of employees working part time.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of those aged *(a)* 16 to 18 years, *(b)* 18 to 19 years and *(c)* 16 to 24 years unemployed in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow; what percentages they are of the cohort; how many persons under the age of 25 years in the same parliamentary constituency have never worked; and what percentage of those aged 16 years in Greenock and Port Glasgow (i) stayed on at school, (ii) went into jobs and (iii) went into youth training in the last year for which figures are available.

Miss Widdecombe: In October 1993, unadjusted claimant unemployment in Greenock and Port Glasgow stood at 194 for 16 to 18-year-olds, 285 for 18 to 19-year-olds and 1,046 for 16 to 24-year-olds. This represents the extent of the available information at the constituency level.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average wage of *(a)* a male and *(b)* a female in (i) full-time employment and (ii) part-time employment in Greenock and Port Glasgow in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information available is for Strathclyde. The average earnings of full-time men and women in Strathclyde can be found in tables 110 and 113 of part E of the new earnings survey for each of the years concerned. Copies of the report can be found in the Library.

Information for part-time men and women is provided in the table:

Part-time employees in Strathclyde—pay unaffected by absence Average gross hourly earnings: at April

	Men	Women
1979	[1]—	1.30
1980	[1]—	[1]—
1981	[1]—	1.78
1982	[1]—	2.05
1983	[1]—	2.24

	Men	Women
1984	[1]—	2.33
1985	[1]—	2.56
1986	[1]—	[1]—
1987	2.77	2.88
1988	[1]—	3.08
1989	[1]—	3.54
1990	[1]—	3.97
1991	[1]—	4.39
1992	[1]—	4.74
1993	[1]—	4.87

[1] Denotes sample number too small or standard error too high for a reliable estimate.

Source: new earnings survey.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the most recent residence-based unemployment rates for each district council area in the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow, giving the figures overall and broken down for males and females; what is the change in the number of unemployed claimants in Greenock and Port Glasgow for the same month in each of the last seven years; and what have been the percentage changes since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Information about numbers of unemployed claimants in Greenock and Port Glasgow constituency is available monthly from June 1983, and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. This is the extent of the available information. Residence-based International Labour Organisation unemployment rates are available from the labour force survey for some district councils, but not for Inverclyde, which contains the Greenock and Port Glasgow constituency, because the latter is too small.

One-stop Shops

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the population was served by an Employment Service one-stop shop and what percentage was served by seperate employment and benefit offices at July 1993.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 4 February 1994:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the percentage of the population served by our one-stop offices.

The Employment Service (ES) is working progressively to bring Jobcentre and Benefit Office services together under one roof. This network will provide a new and improved one-stop service offering the full range of ES services to help people back to work. It is expected that this will be completed by March 1996 when there will be a network of some 1,100 offices.

By July 1993 we had opened 787 of these new style Jobcentres. Although we cannot say what percentage of the national population they serve we do know that they provide an integrated service to some 68 per cent. of our unemployed clients. The remaining 32 per cent. are served by our separate networks of benefit offices and Jobcentres.

I hope this is helpful.

Redundancy Payments Service

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what proportion of letters received by the Redundancy Payments Service from members of the public in 1993 had a reply within five working days;

(2) what proportion of claims received by the Redundancy Payments Service in 1993 were paid within 14 weeks.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: 99·9 per cent. of letters received by the Redundancy Payments Services in 1993 were replied to within five days, and 90 per cent. of claims were paid within 14 weeks.

Health and Safety Commission

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the membership of the board of the Health and Safety Commission, giving in each case details of days worked per month and any remuneration.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The current membership of the Health and Safety Commission is:

Mr. F. J. Davies CBE OSt J Chairman
Councillor E. Carrick
Mr. C. Chope OBE
Mr. P. Gallagher
Mr. P. Jacques CBE
Mr. N. Pitcher
Dr. G. Schofield
Mr. R. Symons CBE
Mr. A. Tuffin CBE
Dame Rachel Waterhouse

The chairman and members of the commission are appointed on a part-time basis.

Mr. Davies works three days per week as commission chairman for which he is paid £54,088 per annum.

Commission members receive £1,060 per annum plus £105 for each day they spend on commission business. In 1993, this was an average of two days per member per month.

Employment Agencies

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many agencies are currently licensed under the Employment Agencies Act 1974, giving, in each case, their location and the numbers of staff employed by them.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: At the last count on 31 December 1993 there were 14,482 holders of licences under the Employment Agencies Act: 7,966 in London and the home counties; 3,056 in the midlands, Wales and the south-west; and 3,460 in the north and Scotland. The exact location of each licence holder is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Department has no information about the numbers of staff employed by licensed employment agencies.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employment agencies have been refused a licence or had their licence revoked under the Employment Agencies Act 1974 since it came into force; and what were the reasons in each case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Fifty-eight licences have been refused and nine licences revoked since the Employment Agencies Act came into force in 1976. Convictions for criminal offences were the reason for 26 refusals and four revocations. Evidence of lack of financial probity was the reason for 16 refusals and one revocation. The remaining cases each involved a variety of reasons, principally the persistent failure to comply with regulations applying to employment agencies.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspections were made of employment agencies by his Department in 1993; and what was the figure in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The annual number of inspections was not recorded in full until 1982. The numbers for the year 1982 to 1993 in the table include visits to investigate complaints.

Inspection of Employment Agencies

Year	*Number of Inspections*
1982	3,686
1983	3,997
1984	3,650
1985	4,252
1986	4,337
1987	4,547
1988	4,854
1989	6,274
1990	6,093
1991	5,199
1992	4,842
1993	4,567

Cash Limits

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes will be made to his Department's cash limits or running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. David Hunt: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the following changes will be made:

the cash limit for class V, vote 1—Department of Employment: programmes and central services—will be increased by a token £1,000 from £2,499,268,000 to £2,499,269,000; and

the single running costs limit for the Department of Employment—class V, votes 1 and 2 will be increased by £13,340,000 from £1,448,050,000 to £1,461,390,000.

In addition:

the cash limit for class V, vote 2—Department of Employment: Employment Service—will be decreased by £13,775,000 from £638,569,000 to £624,794,000;

the cash limit on class V, vote 3—Health and Safety Commission and Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service—will be decreased by £3,000,000 from £206,531,000 to £203,531,000 to reflect adjustments to Health and Safety Executive provision; and

within the cash limit above the running costs limit for the Health and Safety Commission will be decreased by £5,000,000 from £178,131,000 to £173,131,000.

The changes listed are mainly to provide increased running costs provision to cover reorganisation costs and will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRANSPORT

Enforcement Duties

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each vehicle registration office and London enforcement office *(a)* the number of staff employed on enforcement duties, *(b)* their salary costs and *(c)* the enforcement revenue raised for 1992-93.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), *Official Report*, column *710*, on 15 December 1993.

Vehicle Excise Duty Offences

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) of 15 December, *Official Report*, column *713*, how many no further steps codes are used in relation to reports of vehicle excise duty offences; and how many offences were written off for each of those codes in 1992-93.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North, *Official Report*, column *712*, on 15 December 1993.

Urban Motorways

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to franchise urban motorways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: We have at present no such plans. My right hon. Friend announced on 2 December, *Official Report*, column *650*, that we would invite the private sector to bid for contracts under which—would design, build, finance and operate roads for which—would receive payment from Government in relation to the use of those roads; and that we would develop options for the future for more extensive use of private finance. It is too soon to say what the longer-term options might include.

Airport Departures

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his written answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *393-94*, if he will provide a separate breakdown of departures for each United Kingdom airport listed in his answer.

Mr. Norris: Notwithstanding the question of commercial confidentiality of this information, a breakdown of the figures requested is not held by the Department and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information on total passenger movements at individual United Kingdom airports is published by the Civil Aviation Authority in its "Annual Statements of Movements, Passengers and Cargo". The figures for 1992 are contained in CAA publication CAP614.

Cash Limits

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1993-94.

Mr. MacGregor: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

(i) the cash limit for class VI, vote 1—national roads, England—will be reduced by £5,200,000 from £2,254,997,000 to £2,249,797,000. This decrease reflects a transfer to class VI, vote 2 partially offset by a transfer of funds from the Department of National Heritage.

(ii) the cash limit for class VI, vote 2—administration and transport services—will be increased by £10,778,000 from £202,236,000 to £213,014,000 and the Department's gross running costs limit will be reduced by £309,000 from £428,774,000 to £428,465,000. The increase in the cash limit includes various inter-departmental transfers, increased expenditure and a shortfall in receipts on Eurocontrol, increased expenditure on the sale of the DVOIT agency and items of administrative capital and a shortfall of receipts from the recovery of administrative costs and various repayment services. These increases are partially offset by a reduction in running costs and miscellaneous administrative services. There is a reduction of £782,000 from £950,000 to £168,000 in the net running cost limit for DVOIT.

(iii) the cash limit for class VI, vote 4 will be reduced by £3,037,000 from £180,778,000 to £177,741,000. This decrease reflects a transfer to class VI, vote 2 and a reduction arising from demand financing arrangements.

(iv) the DOT/LACAP cash limit will be increased by £1,376,000 from £457,135,000 to £458,511,000. This increase reflects a transfer from the DOE/UA cash limit.

The overall increase will be offset by transfers and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cash Limits

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed in her Department's cash limits for 1993-94.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class III, vote 4—Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: agricultural, food and fishing services —will be reduced by £12,056,000 from £366,814,000 to £354,758,000. Within this limit, expenditure will be reduced by £10,570,000 on agricultural schemes and by £1,398,000 on flood protection. These reductions reflect a predicted decrease in demand and delay in implementation in further areas of these schemes. The remaining reduction —£88,000—reflects a transfer of funds to the Overseas Development Administration for the St. Petersburg model farm.

Ministers (Travel)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* actual expenditure by her Department on (1) internal and (2) overseas travel by the Minister of State since 27 May 1993.

Mr. Jack: The travel and subsistence budget for myself and my private office staff for the 1993-94 financial year, including the cost of services provided by the Government car service, is £104,251. Expenditure to the end of December 1993 was £74,559. The budget does not differentiate between internal and overseas travel.

Beef Special Premium

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the number of recorded claims for the beef special premium in England and Wales; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: In 1993, there were just below 1·4 million first premium claims and just below 450,000 second premium claims under the beef special premium scheme in England and Wales. These figures are still subject to revision.

Offal

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make it her policy to ban the use of offal from calves under the age of six months in meat products; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I have no plans to do so. There is no scientific justification for banning the use of any offal from calves under six months of age. This is based on advice from the Government's independent scientific advisers and is supported by the Department of Health and by international bodies such as the European Commission, the World Health Organisation and the Office International des Epizooties.

Arable Aid, Northumberland

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what delays have occurred in payments of arable aid to farmers in Northumberland who are growers of commercial oilseed rape as a result of computer failure in the Ministry's Carlisle office; what office the cheques are now being paid from; and whether all payments due to be made by 31 December have now been paid.

Mr. Jack: Sixteen producers in Northumberland who claimed set-aside payments in respect of oilseed rape grown as a non-food crop on set-aside land were affected by a temporary problem at Carlisle, as a result of which aid for areas planted to other arable crops was excluded from their payments. As soon as this problem was identified, steps were taken at Carlisle to pay the outstanding balances. Payable orders for all payments due to be made by 31 December 1993 to producers in Northumberland have now been issued except for two claims on which there are unresolved queries.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which appointments since 1979 to public bodies or posts for which she is responsible have included candidates nominated by the Chief Whip's Office; if any nominees by this source have been appointed; and if she will give details.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 2 February, at column *736*.

Touche Ross

Mr. Darling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if her Department or any agencies for which she is responsible has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 3 February 1994]:* Yes, the Department has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross since July 1993.

I have asked chief executives to reply on behalf of their agencies.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Alistair Darling, dated 3 February 1994:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about use by the Department or any of its Agencies of the services of the firm Touche Ross since 1 July 1993.

The Central Veterinary Laboratory has made no use of the services of this company within that timescale.

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Alistair Darling, dated 3 February 1994:

EMPLOYMENT OF TOUCHE ROSS OR ANY OF ITS PARTNERS SINCE 1 JULY 1993.

The Central Science Laboratory (CSL) became a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food executive agency on 1 April 1992. I confirm that the CSL Agency has not engaged the services of Touche Ross nor to my knowledge any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Letter from Guy Stapleton to Mr. Alistair Darling, dated 3 February 1994:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your parliamentary Question asking if the Agency has engaged the services of the firm Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

The Intervention Board has not entered into any contracts with Touche Ross since 1 July 1993, and the company is not currently doing any work for the Agency.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Alistair Darling, dated 3 February 1994:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply directly to you on this matter.

The Pesticides Safety Directorate, an Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has not engaged the services of Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. Alistair Darling, dated 3 February 1994:

The Minister of State has asked me to reply for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) to your Question about the employment of Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

I can confirm that the VMD has not engaged the services of this firm or any of its partners in the period you have identified.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Walsh to Mr. Alistair Darling, dated 4 February 1994:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Question on whether her Department or any agencies for which she is responsible has engaged the services of the firm of Touche Ross or any of its partners since 1 July 1993.

I can confirm that since 1 July 1993 the ADAS agency has not engaged the services of Touche Ross or any of its partners.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Cash Limits

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for changes to the 1993-94 cash limits within his responsibilities and to his Department's running costs limits.

Mr. Howard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII, vote 2—prisons, England and Wales—will be increased by £8,700,000 from £1,524,554,000 to £1,533,254,000.

The additional provision is necessary because of the need to meet costs arising from the cancellation of the planned new Prison Service headquarters. The increase will be met from provision reserved for this purpose by HM Treasury and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The cash limit for class VIII, vote 3—Home Office administration, immigration and police support services, England Wales—will be reduced by £1,930,000 from £1,312,481,000 to £1,310,551,000 to reflect transfers to the Department for Education, Property Holdings and the Department of the Environment, and to offset part of the new expenditure proposed in class VIII, vote 1—police, Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and other grants, England and Wales.

The Home Office gross running cost limit will be reduced by £10,357,000 from £1,653,927,000 to £1,643,570,000 to reflect a reallocation of money between subheads in class VIII, vote 2.

The local authority capital non-voted cash limit will be decreased by £358,000 from £125,593,000 to £125,235,000. The reduced provision results from the transfer of unallocated supplementary credit approvals from the Home Office to the Welsh Office, for the purpose of the replacement of fire service mobilisation and communications systems.

Police Cautions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provisions govern contracts between policemen or employees of the police and newspapers as respects details of charges or cautions *(a)* when no money changes hands and *(b)* when money changes hands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Any unauthorised disclosure by an officer of any information coming into his possession as a member of the police force is a disciplinary offence, of which the maximum penalty is dismissal. Were money or other consideration to be accepted, the possibility would also arise that the common law offence of bribery had been committed.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions he has given to chief constables with regard to the confidentiality of official police cautions and revelations of the details of those cautions to the press.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Responsibility for authorising disclosure of information to the press rests with chief officers. Unauthorised disclosure is a disciplinary offence.

Home Office guidance to chief officers indicates that police records of convictions, cautions and related information should normally be regarded as confidential, but that information may be released to third parties when to do so would be in the interests of national security, the protection of the vulnerable, to ensure probity in the administration of the law; or where it was a requirement of licensing or similar provisions.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is within the jurisdiction of the Police Complaints Authority to investigate complaints from the public regarding details of official cautions which have been revealed to the press and to ascertain if any payment was received for this information.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Such a complaint would fall within the jurisdiction of the Police Complaints Authority.

The responsibility for investigating a complaint rests with the chief officer of the force concerned. The Police Complaints Authority reviews the report of every investigation and has the power to supervise the investigation of serious complaints.

Prison Education

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with whom in his Department responsibility for prison education in England and Wales lies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Director General of the Prison Service is directly accountable to the Home Secretary for the Prison Service's performance and operations including arrangements for the provision of education to prisoners. He is also the Home Secretary's principal policy adviser on matters relating to the Prison Service.

Fire and Rescue Services

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the actual spending in the current financial year on fire and rescue in each local authority in England and Wales;

(2) what is the actual spending per head on fire and rescue in the current financial year for each local authority in England and Wales.

Mr. Howard: Fire authorities budgeted spending on fire and civil defence for 1993-94 is shown in total terms and per head of population in the table.

	1993-94 Fire and Civil Defence budgeted spending (£ million)	*Spending per head (£)*
County Fire Authority		
Avon	21·829	22·7
Bedfordshire	11·780	22·0
Berkshire	15·798	21·0
Buckinghamshire	12·318	19·2
Cambridgeshire	13·795	20·6
Cheshire	21·002	21·7
Cleveland	20·128	36·1
Cornwall	10·146	21·4
Cumbria	11·813	24·1
Derbyshire	18·272	19·4
Devon	22·240	21·4
Dorset	13·748	20·7
Durham	13·914	23·0
East Sussex	16·600	23·2
Essex	34·667	22·4
Gloucestershire	10·285	19·1
Hampshire	27·823	17·7
Hereford and Worcester	12·025	17·5
Hertfordshire	19·547	19·7
Humberside	22·168	25·4
Isle of Wight	3·396	26·8
Kent	35·138	22·8
Lancashire	33·320	23·7
Leicestershire	14·878	16·7
Lincolnshire	11·641	19·6
Norfolk	14·999	19·8
Northamptonshire	11·460	19·5
Northumberland	8·433	27·5
North Yorkshire	14·718	20·4
Nottinghamshire	20·784	20·5
Oxfordshire	11·326	19·5
Shropshire	8·040	19·5
Somerset	9·349	19·9
Staffordshire	18·577	17·7
Suffolk	12·770	19·3
Surrey	26·288	25·4
Warwickshire	11·574	23·6
West Sussex	16·122	22·5
Wiltshire	10·267	17·8
Isles of Scilly	0·088	44·0
Fire and Civil Defence Authority		
London	247·749	36·4
Greater Manchester	70·516	27·5
Merseyside	47·429	32·9
South Yorkshire	30·104	23·3
Tyne and Wear	33·803	30·0
West Midlands	66·728	25·5
West Yorkshire	52·392	25·4
Wales		
Clwyd	8·756	21·2
Dyfed	8·534	24·3
Gwent	11·419	25·6
Gwynedd	6·127	25·5
Mid Glamorgan	12·795	23·6
Powys	2·914	24·5
South Glamorgan	9·508	23·4
West Glamorgan	9·460	25·7

Note: The information relating to England is expenditure to compare with SSAs. It is derived from the budgeted expenditure on services provided by the authorities to the Department of the Environment on form RA93-94, converted to outturn prices where necessary and including amounts for capital expenditure charged to revenue and other contingencies as appropriate, net of specific and special grants.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the standard spending assessments for the current financial year for fire and rescue services in each local authority in England and Wales.

Mr. Howard: Standard spending assessments for 1993-94 relate to fire and civil defence expenditure. The information requested in relation to England is given in the table. Individual services are not separately identified in SSAs for Welsh local authorities.

(£ million)

County Fire Authority	*1993-94 Fire and Civil Defence SSA*
Avon	20·473
Bedfordshire	11·073
Berkshire	16·601
Buckinghamshire	12·360

County Fire Authority	*1993-94 Fire and Civil Defence SSA*
Cambridgeshire	12·039
Cheshire	20·103
Cleveland	19·464
Cornwall	7·181
Cumbria	8·753
Derbyshire	17·067
Devon	19·557
Dorset	12·065
Durham	12·973
East Sussex	14·891
Essex	31·445
Gloucestershire	9·605
Hampshire	31·585
Hereford and Worcester	12·116
Hertfordshire	20·328
Humberside	21·322
Isle of Wight	2·229
Kent	30·998
Lancashire	32·276
Leicestershire	16·924
Lincolnshire	9·583
Norfolk	13·010
Northamptonshire	11·260
Northumberland	5·823
North Yorkshire	12·001
Nottinghamshire	21·087
Oxfordshire	11·284
Shropshire	7·839
Somerset	7·693
Staffordshire	19·345
Suffolk	11·023
Surrey	22·133
Warwickshire	8·993
West Sussex	14·836
Wiltshire	10·054
Isles of Scilly	0·053
Fire and Civil Defence Authority	
London	247·910
Greater Manchester	72·754
Merseyside	48·327
South Yorkshire	29·683
Tyne and Wear	35·357
West Midlands	69·070
West Yorkshire	50·752

Note: The SSAs shown for county fire authorities take no account of capital financing costs.

Taylforth Libel Case

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report on why it was necessary for the Hertfordshire police to hire Mr. Richard Rampton QC in relation to the Gillian Taylforth libel action against *The Sun* newspaper; who would have paid for this if she had won her case and been awarded costs; and what amount the police agreed to pay for (i) the Queen's counsel, (ii) junior counsel, (iii) solicitors and (iv) in total.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that the Hertfordshire constabulary was not represented in the case in question. I am informed by the Commissioner that the Metropolitan police was represented by Mr. Richard Rampton QC, because the Metropolitan police has been joined in the proceedings as a third party by *The Sun* newspaper. Had the plaintiffs' claim succeeded, liability for third party's costs would have fallen to be decided at that point. The Metropolitan police's legal costs have yet to be calculated.

Police Protection

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of the spending of each police authority devoted to providing police protection for *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* other members of the Government were met by each police authority in (1) 1992-93 and (2) so far in 1993-94;

(2) what percentage of the total cost of providing police protection for *(a)* the Prime Minister and *(b)* other members of the Government were met by each police authority in (1) 1992-93 and (2) so far in 1993-94;

(3) what was the spending *(a)* in 1992-93 and *(b)* so far in 1993-94 on providing police protection for (i) the Prime Minister and (ii) other members of the Government (1) in total and (2) broken down by police authority.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information about the cost of specific police operations is not collected centrally. Expenditure on protection duties qualifies in the usual way for police grant at 51 per cent. and for revenue support grant from the Department of the Environment, leaving only some 15 to 20 per cent. to be raised locally.

HMP Pucklechurch

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to rebuild or replace HMP Pucklechurch as a male remand centre, suitable for young offenders.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Robert Maclennan, dated 4 February 1994:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about plans to rebuild or replace HMP Pucklechurch as a male remand centre, suitale for young offenders.

The Prison Service has no such plans. Pucklechurch has not been used as a male remand centre since April 1990. It is intended that the female prison will close in October 1995, after which the site may be sold.

Psychotherapy (Offenders)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines his Department has issued to the probation service on the provision of psychotherapy for offenders in their care.

Mr. Maclean: None.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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24th January—4th February, 1994

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS) and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

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Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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